

EMMONS, from page 9

ago, former Portland City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury – herself a formidable advocate for affordable housing and the needs and rights of senior citizens – said of Paulson: “He just never wavered from his purpose, which was to give dignity and meaning to every person’s life.”

Gretchen Kafoury, whom we lost last year, likewise lived to see a building named Kafoury Commons.

Meanwhile, in 1994, NWPP published the first annual Downtown Affordable Housing Inventory, an indispensable handbook for social workers trying to help clients locate housing, as well as a political tool for documenting the loss of low-rent housing downtown. Susan’s forward to the 1997 edition begins: “There is a desperate shortage of affordable housing in downtown Portland.” She went on to remind readers: “In 1988, City Council adopted, as part of the Central City Plan, a Downtown Housing Policy ... that commits the city to guarantee that 5,183 units (an amount equal to our 1978 affordable housing stock) be kept affordable for low income people in downtown Portland.”

We were then 1,162 units short of that commitment.

Ten years later, her forward to the 2007 edition calculates the shortage at 1,853 units.

And this raises the question: When you score a victory, a promise from one City Council, how do you oblige the next generation of council members to keep that promise? How do you get them to even notice?

Yet today, Bobby Weinstock points to Susan’s impact on the housing that we have managed to retain or produce.

“She saved the Oak and the Taft,” he says, counting on his fingers. “And she is responsible for new buildings that didn’t exist: St. Francis, Hamilton West, Kafoury Commons, Peter Paulson, Twelfth Avenue Terrace, The Morrison and Ritzdorf Court.”

This housing represents a win in the debate over whether we should be spending on temporary shelters or permanent housing; Susan has never wavered in her insistence that it is housing that we need.

In her role as our leading advocate for affordable housing, Susan has received much acclaim, among which is the President’s Volunteer Action Award, which she accepted in 1990 from President George H.W. Bush; and she was the first recipient, in 1998, of the Gretchen Miller Kafoury Award for Outstanding Community Development.

Yet when I ask her to single out one accomplishment that has made her the most proud, without hesitation she speaks of the NWPP staff and the office culture of kindness and respect.

“I would say, as I’ve gotten older, day-to-day kindness has been one of the things I value most. We are a group of people who try to exhibit kindness to each other all the time. I mean, obviously, I’m proud of the housing that’s been built and preserved.”

She quotes as her “watchword” a saying attributed to Maya Angelou: “People will forget the things you said, people will forget the things you do, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Her staff tells the same story. Bobby Weinstock, Susan’s indispensable co-worker whose job description has been honed to “listening to what other staff members identify as their barriers and figuring out ways to overcome them,” says of Susan: “She lovingly takes care of everyone in her

orbit – board members, staff, volunteers and clients. For low-income seniors, homeless folks, and disabled people, she protects the places where they live and she creates new places.”

Rebecca Jones-Childs, program director for the housing team, emphasizes Susan’s policy that the focus always be on the people coming through our door. “All staff members mention some version of the same attribute,” Rebecca explains, “plus overwhelmingly, the care afforded to staff.”

Susan’s way of expressing that care can range from baking birthday cakes, babysitting when a staff member needs to finish a quarterly report, hospital visits and home care when once a staff member suffered a bout with breast cancer, and observing – or inventing! – at least one paid holiday every single month.

“It was to me important that the staff felt as valued as the people we serve,” Susan says. “We’re all here to really do a strong service, and I wanted the staff to feel valued in that same way.”

“For me,” Rebecca says, “Susan was the first person who gracefully demonstrated how you take care of people individually, while at the same time working on the bigger-picture issues.”

Susan had one time thought about retiring when she turned 60, but tells me frankly, “I would say I never actually thought of myself as good retirement material. I really love the job.”

Her husband, David, retired four years ago. After 17 years at Powell’s, and after the age of 40, he had gone back to school to get his master’s in social work and worked with Project Respond, a mobile mental-health

crisis response team, and at two other jobs in the field, work that put him even closer to the realities NWPP staff see on a daily basis. David’s last job was at Kaiser, working a mental health crisis triage telephone line.

In retirement, David enjoyed having the time to return to his writing and spent many hours in the Columbia River Gorge, making photographs of rocks and trees and water, meditative images of beauty and appreciation.

Then, in the summer issue of “Piloting Change,” the agency’s newsletter, Susan informed readers that David had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.

“While he has done pretty well from day to day,” Susan wrote, “I can see that he is losing ground, and I want to be able to spend time with him while he is still able to enjoy it.”

On Oct. 22, a reception at Trinity Cathedral’s Kempton Hall was attended by a large crowd of friends and admirers. It was Susan’s goodbye party.

A new director has been hired, and Bobby Weinstock will stay on, continuing to break trail for the rest of the staff.

Susan has spent three decades dreaming up new ways to save us from our own indifference, never quite losing faith that those of us who are comfortable will one day wake up and stretch out a hand to the poor.

Now she looks forward to the best going-away present ever: For the first time in her 31 years of advocacy, we have finally on the ballot a measure that will create more than 1,300 permanently affordable apartments, for families, seniors and people with disabilities. Susan expects every one of us to vote for Measure 26-179.

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