Lois Kitsch

This activity is geared to achieve the following objectives:

- Learn about the credit union heroes who shaped the industry.
- Connect the personal and professional motives of these heroes to your own credit union career.
- Share what you learn about your credit union hero with the large group in a 2-3 minute presentation.

When sharing this story, your table group is encouraged to reflect on the following:

1. Who was this person, and what were their key achievements in credit unions?
2. What motivated them to action?
3. What's their superpower?
4. How does this Hero's story connect to the larger credit union purpose of helping the financial fortunes of poor and working people?



LOIS KITSCH

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- A Credit Union Development Educator (CUDE) for more than 35 years, Lois served as the national program director for CUDE for several years.
- Worked with credit union leaders from six continents to help build organizational capacity.
- Served as a board member of America's Credit Union Museum and Chairs the African Cooperative Development Foundation.

- Received the 2004 Herb Wegner Award for Individual Achievement and in 2002 for Best Project, the Athena Award from the World Council of Credit Unions in 2015, the Life Time Service award from both the Credit Union Development Education Program and the CUTE Foundation in 2018 (Mindanao, Philippines), and the distinguished service award for ACCOSCA in 2017 (continental trade association for Africa).

- Co-founded cu.difference in 2018, a consulting company created to help others recognize, develop and use the credit union difference to optimize member experience, build member capacity, build staff capacity and optimize community development.

PERSONAL STORY #1

Through her work with World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU), Lois has promoted credit union development and financial empowerment in more than 40 countries. One such example is the Philippines, where Lois was sent in 1997 by the World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) to help local savings and credit cooperatives restructure themselves into strong and stable financial institutions. The credit unions had great potential, but were riddled with operational deficiencies, lacked financial discipline, had stagnant and unsatisfied membership and were very troubled. Some were headed to failure. Working through their leadership – both board and staff – Lois assisted them in the difficult task of building model credit unions. It was extremely hard work to balance the commitment between social purpose and a sustainable business model and to begin product development and innovation. A micro finance program was also introduced that brought access to credit to the most marginalized of Filipino women. This led to revitalized communities and huge growth for the credit unions. In 2020, these credit unions are vibrant and robust institutions that have grown in membership 6 to 10 times those early days. Many have also added social programs to tackle development issues to build a better quality of lives for their members.

PERSONAL STORY #2

In the early 2000s, Lois traveled to Afghanistan to determine the viability of a credit union system and to help build relationships with local donors to secure funding from the World Bank and/or USAID. The US government and others were interested in credit unions to be started in Afghanistan because of their democratic structure. Over the course of two years, Lois traveled there four to six weeks at a time. For her, she often expressed it as a rewarding opportunity but very challenging for anyone - particularly a woman. The laws and local culture is male driven and getting things accomplished takes great courage, intelligence and skill. She traveled throughout most of the country – going places often deemed too dangerous to travel. Lois' actions resulted in a funded project which led to the creation of a credit union movement in the country. These credit unions follow Islamic Banking Laws, welcome women as employees and members, and provide access to financial services to thousands of Afghani citizens that formally had no access to financial services before.

INTERESTING TIDBITS

- Lois’ international work is today focused on Africa, a continent she regularly visits.
- A North Dakota native, Lois had never traveled outside the US until she was in her early 40s.
- Began her credit union career as a teller and is a high school graduate.
- You can learn more about Lois’ work at CUdifference by visiting its web site.

NOTES: