

ATHELENE JOHNSON

Athelene Johnson has been a very nurturing, caring, loving person throughout her life as an elementary school teacher for 35 years, a wife, mother, grandmother, friend and volunteer.

Eight years ago her eyesight began to fail due to macular degeneration and more severely in the past few years. However, with her warm, outgoing spirit, she did not let this condition stop her from living in loving ways.

In order to exercise regularly and safely, since she could no longer see at a distance, she began walking twice a week in Wal-Mart. With her outgoing nature, it is there that she has formed warm and caring friendships with the employees. Despite the fact that Athelene cannot see clearly until someone gets up close to her, a person could never tell that by her big smile and cheerful voice. She always has a happy greeting, an interesting story to tell that adds a bright spot to the day, kind words, and a warm laugh to share with the employees and customers. She makes those she touches feel like they are family, surrounding them with warmth that makes them feel very much at home. And, along with all these good qualities, she has a knack for knowing just what to say and when someone needs a big hug.

This warm spirit of Athelene's not only shows up in Wal-Mart, but in every situation of her life with family, friends, members of her church and strangers. When her husband was on dialysis, she would go with him to his treatments, which would last two-four hours. Members of the auxiliary noticed that Athelene would visit with all the other patients and family members in her cheerful way, providing good conversation during the entire time. It was very evident, by her good nature, that she was also very loving, caring and encouraging of her husband as he went through this challenging time. Later, when his health condition did not improve, he was put on Hospice with his caring wife and family by his side.

Five years ago, after Athelene's husband had passed away, she turned around and took the required training to become a Hospice volunteer. In the last four years, no matter what the circumstance, Hospice patients and their family members as well as other Hospice volunteers have found her to be the "calm in a storm" and a wonderful "beacon of light."

She has a terrific sense of humor, a very compassionate heart along with words of wisdom that are most strengthening. Her favorite expression is: "we don't have to agree or disagree, but we do have to be forgiving and loving." It is these wonderful attributes that help Athelene to be of service to this community and a recipient of the Pride of Safford award.