

Irene Sturges –
**Former Currie woman is a vocal
advocate of the Senior Federation**

By Jo Ann Biren

Affordable health-care, HMO's, Medicare, care-at-home, social security ... issues that concern senior citizens and thus involve Irene Sturges.

Sturges, who was born and raised in the Westbrook area, lived with her husband, Russell, for 30 years in Currie where Russell worked at the Tile Factory. The couple moved into the Westside Apartments in Slayton five years ago.

Sturges admits, with a laugh at herself, that she never was a volunteer when her children, six in all, were growing up and attending school. The money she brought in from her outside jobs, as a housekeeper in the area, was much needed, she explained. It was only after the Sturges moved to Slayton that she became an active volunteer.

"Ever since I started drawing social security," she said of her voluntarism, especially her work with the Southwest Senior Federation, housed in St. Ann's school in Slayton.

Not really, "trained" for anything, Sturges has not let that stop her. She was willing and more than eager to learn on her own. Reading was a pastime she enjoyed, learning more about the world around her. Now, sitting behind the desk at the Southwest Minnesota Senior Federation office, Sturges looks like she knows just what she is doing ... and she does!

"I didn't know how to type and I never did any bookkeeping," Sturges said of the days before her 'job' at the Senior Federation. Now, it is up to her to write the monthly



Irene Sturges, an active senior, enjoys life and can't imagine sitting around her house doing nothing. "I have a good 20 years left yet, I'm only going to be 80!," Sturges stated emphatically.

newsletter that the Slayton office sends out and she does it with a fair amount of alacrity. She does know what she is doing!

"I came aboard in their first year," Sturges said with pride of the Federation. This spring it will be 11 years since the organization was organized in Murray County. Doris Reikow was the first staff person, Sturges said of the Federation which received grants in order to hire staff people when they were first organized. Next was Donna Mailander. After that, Sturges said, "We couldn't afford anyone really, so we decided to try it ourselves."

She pauses, a gleam lights her eyes, "they told us it wouldn't work," she laughed with an 'we got 'em' heartiness.

Sturges doesn't listen to 'they' very often. She is more than ready to take the nay sayers and doom and gloom people and group them together and say, 'Look what we did!'

Look what they did! Working with funds they raised themselves, the seniors found themselves an organization that had some clout. Their monies, Sturges said, come from bake sales and craft sales, along with the monies generated at their convention. Not bad for a group that, when formed, were told they weren't going to make it! What was needed was an Irene Sturges who had the simplicity of mind and naiveté to say, 'Yes, we can,'... and did!

Once organized, what did this group plan on doing? "We look out for senior rights," Sturges said emphatically. "We meet with the legislatures and tell them our needs."

One such meeting will be occurring shortly, with a rally at the capitol in St. Paul on the 17th of January when seniors from throughout the state make their needs and wants known concerning affordable health-care. The Health Care Campaign of Minnesota is sponsoring the rally and as a member of the Coalition, the Minnesota Senior Federation is urging their members to attend and convince lawmakers to make changes in the health-care system.

Sturges, you can bet, will be on the 'hill' expressing her opinion. "Too many farmers, and the working class," she said, explaining her reason for the rally, "can't afford insurance. We would like to see that everyone gets it!"

Meeting people in various walks of life is the one of the reasons Sturges gives for doing what she does with the Federation. "You meet the nicest people, they are out trying to help others. You won't meet these people if you just sit around!"

Sturges stresses that the organization isn't political, "although we do go up and lobby. It is more on issues." She doesn't care about political parties, Republican or Democrat, she is more concerned with how the legislature votes on issues of importance to seniors.

Spare time? At one point she did spend time traveling to each child, spending a couple of weeks and then moving on to the next one. "I made it to Alaska too, to see a grandchild!" Now, she is content to stay around Slayton, except for an occasional trip to the Cities for a rally or a convention. Husband Russ, who will be 85 in May, is in poor health.

Sturges is proud of her six children who are scattered throughout the states; Arizona, Mississippi, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota. She said there wasn't a need to talk her children into obtaining an education. "I didn't have to stress education," she said of her children. They are just like their mom ... inquisitive! They all liked school."

"Older people say, 'It's so boring, there's nothing to do'," Sturges said. "I can't see it." She shakes her head, a confused look upon her face. How can anyone, her face seems to say, be bored when there is so much to do?!

"I do along with what President Kennedy said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country'.

"I can't think of anything more boring than sitting home!"

Enjoying life is Sturges philosophy, one she unconsciously shares with others. Her exuberance for what is going on around her is contagious. "I have a good 20 years left yet, I'm only going to be 80!"

*The Murray County News
date unknown (Abt January 1991)*