



“I truly believe in the philosophy of people helping people, and credit unions are about people helping each other. In developing countries, it’s even more than that. Credit unions provide members with the opportunity to borrow and save with financial dignity.”

— Anne Cochran, President and CEO,
Louisiana Credit Union League

Mama SWAMI

Reminds Us What the Movement is About

Anne Cochran is at once humble and proud about her work with credit unions from New Orleans to Nairobi and all the places she has landed in-between. She has worked her way up through the ranks to become a leader in the US credit union system and volunteers with World Council around the world. Tireless in her efforts and passionate about credit unions, she is a genuine agent of change.

At 21 years old, she left her homeland of Dublin, Ireland, and arrived in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania. She soon assumed the management of a small credit union in Wellsboro, doubling its size during her tenure. Her familiarity with credit union operations—and the pressures faced by credit union CEOs—provided her with great insight when she joined the Louisiana Credit Union League as a field consultant in 1981. In her 18 years as CEO of the league, Anne has transformed it into a true service organization, to which 92% of Louisiana credit unions now belong. Her vision and commitment drive the league’s work, but Anne is quick to point out that the staff members of the league and Louisiana credit unions are the ones who make things happen.

In late 2005, she faced a situation unimaginable to most of us—helping her credit unions, her staff and her family recover from the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina. She readily admits that her focus on credit unions helped her survive it on a personal level. For nine months, she was

displaced from her home, which had been damaged by trees from above and water from below. She worked 20-hour days from a makeshift office in a Baton Rouge credit union to help Louisiana credit unions get the funding, equipment, staffing and whatever else they needed to be able to continue serving members during the chaotic time.

Still recovering from Katrina, she delivered a truly inspirational commencement address at the first Strathmore-WOCCU African Management Institute (SWAMI) graduation in Kenya. Her volunteer service for the Southeast Regional Credit Union Schools in the United States had prepared her well to lead World Council’s effort to develop and launch SWAMI, the first continent-wide credit union management program. SWAMI has since produced 76 credit union leaders from across Africa, each touched personally by Anne. Students endearingly refer to her as “Mama SWAMI.” Indeed she is the mother of this program, proudly leaving part of her legacy in Africa.

Anne is now spearheading World Council’s initiative to establish a credit union academy in Russia. She feels a special kinship with the Russian league as it tries to establish itself as an effective service organization in an evolving economy, much as the Louisiana league had been trying to do back when Anne assumed the leadership. ■

*Do you know an Everyday Hero? Let us know!
Email kjohnston@woccu.org.*