

Meet retiree Lela Thomas



Lela Thomas -- who joined BCBSM in 1970 and retired in 1997 -- says that the most interesting of all the positions she held while a BCBSM employee was a stint as Wellness Coordinator in Human Resources. Now, as a busy retiree, Lela's continued interest in wellness has kept her healthy -- and very active.

"I loved working for Blue Cross, but I love retirement even more -- there doesn't seem to be enough time in the day for all the things I love to do," she said.

Her many loves include traveling, dancing (from ballroom dancing to belly dancing), reading, gardening, bowling, golfing and modeling (she was a runner-up in the Mrs. Black Detroit Beauty Pageant in 1987).

Since retiring, Lela has run two marathons and walked in the Breast Cancer 3-Day, 60-mile event, raising more than \$5,000. She also participates in the March of Dimes walk, Sister Strut, Thanksgiving Day Turkey Trot, Birmingham's Jingle Bell Run, the Susan G. Komen breast cancer walk and the Leukemia Walk. She bowls, golfs regularly with fellow BCBSM retirees and the Oakland Ladies Golf League, and exercises daily to stay in condition.

Lela also keeps busy as a volunteer. She mentors physically, sexually or mentally abused girls at Vista Maria, a state welfare home, and works with the Oakland Hospice Team to give relief to caregivers whose family members are facing their final days.

Helping others spiritually is important to her, too. "Through my church, which has adopted Unit 6E at Sinai Grace Hospital, we meet with nurses and doctors once a quarter and pray for their success as they go into surgery and perform their daily duties. We leave news articles and refreshments with the nurses' station, and every Thursday at 10 a.m. we say a prayer for them."

Lela grew up in Davenport, Iowa, and moved to Detroit in 1969. She held a variety of positions at BCBSM -- beginning as a clerk in the Planning Department, a customer service representative, secretary, and most of the remainder of her career in Human Resources. She has four sons and two grandchildren and lives with her husband Esley in Lathrup Village.