



VOLUNTEER CONNECTION

George and Betty Poehlman— personal connections led them to Urban Ministries of Durham.

The Poehlmans may be retired, but they are busy as ever. In their words “We have spent our whole lives in public service...it’s an orientation.” Originally from Missouri, George and Betty moved to Durham three years ago from Fayetteville. Their public service extends as far away as Malawi in sub-Saharan Africa. From 1999 to 2001, as missionaries for Presbyterian Church (USA), George served as a physician and Betty worked with the schools. Since 2001, they have returned 11 more times to serve temporarily or to relieve local workers.

Two personal connections brought the Poehlmans to volunteer at UMD. Their son, Jon, a Ph.D. health researcher at RTI, learned about UMD while working on a project to assess the needs of homeless people. He mentioned the project and UMD to his parents, knowing they would find it interesting. Coincidentally, the Poehlmans’ daughter, Christin, attended board meetings for Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina at Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (ERUUF). She thought her parents—always focused on social justice—would enjoy this fellowship. Betty and George joined, and ERUUF was asking for volunteers to help with cookies and casseroles for UMD. Since then, the Poehlmans have been sharing their talent, time, experience and expertise in so many ways.

George enjoys working in the UMD Food Pantry. He has helped with client intake and also served breakfasts. He is a member of the Care Review Committee with HHS Durham—the committee brainstorms on the best solutions for clients looking for housing. George offers medical input along with others from the Alliance for Mental Health, the Police Department, lawyers, and social workers.

An educator and counselor, Betty loves working in the Clothing Closet, or as she describes it “being a personal shopper!” She joins George in serving breakfasts, making bag lunches and filling in other times when UMD needs volunteers.

When asked “Why Urban Ministries of Durham?” George shares “Everyone deserves their dignity. Respect and dignity.” Betty adds “It is simply our privilege to be able to work among those who, for many reasons, have had a bad run of luck. And, when each achieves some measure of success, it is always a joy!” Betty and George bring joy to all those they serve and UMD’s clients are very fortunate to have them in their circle of support.