

THE PANTAGRAPH

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NORMAL -- Alan Sender planned to sneak out of the annual Town of Normal Appreciation Reception and go back to work right after the mayor named the 2005 Citizen of the Year on Wednesday evening.

That plan changed when Sender was named recipient of the award.

"Well, you got me. I'll admit it," Sender told Mayor Chris Koos after the announcement. "I heard the description (of the recipient) and still had no idea.

"I'm certainly honored to be included. I'm certainly shocked."

Koos said, "Alan is a classic example of someone who is always willing to go the extra mile and put in the time to make a positive difference in the community.

"The town of Normal is truly fortunate to have a man like Alan Sender, who is always eager to lend his sharp intellect and insightful analysis to a variety of community causes."

Sender is a self-professed behind-the-scenes volunteer.

"I'm happy to be in the background," he said. "You can do a great deal behind the scenes."

He has served on numerous community boards and councils, including the Beyond Books Foundation Board, Moses Montefiore Temple Board and several Unit 5 task forces and committees.

He also is co-founder and treasurer of the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that helps donors with planned charitable giving and organizations with endowment funds, and has served on the Normal Planning Commission since 1994.

Sender said he is most proud of his role in helping start the Normal Parks and Recreation After-School Program.

Concerned about latch-key kids who left school about 3 p.m. and went home to an empty house, Sender and another approached former City Manager Dave Anderson about starting an after-school program several years ago.

"We didn't set out to change the world," Sender said. "Someone else took the ball and ran with it."

The program has been expanded this year to eight Unit 5 elementary schools.

He said he's also proud that the Normal Planning Commission stuck to imposing school impact fees on new developments. Developers either have to give Unit 5 land for a school or give the district money.

Sender said his volunteer efforts are just part of his family's philosophy.

"You have a duty and obligation to contribute back to the community," he said.

Sender has a bachelor's degree in finance from University of Illinois and a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University. He is chief operating officer of Chestnut Health Systems and formerly was assistant news director at WJBC Radio.

He and his wife, Judge Elizabeth Robb, have two daughters, Jessica and Molly.