

Avrum (Avi) Lank

Journalist, Retired
Member since 2013



You may know him from his newspaper byline but these days he's just as well known for his community involvement and service to Rotary.

Avi Lank, a Rotary Club of Milwaukee member for nine years, enjoyed a long, distinguished journalism career, most of it at the Milwaukee Sentinel and then the Journal Sentinel.

Due to his long-term relationship with newspaper readers in our region, it is easy to consider him one of our own, yet his time in Milwaukee covers just part of Avi's life. He was born in Penn Yan, New York, a community in the scenic Finger Lakes region, and raised in Rochester, New York, where his parents pursued their careers. Avi's dad was in sales and real estate and his mom, still living at 96, was an author and columnist. After high school, Avi attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he earned a bachelor's degree in economics.

"Antioch provided me with a unique college experience that placed a heavy emphasis on work experiences through their job co-op program," Avi said. Those experiences—reporting for two newspapers and being an editorial messenger in the Associated Press's US Senate bureau—set him on a course in journalism. Earning a master's degree in journalism from the prestigious Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University solidified that course.

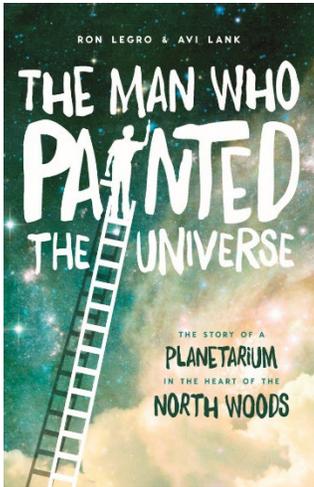
After a couple of reporting jobs elsewhere, Avi joined the Milwaukee Sentinel in 1974 where he progressed from general assignment reporter to business reporter to business editor. When the Sentinel merged with the Journal in 1993, Avi became a business columnist and continued reporting on a number of significant local stories until he retired in 2008.

As a reporter and columnist, Avi had a natural tendency to refrain from community involvement, but that changed upon his retirement.



Using his economics background and experience as president of the Journal Credit Union, Avi became a credit counselor. Working for the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Greater Milwaukee, he helped clients navigate through a myriad of personal finance issues—from bankruptcy to reverse mortgages. He estimates that his work helped clear about \$1 million annually in personal debt for his clients.

After joining Rotary in 2013, Avi became a member of the World Community Service Committee. He has journeyed with fellow Rotarians to the Guatemala highlands to work on club-sponsored water projects.



“Being on these trips allows you to see firsthand how Rotary affects the world,” Avi said. He has also been a member of the Tyrotarian Committee that affords members with unique or exclusive tours of local businesses, institutions and facilities.

Avi added author to his post-retirement credentials when he coauthored a book with former Sentinel reporter Ron Legro. “The Man Who Painted the Universe” chronicles how Frank Kovac Jr., of Monaco, a town in northern Wisconsin, built a 22-foot rotating globe planetarium on his property, the world’s largest and one of only four in the world. Kovac hand-painted the night sky as seen in Monaco, and its detail and accuracy make the planetarium even more remarkable. The book was published by Wisconsin Historical Press in 2015.

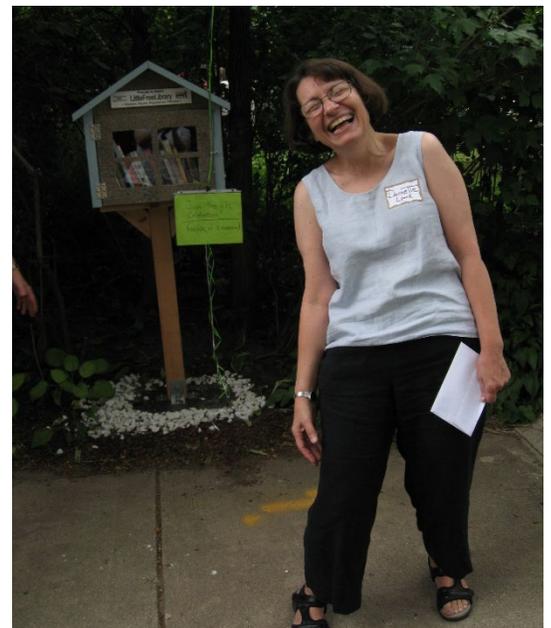
Avi and his wife, Dannette, a librarian by training, are longtime residents of Whitefish Bay. In 2013, they decided to place a Little Free Library on their front lawn. Unfortunately, the small book-sharing box was not in compliance with a municipal ordinance. A community kerfuffle quickly ensued, and the little library became a local cause celebre that eventually led to the ordinance being changed and the little library being compliant. There are now numerous Little Free Libraries throughout Whitefish Bay and beyond, undoubtedly inspired by the Avi’s persistence and advocacy.

The couple now live in an apartment in Whitefish Bay and also own a home in the historic Three Arrows Cooperative Society, a self-governing 125-acre community in Putnam County about 52 miles north of New York City.

“We’re going to be reverse snowbirds—New York in the summer and Milwaukee in the winter,” Avi said.

The Lanks who met at Antioch College, have been married nearly 50 years and have a son and daughter. Their daughter, who has two children, lives in Queens, New York, so summers will bring them closer to their grandchildren.

Avi will stay connected to Rotary both here and in clubs in the Putnam County area. He will maintain other Milwaukee ties like his work as treasurer of the Jewish Museum Milwaukee. From journalist to author, credit counselor to Rotarian, Avi’s accomplishments, connections and community outreach will continue from Milwaukee to New York and beyond.



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.