

Meet Society board member: Caroline Whitacre



With an immunology background and doctoral research under her belt, Caroline Whitacre decided early in her career to focus on a field that would allow her to have real impact in healthcare: multiple sclerosis.

Thanks to a fellowship from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society that paid her salary for two years as she trained at Northwestern University Medical Center in Chicago, she started on a professional path she's still focused on almost five decades later.

Now retired from academia, Whitacre volunteers her time and offers her scientific expertise as a vice chair of the Society's national board of directors, where she has served since 2014.

"The MS Society gave me so much and helped me get started," she says. "I want to give back."

When Whitacre first started researching multiple sclerosis, she didn't know anyone living with the disease. But in addition to her work in the laboratory, she started attending MS support groups, where she saw the many faces of MS, from people with hidden symptoms to those using wheelchairs.

"It made it real," she says. Early on during her research, the family of a woman from her hometown in Morrow, Ohio, sought her out. Whitacre ended up accompanying her to the Ohio State MS clinic, where she was diagnosed with MS.

Her experience with people living with MS has broadened Whitacre's outlook and informed her work. As a professor at Ohio State University, she made sure her students had similar

personal contacts.



Caroline Whitacre — with Julie Leggett, president of the Society’s Ohio chapter, and Chet Porembski, an Ohio chapter board member — values the relationships she makes as a board member.

Whitacre spent 36 years investigating treatment approaches for MS and rose to senior vice president for research at Ohio State University before retiring in 2017. Now, in addition to traveling and restoring old houses with her husband, she contributes to the economic development of her hometown of 2,500 as its city manager and works as a consultant for a higher education analytics company.

She also still devotes her time to the Society, sometimes up to 10 hours a week, where she has chaired the Scientific Advisory Committee, among others.

As a scientist, Whitacre has been trained to keep her emotions out of her work. But her experiences and relationships with people with MS, whether Walk MS® participants or fellow board members, are a reminder of the human impact of this disease.

She has watched the Society's growth with admiration through the years. She is impressed with the way it handled the pandemic. And she is enthusiastic about the Society's research agenda and the promise of a not-so-distant cure.

"There's a glimmer there that we're getting close," Whitacre says.

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