

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Gale Sander has lived on Grand Island all her life, the last 54 years with her husband, Richard. They have four children and 10 grandchildren who also call Grand Island home. Gale is a retired nurse of 42 years from the Catholic Health System; most of those years spent at Kenmore Mercy Hospital.

Her volunteer experience started like so many other mothers: Cub Scout Den Mother, Girl Scout Leader for ten years, as well as many other activities with her children at St. Stephens School, St. Stephen Church, and Mount St. Mary Academy.

St. Stephen's is an integral part of Gale's life. She is a Eucharistic Minister, funeral liturgy planner, a captain for the bereavement team, and she also distributes communion at Elderwood Nursing Home weekly.

Gale became involved in helping people with special needs learn to ice skate when her oldest child needed a service project back in 1982. What keeps her coming back year after year are the smiles and joy she sees on the faces of the skaters. Who would have thought this service project from 1982 would blossom into having Gale's four children and eight of her grandchildren experience the joy of giving back to the community just as she has done for so many years. What started as a "Sanders family experience" has expanded to include our "Grand Island Family" as there are more and more skaters and volunteers every year from the Island participating. Gale has worn many hats over the past 37 years including Rink Captain, Sewing and organizing costumes (with a lot of help from others), WNY Coordinator of Gliding Stars, and also sitting on the Gliding Stars National Board of Directors.

Gale's granddaughter with special needs, Ellie, pushed their family into being a two-sport family. In the Summer of 2010, Gale, her daughter Teresa Hooper, Fran and Kim McMahon, and the late Joan Droit had a dream to have a place where people with disabilities could play baseball. This dream became a reality in 2011 when The Miracle League was built, in a very short amount of time, with the help of Dan Drexelius and Larry Playfair. Not long after, an all-inclusive playground was built, where anyone with special needs could participate in the fun. Gale's granddaughter Ellie played baseball with The Miracle League and even got to play on the new playground before she unexpectedly passed away in 2011. We are so fortunate to have this Jewel of Western New York on Grand Island.

The greatest joy in Gale's life is having her entire family volunteer with her in all she does. She knows that Grand Island will continue to benefit from her efforts through her children and grandchildren's continuing involvement in service for others.