

Getting to Know Judy Allison
By: Katie Hallaway



If you're newer to the Women's Impact Fund like me, and/or need to brush up on WIF history, you need to know Judy Allison. She was on the founding board of directors, and she subsequently held a number of leadership roles, including leading the first strategic planning initiative and serving as board chair. Judy has been at the forefront of helping grow and shape the organization.

Within the first few minutes of my sitting down with Judy at The Mayobird in Dilworth, she is approached by fellow WIF luminaries Sandra Conway and Kathy Izard, who coincidentally are also there for a meeting.

Sandra and Kathy warmly greet Judy, and when I introduce myself and say I'm working on a profile about Judy, they both enthusiastically say I am writing about a remarkable woman and comment on what a great piece it will be. (No pressure.)

When I offer Judy a coffee, she says she will get a cup when the line is shorter. But after nearly an hour of easy conversation and listening to Judy describe the founding of the Women's Impact Fund and her roles and involvement over the years, we never get around to that coffee. I'm thinking wow, this woman is fueled by energy and passion, no caffeine needed!

Soon after retiring in 2002 from Wachovia, where she was the director of corporate community affairs and charitable giving, Judy was approached by Mary Lou Babb and Claire Tate about joining the effort to start a women's collective giving fund in Charlotte. The organization would be similar to the Washington Women's Foundation in Seattle. Judy readily agreed and along with fellow member Sandra Conway developed the original organizational design to strategically position WIF for future success.

"It is deeply rewarding to have been involved in WIF since the beginning," says Judy. "I had a lot of faith we would succeed."

Judy led the inaugural grants committee, with the first grants being awarded in June 2004, totaling \$158,000. She helped establish the processes for thorough applicant evaluation and democratic grantee selection that remain so successful today. She says the idea of every woman having a vote was adopted from the Seattle group.

Another partner organization Judy is quick to acknowledge is the Foundation for the Carolinas. Another bit of history for my fellow newer members, WIF originated as a special initiative of the Foundation for the Carolinas until we became a stand-alone 501(c)(3) in January 2010. The planning for this transition was a major part of Judy's tenure as board chair, a post she held from 2007 through 2008.

Judy is committed to women's philanthropy and education in particular.

"The education focus of the organization is so important to me," she says.

Judy is passionate about the support WIF provides to education-related nonprofits, and she is equally enthusiastic about the education opportunities within WIF for women to learn about nonprofits and the grant process, share knowledge with each other, and develop as leaders.

In looking at where WIF is today, Judy is proud of the strides made in just over a decade, with more than 400 members and \$3.7 million in grants awarded to date. She emphasizes the importance of continuing to "attract, recruit and retain a strong, diverse membership."

"The organization has grown and become so important to our community, and at the same time, WIF has made Charlotte a national leader in women's collective giving," she says, pointing to the Women's Collective Giving Grantmakers Network national leadership conference being held in Charlotte in October this year.

In addition to her continued service to WIF on the board of advisors, Judy shares her time and talents in other ways. She is the vice-chair of the board of trustees of Central Piedmont Community College, on the board of directors of Good Friends, and an elder at First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte. Judy also is devoted to her family, including her three granddaughters who live in Charlotte and attend public schools.

As you may expect, I left my meeting with Judy feeling energized, inspired and excited, and I'm pretty sure that wasn't just from my latte.