



Visiting with Rob and Pam Ramirez in 1989, Shirley Krueger holds their daughter, Amber, amid all the equipment that helped keep her alive. Amber's medical bills had exceeded \$1 million and she was nicknamed the "Million Dollar Baby."

who, through example and accomplishment, provides outstanding volunteer service. No one else has ever earned NMB's top two awards for volunteerism—Shirley is a first!

While growing up, Shirley was exposed to National Mutual Benefit and the volunteer spirit through her grandfather, who was president of the Fond du Lac branch many years ago. Just as he did for each of his grandchildren, Shirley's grandfather took out an NMB policy on her shortly after she was born. After her grandfather died, the policies were dropped, but Shirley didn't forget about NMB. When she and her husband, Keith, were married, one of the first things they did was apply for life insurance with National Mutual Benefit. After their policy was delivered, it didn't take long for Shirley to become involved in local branch functions.

For the past 25 years, Shirley has been actively involved in her branch—the last nine as a district representative; the previous 16 as a branch officer. She served as treasurer of Fond du Lac Branch 695 from 1986 to 1988; vice president from 1989 to 1990; and president from 1991 until she became an insurance professional in 1996. Shirley attends at least 75 percent of all branch functions, stating, "There's not a whole lot that I miss out on."

The dynamics of NMB branches are changing, which in Shirley's eyes, is a good thing. "We're seeing more young people involved, and those of us who have been around a long time need to sit back and let the young people do things, even if we might think 'that's not the way we would do it,'" states Shirley. "Getting more young people involved in the branch is crucial to its continued success."

## 25 Years of Fraternal Service

*Longtime member receives prestigious Wenger Award*

**"I** TRULY BELIEVE I AM helping someone each and every time that I am able to provide a client with a more secure financial future." That is the professional philosophy of Shirley Krueger, a district representative with National Mutual Benefit's Fox River Valley Agency located in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Shirley's philosophy of helping others was formed long before she became a professional life insurance representative with National Mutual Benefit. That dedication to serving her fellow man earned her the William J. Wenger Award as 2004 Fraternal Agent of the Year.

Named after the organization's sixth president, the William J. Wenger Award was established in 1998. It is presented to a Society district manager or district rep-

resentative for outstanding service, accomplishment, volunteer contributions to branch and community, and dedication to the fraternal philosophy.

Shirley was nominated for this award by the members of Fond du Lac Branch 695. Laurie Pethan, president of the branch, stated in the nomination form, "I can always count on Shirley's support and great ideas. She vary rarely turns anyone down when asked for help, and if she does, it's usually because she has another volunteer commitment somewhere else." Laurie adds, "And she always has a smile on her face!"

This isn't the first time Shirley has been honored for her volunteer efforts. In 1990, she was named National Mutual Benefit's Fraternalist of the Year. The honor is awarded to a branch member

Shirley serves on NMB's Fraternal Advisory Council, which meets every year to review fraternal branch programs, suggest improvements, and encourage NMB branches to conduct fraternal activities in their local communities. Being asked to serve on this committee is an honor, one that Shirley gladly accepted as another opportunity to serve.

The list of branch volunteer projects Shirley has been a part of is a long one, but there are two fund-raisers that she is most proud of and will never forget. The first took place back in 1989, when branch members pulled together to provide emotional and financial support to fellow members, Rob and Pam Ramirez and their daughter, Amber.

Amber was born two and a half months premature with a partially collapsed lung. Doctors put a tube in her throat and connected it to a respirator so she could breathe. But the tube created scar tissue in her throat and could not be removed. At the time the branch came to the family's aid, medical costs had exceeded \$1 million and more surgeries were needed. Amber was known as the "Million Dollar Baby."

The branch held several fund-raisers during that time and raised a lot of



After a 1996 tornado destroyed over 500 oak trees in the close-knit community of Oakfield, Wisconsin, Shirley Krueger helped organize the "Put the Oaks Back in Oakfield" campaign to replace the trees.

money—and it was worth it. Today, Amber is about to turn 17 years old and according to Shirley, "The only way you would know she had such a rough start in life is from a small scar on her neck from the tracheostomy."

The other fund-raiser Shirley is most proud of was held in the aftermath of the July 18, 1996, tornado that devastated Oakfield, Wisconsin. Shirley, along with other NMB members and branch volunteers, organized the "Putting the Oaks Back in Oakfield" campaign. A dance, raffle, and silent auction raised \$17,500 toward replacing the many oak trees for which Oakfield was known and named.

Together with fellow agent Mark

Berger, Shirley was also instrumental in locating NMB members in Oakfield who qualified for NMB's Disaster Benefit. At the time, District Manager Ron Collien stated, "Without the dedication and help of both Shirley and Mark, I wouldn't have been able to so quickly aid our members in Oakfield. Their time and expertise on the computer were invaluable." Over \$22,000 in disaster benefits from NMB were in members' hands within days after the tornado.

Another branch event, which has become a favorite for Shirley, is the annual Hospice Spaghetti Dinner. For the past two years, she has made the spaghetti sauce for the dinner and is looking forward to this year's event. With serving over 300 people each year, Shirley says with a laugh, "Last year, we had four Nescos full of spaghetti sauce—that's a lot of hamburger to brown!" She also shops for supplies and works from setup through the cleanup process. For Shirley, her efforts are definitely worthwhile because, "This event does so much good for Hospice and those people who can't afford to pay for Hospice services."

In her community, Shirley most often focuses on events where children are the benefactors. She has chaired multiple committees at the high school and chaperoned post prom parties, dances, and high school band trips. She is a member of her church council and has taught religion classes to the young people there for at least 12 years.

Shirley Krueger's 25 years of fraternal service and her philosophy of helping others leave no doubt that she is most deserving of the 2004 William J. Wenger Award. On receiving the award, Shirley stated, "I'm not only pleased to be the recipient of this award, I'm truly honored because I've known Mr. Wenger from way back when he was president of NMB. He was so instrumental in the development of the branch system." ♦



Branch 695 volunteers at the 2004 Hospice Spaghetti Dinner are; back row: Laurie Pethan, MacKenzie Smit, and Shirley Krueger. Front row: Leah Pethan, Karen Collien, and Ron Collien.