

# PEOPLE OF ACTION

## JoAnne Anton

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*(Member since 2003)*

Rotarian JoAnne Anton has proven to be a Person of Action throughout her storied career, working to improve our community in roles that span from the City to the US Senate, from private business to philanthropy. And, of course, as President of our Rotary Club.

JoAnne has a deep love for public service that led to her first stop on her career journey - serving at City Hall as an assistant to former Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist. "City government is the best kind of government and most direct form of public service," reflected JoAnne.



*Nick and JoAnne Anton with their two sons and dog, Minnie*

But it was her next role that truly defined her career of service, beginning a partnership that has now spanned more than two decades of service, working in key positions for (retired) U.S. Senator Herb Kohl.

JoAnne first took a position with former Senator Kohl as the Director of his Southeastern Wisconsin District Office and then embarked on a series of progressive roles of responsibility, including as State Director and Campaign Manager. As Kohl's State Director, Anton managed the Wisconsin staff in five state offices and regularly traveling with and staffing the Senator throughout Wisconsin. She was also responsible for Senator Kohl's successful re-election campaigns in 2000 and 2006.

When Kohl retired from the Senate in 2012, "he told me to stick around and we'll figure out the future together." And as he returned as President to run his NBA basketball franchise, the Milwaukee Bucks, JoAnne joined him as Project Coordinator.

"Joining the Milwaukee Bucks was a once in a lifetime opportunity," said JoAnne. "For many years I had toyed with the idea of pursuing an Executive MBA and planned to do so when I left the Senate. Instead, my work with the Bucks became my personal MBA program as I learned the business of basketball. It was a true challenge and a wonderful opportunity to learn and support a team that means so much to Milwaukee."

During her time with the Bucks, they worked to plan for a new sports arena and ultimately, for a sale of the team in a way that would ensure the team stayed in Milwaukee, just as the Senator had done by purchasing the Bucks in 1985.

After Senator Kohl sold the Bucks, he was asked, in his final interview as owner what he was going to do with the money he made in the sale. JoAnne recalled him answering: "JoAnne and I are going to figure out how to give this money away."

And that's exactly what they've been doing in ways both big and small, making a difference in the lives of countless people across the state of Wisconsin. Today, JoAnne serves as Director of Charitable Giving for Herb Kohl Philanthropies.

“Giving away money is easy,” said JoAnne, “giving it away well is hard. This role comes with tremendous responsibility, because there is so much need in our community. “

With a focus on K12 public education, the foundation works to provide economic opportunity to the underserved and underrepresented. It seeks opportunities for big picture change, but also the type of contributions that make an immediate difference in people’s lives.

“The Senator cares deeply about people and focuses on ways to make a difference for those most in need. But his real love is helping create economic opportunity for people, especially through education.”

What sticks with her most are the meaningful moments that brought joy and learning to individuals throughout Wisconsin: the students who were able to continue their education because of scholarships, the teachers who were able to advance their classrooms through one of the “flash funding” programs, the kids who were inspired by a trip to Washington, D.C. or an encounter with the Senator or a Bucks player.



What JoAnne is most proud of though is her family. JoAnne and her husband, Nick, have raised 2 young men. The eldest is a recent graduate of University of San Francisco Law School and runs a new startup company. Her younger son is currently a 2L at Marquette Law School. She's thrilled to have both of them in Milwaukee. Rounding out their family is JoAnne's beloved Toy Yorkie, Minnie. “Honestly, she’s my third child and together they all kept me sane during this last year.”

Despite the many challenges of this last COVID year, they’re also counting their many blessings, including the unique opportunity to have the family all together for now, enjoying cooking, Netflix and board games.

JoAnne treasures her time with Rotary: “Sometimes you don’t realize exactly how important something is to you, until it’s gone. Attending Rotary on Tuesdays was like breathing. When the world came to a halt a year ago, not having in-person Rotary engagement was a huge adjustment.”

She applauds the Club for how effectively it transitioned to online opportunities for members. “I think Rotary completely hit it out of the park in managing through the pandemic,” said JoAnne. “It was simply Herculean to do what they did and not miss a beat.”

In addition to her service with Rotary, JoAnne also serves on the boards of the Greater Milwaukee Committee, First Federal Bank of Wisconsin, Harbor District Inc, and the Wisconsin State Fair Park Foundation, and is an active member of Professional Dimensions. She has been recognized by the Business Journal’s 40 Under 40 List and as a Woman of Influence.

“27 years in and my career still feels new, because there are so many new mountains to climb each day,” said JoAnne. And our Club and our Community is all the better for it.

**Editor’s Note:** Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by James Madlom.