

# Top Woman In Grocery

Tonya Graff took the reins of the Yankton Hy-Vee store about 2 ½ years ago. She's been the store director at different store sites for 16 of her 27 years at Hy-Vee. Her hard work was recently recognized when she was named one of the 2012 Top Women in Grocery by Progressive Grocer magazine in its June 2012 issue.

There were only 25 top women managers recognized from all the female managers in the nation, Graff said.

"I was nominated by people in my peer group," she said. "I feel very honored. It's rewarding to be recognized by your peers."

Graff, her husband, Guy, the other HyVee women recognized by Progressive Grocer, the company's president, CEO and chairman of the board will all travel to Chicago Nov. 8 for the Progressive Grocer's annual event.

Graff started in the grocery business, 26 years ago when she took a part-time clerk job to supplement her family's income. Before long that job became full-time.

"I never really knew how exciting the grocery industry was," she said. "I have always worked retail my whole life. I love it."

Eventually, Graff had the opportunity to take part in a training program through Hy-Vee that would allow her to become a store director.

"My husband and I sat down and had a conversation that if we made some sacrifices we could really improve our lives," she said. "We could continue to live as we were, like most young families, paycheck-to-paycheck or we could take a risk and go for our dreams and make a better life for our family."

Graff said moving her two children, who were the only grandchildren in her family and her husband's family, five hours away from their hometown of Sioux Falls was very hard.

"Our first move was to Waterloo, IA," she said. "I think I cried for three days. It was hard but we have met wonderful, lifelong friends in every community we have lived in and I can honestly look back and say I wouldn't change a thing."

Over the years, the Graffs moved 17 times in seven different cities.

"We always hoped to be back in South Dakota, and low and behold," she said. "We lived in Iowa for 22 years. Iowa is a great state, they have great Midwestern

values and are hard-working great people, but there is just something about moving back to your home state. We're definitely done moving."

The Graffs have two children and four grandchildren — three granddaughters and a new grandson — who all live in Sioux Falls.

Moving to Yankton has been great for the Graffs personally but it has also been a great career move for Tonya.

"I love being a store director because there are no two days alike," she said. "Of the three stores I've been a director at, Yankton is the largest community, it has the most employees with about 400 and the economy is more driven by recreation than the other communities."

Graff joined the Hy-Vee board of directors in 2011 and is currently on the company's advertising committee, but she said her success is proof of the wonderful support her husband has given her over the years.

"Everyone needs a good support system, but I think it's even more important for women because the domestic roles of laundry, taking care of sick kids and dentist appointments call to females. It takes a very strong person to step in and say, 'I'll learn to do the laundry and take care of the appointments and do the part-time jobs. I'll take the backseat so you can succeed.'"

■ by Tera Schmidt



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