

Featured Member: Mary Jo Murphy

SO . . . What would you like to know about Fermilab or Fermilab Friends for Science Education (FFSE)? Member and longtime dedicated docent, Mary Jo Murphy, is the person you want to find for answers. An avid lifelong learner, Mary Jo thrives in the collective ocean of ideas and opportunities that epitomize the Fermilab arena.

Mary Jo began her career with a B.S in Biological Sciences and was offered the opportunity to teach science in a school needing a female science teacher. Never one to turn down an opportunity to advance science education and learn as well, Mary Jo obtained a provisional teaching certificate and began her new career as a science educator, completing her full teacher certification within one year.

Mary Jo's interest in research also led her to pursue work in the medical field at Northwestern University Medical School as a technician in a Tissue Typing Laboratory, where kidney patients were matched with possible transplant donors. A spouse, four children in rapid succession, and a move to Georgia for nine years interrupted her research pathway.

Upon returning to Illinois, Mary Jo decided to improve her teaching skills by seeking a master's degree from Northern Illinois University in Biological Sciences before returning to the classroom. Teaching in both public and parochial schools was enlightening to Mary Jo, who was proficient in engaged learning, inquiry-based science education long before the general population of teachers came on board. It was just natural to Mary Jo to have students *do* purposeful, question-generating science rather than simply *learn* about science.

To the benefit of the Fermilab Education Office, Mary Jo began serving as a docent in 1993. She assists with physics tours to the many nooks and crannies of Fermilab, including DZero and MINOS, but her first love is the Fermilab natural areas. Few individuals onsite have an equivalent knowledge base about the prairie forbs, grasses and animals, as does Mary Jo. She has been a docent mainstay of the prairie programs at Fermilab for nearly twenty years.

Mary Jo's love of nature is revealed in her other avocations. She is the longest serving Master Gardener in Kane County, receiving her certification in 1988 before Illinois even had a Master Gardener book. She has served as steward of the Burlington Prairie since 1994 and is a monitor for Plants of Concern (endangered species) for the Chicago Botanic Garden. Every Wednesday evening since 1992 during the growing season, you will find Mary Jo at her church tending to the gardens in a labor of love. What does she do in her spare time? Astronomy, of course!

Asked what she most enjoys about her work at Fermilab, Mary Jo does not hesitate—the PEOPLE! She raves about the collegiality within the docent group. “We help one another and all get along so well.” She explains that kindnesses abound perhaps because the docents are not competing with one another. They are all here for the same reason—to advance science education. It is clear that a fair degree of fun and satisfaction is part of the attraction.

Mary Jo also commends Fermilab for its attentiveness to ongoing docent professional development. With the physics world changing by the hour, the docents must receive appropriate and timely information to enlighten students and visitors not only about the workings of the lab, but to properly respond to their questions. The docents are, in large part, the face of Fermilab to the casual visitor, students and tour groups. Mary Jo Murphy puts her best face forward at every turn. She is a Fermilab Friends for Science Education member that you should know.