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## Voluntary Action Center's Cindy Mustard hopes for busy retirement

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When Cindy Mustard is working as a volunteer, no job is too small or too menial. "It doesn't matter how low profile it is, she will do it," said Marcia Walker, executive director for Meals on Wheels. † CATALIN ABAGIU

BY [Holly Bender](#)

COLUMBIA — Cindy Mustard, the longtime director of Columbia's Voluntary Action Center, is retiring this fall. But her work helping people in Columbia is far from finished.

"I just can't see myself sitting at home all day," said Mustard, 67. "That would just drive me and my husband batty."

As executive director of the VAC for 20 years, Mustard has put people in need in touch with more than 240 social service agencies in Boone County.

"I have often referred to Cindy Mustard as the 'Mother Teresa' of Columbia," David Holtgraewe, campaign director of Heart of Missouri United Way, said.

Mustard grew up in Columbia and plans to stay in the city after she retires.

“Columbia’s a great town,” she said. “My friend Jolene and I have known each other since we were in our 20s, and we still talk about starting tours of Columbia. We were thinking it might be fun to do trolley tours, historical tours, just fun tours.”

She also plans to stay involved in the community by continuing to serve on boards for other organizations that promote volunteerism and improve quality of life.

“Volunteering is very important to me — I think I got that from my dad,” Mustard said. “I didn’t have to struggle as a kid, but some people are struggling day to day. My dad was always doing something in the community to help people.”

After retiring on Oct. 15, Mustard might look for other work, but she will also take time to relax.

“Who knows, maybe I’ll do some kind of part-time job so that I don’t get bored,” she said. “I’ll probably do all those things at the house I haven’t done in 20 years. And I’ll try to just sit back and take it all in and relax. I’ll have a lot of freedom to pick and choose what I want to do.”

When she was 24, Mustard traveled to more than 20 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia, and she’d like to go overseas again.

“I’d like to go back to Europe, but maybe without the hitchhiking this time,” Mustard said. “Maybe go somewhere warmer in the wintertime with my husband, Marvin.” Their daughter, Katie, lives in New York and works as a filmmaker.

Mustard had planned to retire in 2009 but stayed when the economy began to suffer.

“The economy went down, and I enjoy the work, and thought I might as well continue,” she said. “But right now just seems like a good time to retire. My 50th Hickman High School reunion is the weekend before I leave, and then MU’s homecoming is on the weekend I retire. I turn 68 on October 29th, and I’ll be having a lot of company at my house. Those activities will be a lot of fun.”

Mustard lived for years in Kansas City, where she was a field director at Camp Fire Inc., a youth development organization, before returning to Columbia in 1988 and moving into the Greenwood Avenue house in which she was raised. She was working for the American Cancer Society when she saw a listing in the newspaper for the executive director’s job at the Voluntary Action Center.

“I wanted to work somewhere that was very service-oriented,” Mustard said. “One of the best parts of my job was helping to make other organizations in our community stronger and more successful. I’ll really miss seeing that you can make a difference day to day in peoples’ lives.”

Mustard said she has helped strengthen the presence of the VAC through combined efforts with other organizations and volunteers in the community.

“It is a viable and strong organization that is respected in the community,” Mustard said. “When I started here, we had very little reserves, and now we have financial stability. We have an endowment fund and reserves.”

She said whoever succeeds her should understand that he or she is the face of the organization. “You need to be able to make connections to do this job,” Mustard said.

Rick Ravenhill, senior vice president of Boone County National Bank and treasurer of the VAC, called Mustard a tireless worker. “People know and trust her,” Ravenhill said.

“She epitomizes what it means to be a social worker and community organizer,” said Tim Rich, executive director of Heart of Missouri United Way.

Mustard said that though her job comes with a lot of responsibility, it's been a dream job and her successor can look forward to a fulfilling career.

“I've gotten to work with all populations of people of all ages,” Mustard said. “In Columbia today, you'll seldom find anyone who hasn't volunteered, and it's great to work alongside them.”

Lisa Rohmiller, volunteer programs assistant for the city, has worked with Mustard at volunteer fairs. “She is really integral at keeping volunteerism at the forefront,” Rohmiller said. “Cindy is altruism defined in Columbia.”

Mustard has received many awards and recognition during the past 20 years, but she is most proud of the Athena Leadership Award that the Women's Network gave her in 2008.

“It's kind of like the Oscar,” Mustard said. “It really means a lot to me. All my awards do.”