

Meet Our Volunteers | Susan Van Gorder

“I volunteer because it’s a good feeling,” says Susan Van Gorder. “You see people arrive needing answers, and leave looking satisfied, relieved, and even hopeful.” Susan has a personal connection with the quest for answers and for hope: her husband of 45 years, Matt, was diagnosed with Parkinson’s in 2008, and Susan says that volunteering at the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health helps her as a caregiver.

“The Center has a caregiver support group every Wednesday,” reports Susan. “The caregivers arrive for group sometimes looking sad or tired. Then, when greeted by our little puppy, Jordan, they begin to look more relaxed. When group is over and they step off the elevator, they can’t wait to talk about their experience. They appear calm and relieved, as if some weight has been lifted off their shoulders. You can tell they feel as if they’ve finally found the right place.”

When she wants the weight of the world removed from her own shoulders, Susan heads to the gym. While her husband goes six days a week because the exercise helps reduce the symptoms of his Parkinson’s, Susan accompanies him at least five days. She likes the exercise ball, while her husband enjoys weightlifting. Both agree that time spent on the treadmill is purely a necessary evil! Outside of it all, Susan is most proud of being the only adult able to successfully shop for her 12-year-old granddaughter.

When asked which of the many volunteer hats she most enjoys at the Center, Susan says, “Most of all, I enjoy that there’s no such thing as ‘I’m just a volunteer.’ [Director of Volunteer Services] Dee King has a knack for making all of her volunteers feel appreciated and needed.”

Susan met Dee King while volunteering at a local hospice where Dee was director of volunteer services, then followed Dee to the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health. Susan herself has a knack for making employees and fellow volunteers feel cared for, routinely checking to see who has been to the gym that day and making certain that everyone has packed healthy choices for lunch.

Susan reports, “I enjoy meeting and working with other volunteers. Everyone is so interesting. It’s fun to exchange experiences with them.”

