

# Margaret Crawford

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Member since 2002

Some people make connections. Margaret Crawford forges relationships. And with her genuine desire to see others succeed, her network is broad and deep.

Born and raised in South Milwaukee, Margaret is one of five children, the only girl among four brothers. Her family's story reveals a fascinating yet troubled chapter of American history.

Originally from Hawaii, Margaret's mother Irene, "a 4-foot, 9-inch pistol," knew she wanted to see life beyond the islands. When GIs returning from World War II filled the available spots at the University of Hawaii, a chance encounter with a teacher originally from West Allis led Irene to apply to Mount Mary College in Wauwatosa.



Margaret with her Rotary Proposer, Paul Pagenkopf

Meanwhile, Margaret's Japanese-American father Andrew was interned at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, during the war. The Japanese American confinement site offered an incentive to prisoners: if they went to the Midwest, they'd get early release. A quiet, gentle, and intelligent man, Andrew accepted the offer. Irene and Andrew met at a social club in Chicago.

This history and Margaret's experience growing up as a minority sparked a lifelong interest in civil rights.

"There weren't many Japanese in South Milwaukee," she said. "There were few minorities at all. Not enough of us to be a threat."

Margaret rarely encountered open discrimination, but prejudice existed beneath the surface. After Margaret was elected high school prom queen, she overheard a man at a local corner store lament, "Why couldn't a normal girl be elected?"

Margaret developed a deep interest in human relationships, specifically in leadership and what brings people together to achieve a common goal. Pursuing her interest in industrial relations, Margaret attended the University of Wisconsin-Parkside where she earned bachelor's degrees in business management and labor economics.



Margaret with her grandchildren

"South Milwaukee was a blue-collar town and I was fascinated by the working relationships between companies and their employees. I became very interested in employee engagement and organizational development."

Margaret's impressive career has included roles as Affirmative Action Officer for the City of Milwaukee, where she wrote and implemented the city's first affirmative action plan, and Harley-Davidson's Director of Employee and Organizational Development, where she established the Harley-Davidson Leadership Institute. An onsite degree program in partnership with Marquette University, the Leadership Institute is one of her proudest accomplishments.

“We took away that barrier so people were able to pursue their education while working. Many went on to advance their careers in different areas, something they might not otherwise have been able to do.”

While at Harley Davidson, Margaret was influenced by former CEO Rich Teerlink.

“I was inspired by his values and perspective on business and the relationship of business to the community. He believed in creating a culture within the organization.” Teerlink later sponsored Margaret at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, where she earned a master’s degree in management.

Margaret went on to hold leadership roles in human resources at health insurance provider Fortis and later at Northwestern Mutual, where she provided strategic planning, organizational development and executive coaching.

“It’s called the soft side of HR, but it’s really the hard side.”

Now retired, Margaret still wears many hats: mentor, guide, adventurer, matriarch. Twenty-two years ago, Rotarian Paul Pagenkopf, her former boss at J.I. Case Corporation, encouraged her to join Rotary. Since then, she has been devoted to the club and its mission, and has served in multiple leadership roles including Diversity Committee and Scholarship Committee chair and current chair of the Environment and Ecology Committee.

Margaret continues to invest in people through her work on the Scholarship Committee and has mentored students for the past 12 years. Her current mentee graduated this month from the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater with a degree in mathematics and she still stays in touch with her very first mentee.

“Mentoring is so rewarding. You learn so much about the perspective of younger people. That’s my legacy—being a part of the development of all the people I’ve been able to coach or sponsor.”

Since leadership is second nature to Margaret, she naturally assumed the role of family matriarch, frequently hosting large family gatherings for home-cooked meals, which often feature her signature dish of Teriyaki Chicken. She and her partner Chris enjoy time with two grown daughters, Monica and Caitlin, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Last October, Margaret went skydiving with her grandson.

“I’m getting more adventurous as I get older,” she said laughing.

People who know Margaret don’t forget her. They also quickly learn that her elegantly composed, serene exterior belies a driven, action-oriented nature.

“People think I’m quiet—until they get to know me,” she said with a smile.



Margaret on an adventure in Egypt

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