

## 2021-22 RETIREES OF THE YEAR AWARD FOR STAFF

### CONNIE JEFFRIES



Connie Jeffries retired as Program Manager in the School of Professional and Continuing Studies, College of Arts and Sciences in 2011.

Since retiring, Connie volunteered at the Violence Prevention Center of Southwestern Illinois from 2012-2019, with whom she completed 40 hours of hotline training. Using her programming manager skills, Connie spent several weeks assisting with cleaning up data that had been incorrectly entered into the VPPC software, thus ensuring a smooth-running operation. As a member of the VPC Development Committee, Connie's attention to detail significantly enhanced the planning and implementation of essential fundraising activities.

The loss of Connie's husband and the death of her father one year later, Connie faced a new reality of how to pursue her passions in protecting vulnerable women, outdoor activities, and a love for all things nature. She realized that the pandemic caused significant mental and emotional issues for many, especially among seniors and the newly retired. Connie set off to challenge herself and encourage others, many of them women, to embrace their curiosity for the gifts of nature. Connie has driven tens of thousands of miles on road trips, crisscrossing the US and Europe, including the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, sections of the Appalachian Trail, and the 523-mile Camino del Norte. Through her travels, which she freely shares on social media to encourage other women to become and stay active, Connie says she has "wittingly and unwittingly encouraged both young women and older single women to explore out amazing country, as to not be afraid to set out on a solo journey."

Finally, on her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, Connie celebrated her day by running 7-miles through Belleville, Illinois.

Because of her civic engagement, her dedication and loyalty to UM-St. Louis, and her zeal for an active life, all of which she encourages others to join in, Connie Jeffries is this year's Retiree of the Year for Staff.