

Theresa Reagan

Patient Advocate, Nonprofit
Member since 2008

Theresa Reagan describes herself as a navigator, someone who helps others—cancer patients, non-profit organizations, friends—find their way through life’s storms and organizational ambiguities. But it’s clear she is more pilot than navigator. Along with succeeding in her own challenging journeys, Theresa helps others find a safe place to land.

Theresa, who earned an MBA and a certificate of health advocacy from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, enjoyed a successful career in marketing, sales and business development in consumer products businesses. Named a 2013 *Milwaukee Business Journal* “Woman of Influence,” Theresa has excelled at organizing, coaching, directing and affirming the potential of others, helping them build the trust needed to achieve together what they could not do alone.



Her impact and record of achievements is lengthy and noteworthy. She has had leadership roles with organizations such as the Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin, the Rotary-funded Children’s Health Education Center, Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin, and Stillwaters Cancer Support Services. She also served on the board of directors for ABCD (After Breast Cancer Diagnosis) and Professional Dimensions and currently serves on the Penfield Children Center’s board.

Her personal journey includes being a breast cancer survivor, which taught her to find exceptional purpose with each sunrise—whether it’s holding the hand of a frightened cancer patient, spending time with her grandchildren or as a board member of numerous organizations.

“What drives me? It’s people interaction. It’s people service,” Theresa said. “I find great joy in helping other people.”

That makes Rotary a natural fit.



“Rotary is about service. Rotary in Milwaukee. Rotary in Zurich, Switzerland,” she said.

In 2013, her husband Bill Reitman was transferred to Zurich to head Briggs & Stratton’s European operations. Theresa joined the Rotary Club of Zurich International, became a board member and supported efforts including support for adults with brain injuries, a children’s hospital in India and fundraisers like “Run for Change” and sales of holiday wreaths handmade by members.

Returning to Wisconsin in 2016, Theresa became a board-certified patient advocate, allowing her to assist others with a wide variety of health

topics, including health insurance and end-of-life planning. She extended those skills to volunteering at Horizon Hospice.

Theresa became actively involved in the Rotary Club of Milwaukee, most recently stepping up to lead the club's Ukraine relief efforts through the World Community Services committee. She also serves on the Community Connections Committee, helping guide the first grant cycle to several nonprofit organizations in Milwaukee. Additionally, Theresa has supported the Rotary Centennial Arboretum, even co-chairing the centennial gala with Jean Casey.

It was Theresa's idea to have proceeds from the Scholarship Golf Classic and Auction, which formerly went to the general RCM Community Fund, go directly to the scholarship program. The value of that decision is seen in the incredible success of the event and in the words, faces and achievements of scholarship recipients, Theresa said.



"Watching these young adults gain confidence and pursue their dreams is so inspiring and gratifying. It means so much that our scholarship and mentoring program can make a difference in the lives of students who otherwise may not have had an opportunity to attend college."

These days, she and Bill are focusing their efforts on the Milwaukee Academy of Science (MAS), a public charter school on the Near West Side. Bill is vice chair of the school's board of directors.

With a STEM-based education from kindergarten through high school, the school's graduation rate is 100 percent with 100 percent accepted to post-secondary schools, many with full-ride scholarships.

"Gary Grunau introduced us to MAS when we returned to Milwaukee from Switzerland. After meeting the CEO, Anthony McHenry, and several students, we immediately knew what a special place it is. It's a success story in Milwaukee education," Theresa said, adding that Bill plans to be even more involved after he retires next month.

Whether it's Rotary, nonprofits, cancer fighters or schools, Milwaukee can expect more from Theresa, a navigator for good and a co-pilot for many.



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