



Janie Pellish

Pittsfield, MA

Janie Pellish found something she liked in Pittsfield when moving there in 1977 for her husband Larry's job: a community to embrace. At the League of Women Voters, a mentor helped Janie find her voice and ways to express it. Water quality became her issue, eventually serving as a member of Pittsfield's Water Commission. She later spent 23 years at Berkshire Community College as Coordinator of Tutorial Services, where she developed and taught study skills workshops.

As much as Janie loved interacting with young people – and still does - when retirement beckoned she transitioned easily. There are so many ways to still contribute, but she advises to “give yourself permission to just be, to think about what you want to do before jumping in.” A decade into retirement, she has not held back. Her issue now: food insecurity. She was appalled to learn about the number of children who go to bed hungry in Berkshire County.

Her food-focused efforts are many. She's a longtime volunteer at the Reigning Love Food Pantry and periodically works at the St. Stephen's Table and the First Baptist Church meal sites. For the Food Pantry Collaborative, she maintains a list of 53 Berkshire County food pantries and meal sites, and ensures its wide distribution, including on the City of Pittsfield's website and in the Berkshire Eagle. There's more.

The program that softens Janie's voice and widens her smile is the Thanksgiving Angels. Each fall 18 faith and civic organizations, including Temple Anshe Amunim, which she represents, amass frozen turkeys and all the fixings for pick up by nearly 1500 people three days before Thanksgiving. Janie co-coordinates the 350 volunteers that make the event happen. This event epitomizes Janie's joy in interacting with and caring for her community.

Janie's other passions are a love of the outdoors and music. Just ask her about hiking and wildflowers. She loves being a member of the Berkshire Hills Chorus, where in addition to singing bass, she serves as the chorus manager.

Photography: Susan Geller

Words: Kathy Zdeb