

'The dream can be so big'

First director of Community Foundation recalls the early years

By Julianne Endres

Watertown Community Foundation

A growing organization is a good thing, but with that growth, change often needs to occur.

The Watertown Community Foundation started experiencing its first "growing pains" in the early 1990s, and it was evident

the organization needed more than its five-member volunteer board.

It needed a director.

Barbara Pingrey had moved to Watertown six months prior and had been working in the nonprofit community. She had the credentials and the passion, so the board hired her part-time in 1994 as the first director of the



Pingrey

Foundation. She worked at the first Foundation office in the Chamber of Commerce.

"There were several opportunities in front of us and some organization needed to take place," Pingrey recently said. "Before I was hired, the board was relying on trustees' statements for current financial status. By creating a budget, we could have a more long-range plan for what the Foundation could do for the community. With more organization, we would have a steady stream of funding rather than a lot there and none here.

"With the help of some CPAs, we created a very rudimentary financial statement," Pingrey said.

Before, it just wasn't necessary. With the financials, an office and a

director, the board now would know how much the phones cost, what fees the banks charged. Everything could be on one page.

"I'm very visual - it helped me as well," Pingrey said.

For a time, the board hired an outside consultant in John Griffin (now deceased). He came once a month to meet with potential donors, Pingrey recalled.

"It also educated us," she said. "He did a great job of teaching us so it helped bring it back to the community. We could begin conversations in an intelligent manner and tell a more complete story of the Foundation, how the money is used, what a Donor Advised Fund is all about."

Pingrey said she enjoyed that, and working with the board was a "great pleasure."

"As a director, it was also big for me to connect with the other nonprofits in the community," she said. "And with them, realize what was possible because we had a community foundation in Watertown. It kind of felt like, then, we couldn't do everything, but we could dream about doing everything and we could work toward it."

Just as the Foundation's assets were reaching nearly \$1.3 million in 1997, Pingrey and her husband Mark moved to Colorado. She was president and CEO of the United Way (Boulder and Foothills area) for 15 years and retired six years ago.

The nonprofit sector will always be close to Pingrey's heart, and the Watertown Area Community Foundation has a special place all its own.

It's been 22 years since Pingrey was executive director at the Foundation, but she'll always remember her time here.

"I have referred to it as the job I never knew I always wanted. It was really less of a job and more of a privilege."

Pingrey's wish for Watertown and the Foundation is simple: "Everything."

"I would hope by now that the greater community has a real understanding of what the Foundation is and what it can do," she said. "The dream can be so big! Together, you can continue serving the Watertown area in ways that make a difference not only for the people who live there now but for the people who come after - for generations."