

# Vitek's craft lasting legacy

By Julianne Endres

Watertown Area Community  
Foundation

If Jo Vitek left Watertown tomorrow her legacy of working to prevent sexual abuse, as well as her commitment to serve victims of it, will continue long after she's gone.

Vitek has ensured that her passion and mission will carry on through her partners by establishing the newest Agency Fund at the Watertown Area Community Foundation.

But she will be the first to tell you, this isn't just about her legacy. It's also about her husband, Tony's. Vitek lost Tony earlier this summer and has donated \$100,000 in his memory to begin the Divine Providence of South Dakota Fund.

"Tony was a very gifted person and a good provider," Vitek said. "I inherited an IRA. I reinvested that. Over the course of



Courtesy Photo

Jo and Tony Vitek pose for a portrait. Tony died earlier this year. Jo is a retired Watertown police chief.

five years, the Foundation should receive almost \$19,000 each year from that. So, hopefully, the fund will turn into approximately \$200,000 in five years."

Originally from Georgia Vitek moved to Florida where she was a police officer. She answered Watertown's call in 2005

when she and Tony moved to Watertown and she began serving as chief of police. After 36 years in law enforcement, Vitek retired in 2013 to answer an even bigger call.

A victim of child sexual abuse herself, Vitek began spending her retirement time serving others

wounded by child sexual abuse, serving faith communities and their clergy, enhancing community awareness of child sexual abuse and sexual assault and providing leadership training to area groups and organizations.

The umbrella organization for her work is Divine Providence of South Dakota. Its board oversees four ministries each with its own advisory board. They are:

■ **Pulpit Supply** — Designed to help area churches in need of speakers.

■ **Hope, Healing and Hoofprints (HHH)** — Established by the Vitek's in 2016 to benefit children of sexual abuse in providing a faith-based equine experience for them at Joy Ranch. Funding for this ministry is also administered by the Community Foundation.

■ **Hope In God for women, men and teens** — A Christian network of survivors of child sexual abuse and sexual assault who provide spiritual and emotional support to each other while increasing community awareness in northeast South Dakota.

■ **Providence Solutions** — Leadership training and strategic planning for churches.

None of this happened by accident. Serving this area in this manner was not only a result of Vitek's background, but was greatly influenced by Jolene's Law Task Force formed by the South Dakota Legislature in 2014. Since then this group — named after Jolene Loetscher, an abuse victim — has been making a difference for victims in South Dakota. It consists of law enforcement, mental health professionals, tribal entities, victim witness advocates and politicians.

The task force was instrumental in establishing the pilot program REACH, an acronym for Respond, Educate, Advocate, Counsel, Heal. This child advocacy center

is located in Watertown and helps strengthen the state's response system and improve supportive services to the victims and their families.

While Vitek has no intention of leaving Watertown, she knows very well that we don't know when "our time" will come. Tony, though, she says, had some profound insight she remembers vividly.

"He said, 'God will take me before He takes you,'" Vitek recalled. "God's not going to take you until you have accomplished what He wants you to do."

Tony told Vitek this on his 80th birthday and shortly before he died.

"He was a humble and faithful servant," Vitek said of her husband, "and he died on the exact date that he was baptized."

"Tony really built the foundation for Divine Providence to occur. 'I'm saving for you and your work' he would always tell me. My salvation is dependent on how I manage the gifts God has entrusted to me."

The Watertown Area Community Foundation includes an accumulation of endowment funds that serve the greater Watertown area. The funds grows over time to generate an increasing stream of funding to support its intention in perpetuity.

Many non-profit organizations in the Watertown area have established Agency Endowment Funds at the Foundation to support and enhance their organization as well as ensure their sustainability far into the future.

"Many organizations in our community have realized that establishing a fund is a part of planning for their future," said Jan DeBerg, WACF executive director. "From the oldest funds, like United Way, to our newest, Divine Providence of SD, these funds have the potential to help fuel their organizations and the people they serve forever."

While the Foundation accepts many unrestricted gifts, donors may choose to designate a gift to any of the Agency Funds if they choose to do so. A listing of Agency Funds follows:

Arrow Education Foundation Fund  
Beacon Center Fund  
Boys & Girls Club of Watertown Fund  
Castlewood Historical Society Fund  
Codington County 4-H Fund  
Codington County Historical Society Fund  
Codington County Search & Rescue Fund  
Divine Providence of South Dakota Fund  
Friends of Acoustic & Blues Fund  
Glacial Lakes Humane Society Fund  
Joy Ranch Fund  
Lake Area Zoological Society Fund  
Mellette Memorial Association Fund  
Prairie Lakes Healthcare Foundation Fund  
Preschool Scholarship Fund  
Sea of Goodwill Fund  
Town Players Endowment Fund  
United Way Donor Fund  
Watertown Area Disaster Relief Fund  
Watertown Area Special Olympics Fund  
Watertown Community Projects Fund  
Watertown Hockey Association Building Fund  
Watertown Lions Park Project Fund  
Watertown Police Department Fund  
Watertown Regional Library Fund  
Watertown Senior Citizens Fund  
Watertown Trail Fund

