

# Kathy Ehley

Former Mayor of Wauwatosa (Retired)  
Member since December 2020

*"It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit" – Harry Truman*

That quotation has been Kathy Ehley's email signature for 30 years. More than just a sentiment, it's a philosophy that has guided her life.

"I'm passionate about community building and working together for the common good. That's what inspires me."

Kathy has always been selfless in her actions, but the leadership part did not come naturally.

"Throughout my life, people have seen qualities in me that I didn't see in myself—part of being an introvert. But people pushed me and encouraged me to take on roles I might otherwise not have pursued."

A cautious kid with cautious parents (and the youngest of three by several years), Kathy was the first in her family to attend college. Her parents both worked in factories—her dad as a manager and her mom worked on the assembly line. Despite her parents' trepidation, Kathy enrolled at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee to pursue a degree in education.

During college she worked at Loewi & Co. and when the stock brokerage firm offered her a full-time position as a trading assistant, she accepted, leaving college in her junior year. At 21, she married Kent Ehley, had two children and for the next 12 years, juggled stay-at-home mom duties with volunteer/leadership roles with the Girl Scouts, the PTA, Channel 10/36 and PBS.



Kathy's eclectic career path included Loewi, Kansas City Board of Trade, a personal chef/catering business, PBS, Milwaukee Ballet, Children's Hospital and executive director of the Wauwatosa BID. A two-time breast cancer survivor, she took the reins of founder Melody Wilson's ABCD (After Breast Cancer Diagnosis), which grew to become a national organization.

"When I was young, I watched people be so set on their professional course in life, knowing exactly what they wanted to do. Mine was more meandering."

But the knowledge and skills she accrued along the way, combined with a propensity for problem solving, made her an effective leader with measurable successes at each entity she landed in. In fact, she was often so successful at volunteer stints that organizations hired her.

In 2012, people thought Kathy could put her well-rounded expertise to work as mayor of Wauwatosa. And they were right.

"People encouraged me to run for office and I thought, 'I can't do that.' It was scary and challenging, but it ended up being a natural progression. I'm glad I did it."



Kathy served as mayor for eight years, which came with positions on the boards of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, Visit MKE, Wisconsin Center District and League of Wisconsin Municipalities.

Today, when she walks around Wauwatosa, she sees her efforts reflected everywhere.

“Wauwatosa had the biggest growth and economic development in history while I was mayor. There’s no place in the city where I don’t see my thumbprint. Not that I did anything singlehandedly, but it’s been so gratifying to see it go from good to thriving, a great place to raise a family, with beautiful parks and gathering spaces.”

Less visible but impactful accomplishments included improved communications, increased resident involvement on municipal committees and boards, creation of an equity and inclusion committee and a focus on public health and quality of life.

As for personal achievements, she is proud of overcoming her fears to take on new challenges, and that in her 50s, she returned to UWM and finished her degree.

Kathy and Kent have been married for 56 years. Daughter Jen and her husband Chris have two children and live in Colorado. Their son Zach and his wife Julie live in Wauwatosa. Kathy continues her involvement with community organizations, including the transit advocacy organization MobilISE, the PerSisters, an intergenerational group that strives to create a more equitable democracy, the Wauwatosa Board of Review, TIF Review Board and Rotary, which came along at just the right time.

“I had always admired the downtown club and I was looking for things that would keep me engaged and mentally stimulated when I was no longer working fulltime. I went from working 60 hours a week into isolation for COVID. I really valued how Rotary was immediately able to pivot with virtual meetings. That was my salvation,” said Kathy, who serves on the World Community Services, Environment and Ecology and Done-In-A-Day committees.



In her fourth year of retirement, Kathy claims she is determined to live life at a more relaxed pace; that it’s okay to not be constantly busy. She enjoys skiing, bicycling, motorcycle trips, kayaking, gardening, traveling, book and movie clubs and lifelong learning through UWM’s OSHER program.

“I have a curiosity and openness to new things and a genuine interest in people. England has a lifelong learning program for people over 55 that’s called University of the Third Age. I think that name is so appropriate. Life doesn’t end when you’re over a certain age. There is always something to learn and interesting.



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