

# Audra Brennan

Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy, Northwestern Mutual Foundation  
Member since 2016

*"I arise in the morning torn between a desire to save the world, and a desire to savor the world." E.B. White*

Rotarian Audra Brennan is a true Person of Action who exemplifies the ideals of Rotary at work, at home and in the community. She seeks to live a life balanced between a commitment to help save our corner of the world and savoring the moments that make the world worth saving.

Professionally, Audra has built a career of public service and service to others. Today, she serves as Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy for the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, where she helps oversee the work of the foundation in its four core areas of investment.

"This really is my dream job," said Audra. "I have the opportunity to work for this amazing company on issues that matter to our community. We get to tackle the big picture policy issues and the on-the-ground work to ensure those policies and investments truly make a difference."

The Foundation is committed to a future without childhood cancer and makes local and national investments to help reach that goal. "We're listening to families, researchers and foundation partners to identify where we can best invest to meet the needs of families experiencing childhood cancer, the doctors that care for them and the researchers working on treatments and a cure," said Audra. "We really get to know the families and our partners."



Audra's son, Conor

Audra also oversees the Foundation's work in Milwaukee to strengthen access to education, support strong neighborhoods and help ensure our community has access to vibrant, destination assets like our museums, zoo and performing arts venues.

"Both of my parents were teachers who believed that every child has the ability to succeed if they have access to high-quality education. I'm proud of the work the Foundation does to provide this access by supporting successful schools in Milwaukee." She is also particularly proud of the work the Foundation is doing with the Community Development Alliance to help create long-term, systemic change to address the affordable housing crisis in Milwaukee.

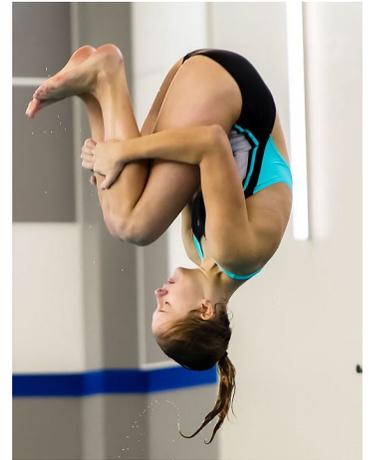
Prior to joining Northwestern Mutual, Audra worked in public policy at all levels of government. She started at the Congressional Budget Office in Washington, D.C. She continued with roles at Milwaukee Public Schools, City of Milwaukee and for the State of Wisconsin at the Department of Revenue and Department of Health Services, where she was proud to support the expansion of BadgerCare in Milwaukee - helping meet the

health care needs of Wisconsin children and families. She also worked on the Milwaukee Succeeds initiative while at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

As committed as Audra is to our community, she is even more committed to her family and to savoring every moment in the life she and her husband, Joel Brennan, have built together in Milwaukee.

When she first moved to Milwaukee, in 2000, she became active in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. She was matched with her Little Sister, Chenika and, two decades later, they remain close friends. Chenika was a bridesmaid in Audra's wedding and when she had a baby last May, she named her Kristiana Audra.

Audra and Joel live in Milwaukee's Brewer's Hill neighborhood and are proud parents to Allison and Conor, who attended the nearby Golda Meir School. Today, Allison is a sophomore at Divine Savior Holy Angels High School and Conor is a freshman at Marquette University High School.



*Audra's daughter, Allison*

Audra and Joel have spent many wonderful hours cheering on their kids at baseball diamonds, basketball courts and gymnastic meets and, most recently at diving competitions. And the family is united in a love of board games: "We love playing Yahtzee as a family or sneaking in that one 'Game of 500' between busy schedules."

Audra likes to travel and see the world. For her 50th birthday, she joined another friend turning 50 on a trip to El Salvador where they participated in a yoga retreat and learned to surf. She's had the opportunity to travel to Tokyo with Joel. And among their favorite family trips was a journey to Costa Rica.

Audra also enjoys savoring a good meal. At lunch, you might find her at Shah Jee's, the unassuming, yet fantastic, Pakistani restaurant located in the basement of the Jefferson Building. (Inspired by Audra, I stopped in and suggest you do the same—it's amazing.) Or enjoying sushi at Lucky Liu's where you'll spy a menu item named for her daughter, "The Allison Roll," which features egg and crab.

She is guided by her faith and has served as an Elder and Sunday School teacher at Immanuel Presbyterian Church on Milwaukee's East Side.

Audra loves the values of Rotary and shared that "I always come away from Rotary meetings with a great new idea, new perspective or new connection."

At the end of our discussion, Audra shared the quote from E.B. White that appears at the top of this profile and that really stuck with me. She is truly a testament to how you can take these two core values and live them fully - making the world a better place for others while savoring the moments that make life so great.



**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.