

PEOPLE OF ACTION

Jill Pelisek

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(Member since 2006)



Relaxing at home with Jill are her dogs Kashen and Nikon.

Sometimes a childhood skill hints at what will define our adult life. It doesn't reveal all, but it forms a basis for who we will become.

That may well apply to Jill Pelisek. In her life, love of the arts, volunteerism, teaching, and later banking, started with an aptitude for art. Her school art projects often drew praise from her teachers and by the end of elementary school she was helping others with their projects. So, it is no wonder that by the time she was in junior high school, she knew what she wanted to be, a commercial artist.

Eventually she went off to the University of Michigan to study at their highly regarded art and architecture school. Not only did she excel there but being close to Detroit and the auto industry opened opportunities for commercial art internships. Those internship experiences enabled her to come home after graduation and begin her commercial art career at the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company.

Although the company was in its heyday, she found her day-to-day duties less and less fulfilling. After a couple of years, she left the job to go to Madison to marry and begin her family in daughter, Kitt and son, Eric.

When the marriage did not work out, Jill found herself back in Milwaukee and reconnected to art and volunteerism along with a new thread in her life, teaching. Substitute art teaching assignments at Brookfield East and Menomonee Falls high schools got her into the classroom while also allowing her to pursue being a volunteer. Soon she was volunteering and teaching at the Milwaukee Art Museum, something she has done for more than 50 years.

That in turn lead to another thread in her life, board of director service and leadership. She recounts how she became a member of her first board of directors in her mid-twenties. Since then, she has served on more than 50 boards, commissions, task forces and advisory committees, and, more often than not, took on some position of leadership.

In Rotary, we ask our members to put "Service Above Self" which Jill certainly fulfills. But can service lead to love? In her case it did. While putting her art and design skills to work for the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra Ball, its annual fund-raising gala, her friends took the opportunity to introduce her to a single man they knew. The match making worked and Jill became Mrs. Jack Pelisek.



Jill's family getting together for pizza. Standing left to right: son Eric, and grandsons Mitchell, Ryan, Colin. Seated is Jill's daughter Kitt and Jill.

Before marrying Jack, Jill had left substitute teaching and was supporting her young family by working as a teller for First Wisconsin Bank, later Firststar and now US Bank. She rose from being a teller to manage the bank's prestigious downtown branches. During that time, she earned a master's degree in monetary economics and deepened her involvement in the community.

After retiring from the bank in the early 1990's, Jill was invited to UWM as an adjunct professor and executive in residence. One of her proudest accomplishments at UWM was teaching its first ever diversity course. The other great UWM accomplishment she will tell you about is the business mentor program for students of color and first-generation college students. At her encouragement, RCM also became involved in the mentoring program shortly after she joined the club in 2008.

When asked what made her so sought after as a volunteer, she replied, "I know how to ask for money." Her fund-raising effectiveness can be summed up this way: if Jill asks you to contribute to a project, you know it's worth it. Great examples of this are Jill's work on the RCM Centennial Arboretum, the Arboretum Maintenance Fund, and the MKE Urban Stables.

These threads: art and the arts, teaching and leadership have created the fabric we recognize today as Jill Pelisek. There are a couple of other threads though starting with her love of dogs. Every morning you'll find her walking one of her dogs, likely Nikon her big but gentle Borzoi. Or then again, it may be Kashen, her Silken Windhound.

She also loves croquet and plays in a league at Lake Park. It's no surprise that she brought the game to the Milwaukee Country Club where she coordinates and teaches it to members.

Her mark on our club and the community has been there for years and will be for many years more. She's been not just the "go to" person for a

lot of projects but has personally affected many people through her teaching, example and especially her mentoring.

If you ever get a card, letter, or email from Jill, she signs it, "Cheers! Jill". After decades of devotion to our community and some of its most important institutions, she's earned from us a hearty and heart felt "Cheers! Jill!"



Jill riding a police horse promoting RCM's role in the development of the MKE Urban Stables. Believe it or not, the horse's name was Jill!

Editor's Note: Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Joe Caruso.