

# PEOPLE OF ACTION

## M. Kathleen Eilers (Kathie)

Consultant

*(Member since 2003)*



*Kathie and grandson Oliver in New York City*

She was born in New York City, educated in Cincinnati, Ohio but in 1980 Kathie Eilers, her husband, Dr. Barry Blackwell and their then-two-year-old son, relocated to Milwaukee. The family was determined to make Milwaukee their permanent home and this city has been enriched ever since.

Kathie earned her nursing degree from Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati and a graduate degree in psychiatric nursing from the University of Cincinnati. She and her husband met while working together in Cincinnati as Barry is a psychiatrist.

The family came to Milwaukee because Barry was hired to chair the Department of Psychiatry at the Milwaukee location of the University of Wisconsin's Medical School.

The couple settled in Shorewood and their youngest son, a family practice physician, now lives with his family a scant two blocks from where he was raised. Assimilating into a new community wasn't necessarily easy. Kathie remembers enrolling her son in elementary school and completing the emergency contact information, when asked who to contact if the school was unable to reach either parent, Kathie replied, "keep trying!"

But assimilate Kathie did, contributing significantly both professionally and civically. Professionally she has served as the National Health Care Director for Manpower; for more than 20 years, Kathie served as the Administrator of the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health System. She retired from that position but was lured back by County Executive Chris Abele as a consultant.

Retiring isn't a descriptor anyone who knows Kathie would use and retiring professionally wasn't easy, either, for she did it not once or twice but three times. Her final professional appointment was through Rotarian Jude Werra. Jude was conducting a nationwide search for someone to assume the leadership of St. John's on the Lake. He didn't have to look far, Kathie was hired, and she committed to leading the retirement community for three to five years – she stayed eight. And serendipity brought her and Barry to make the decision to move into St. John's as residents a few years ago.

Civically Kathie has always been involved. A breast cancer survivor, Kathie served as board chair for ABCD (After Breast Cancer Diagnosis support agency started by the late Melody Wilson). She has been chair of the Grand Avenue Club, the UWM Behavioral Health Advisory Committee and served on the

boards of the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center, St. Catherine Residence, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, NAMI and the Shorewood Community Development Authority.

The Blackwell/Eilers blended family includes their son in Shorewood, a daughter who is an immigration attorney living in Whitefish Bay and another son living in Hawaii and one in Seattle. The couple has a granddaughter living in London, a grandson in Atlanta making movies and another in Oregon. The Shorewood physician has a boy and a girl attending Lake Bluff Elementary.

Kathie and Barry like to entertain, (they've hosted the RCM home hosted dinners twice), and they are season ticket holders for all the venues at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater as well as the Shakespearean theater at Spring Green, WI and the symphony. The couple also enjoys travel.

Barry hails from England so they travel frequently to Great Britain. They enjoy Cabo San Lucas, Mexico frequently and have had some extraordinary travel experiences. They were in Beijing, China during the Tiananmen Square Massacre. They were in Russia when the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident occurred. But of all the places in the world where they've traveled, Kathie would return to Egypt. *"I loved Egypt. The people were wonderful; the sense of history is amazing."* The couple are also avid baseball fans and attend the Milwaukee Brewers Spring Training whenever possible.



*Kathie and Barry at Monticello in Virginia*

Their next trip, equally exciting, is a round trip sail aboard the Queen Mary. They'll depart from Brooklyn, sail to Southampton, England, onto France and then back to Brooklyn. *"We've sailed on the Queen Mary before but never round trip. Actually, the cost of doing this trip isn't much more than business class airfare and the food and entertainment are fabulous."*

This distinctive woman earned another distinction – she is the only woman to have served as President of Tempo Milwaukee, Inc. (Tempo's mission: To further the impact of women leaders in our community with the vision of a society where women hold an equal place in leadership, policy, and decision-making.), and the Rotary Club of Milwaukee (Kathie served as RCM President in 2013-14).

*"Rotary for me, has the usual give back to the community but what I value the most are the people. I never would have met many of the members were it not for Rotary and those people have enriched my life immeasurably. We all know this, when you work in a field you can get stuck in the offshoots of that field. I feel much more of a part of this community and more connected to other people because of my Rotary experience. We do good work and it's nice to be a part of those good works, too, but for me, it's mostly about knowing and engaging with my fellow Rotarians."*



Editor's Note: *We feature the popular Rotary People of Action series regularly. The December 13 edition will feature William Coleman. The feature will return late January as the writer, RCM Board Member Barbara Velez, and its Sergeant at Arms will be traveling until mid-January.*