

Marilka Vélez

Senior Vice President – Senior Director of Marketing, Associated Bank
Member Since 2018

Marilka Vélez’s resume is packed with superlative educational, business and community experiences, but what really sets her apart is the heart and soul she puts into making the world a better place.

“As a former Girl Scout, I try to live the motto of leaving a place better than when you find it. My goal is to leave a legacy of better lives for women and girls, especially persons of color,” Marilka said.

Marilka, who holds a bachelor’s degree in graphic design and Spanish from Mount Mary University and an MBA from Marquette University, is Senior Vice President – Senior Director of Marketing at Associated Bank, where she serves on the well-being board and is past co-chair of the cultural awareness colleague resource group.

“Associated Bank is in an excellent spot to make a difference in the state, be it on equity issues or on things like financial literacy and common-sense budgeting that fit with our Midwest culture,” she said, noting that Associated Bank is a strong supporter of Secure Futures, an organization that empowers teens with financial education, tools and mentorship.

“I’m focused on delivering superior, people-first, digitally-enabled banking experiences,” Marilka said, adding that connecting consumer insights to quantitative research methods produces a “successful brand platform that lifts overall trust.”



Marilka with her husband, David Muehlbauer at recent graduation from Marquette’s Executive MBA program.



Marilka keeps an eye out for Rotary’s impact around the world. The Cocoa Beach and Space coast chapter of Rotary club co-sponsors the beach bucket foundation.

Marilka, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, has been successful in advancing new Associated Bank services in Milwaukee’s Hispanic community, which she says is an important business and social need. She worked directly with colleagues to identify the most meaningful marketing and sales collateral to help bilingual colleagues work with Spanish-speaking customers and find Spanish-speaking colleagues via the bank’s branch locator.

“Through this effort, I see customers of all ages acquire the capacity to manage money better,” said Marilka.

Prior to Associated Bank, Marilka, who was named to the Milwaukee Business Journal’s 40 Under 40 list in 2021, worked in design roles for 16 years including adjunct design instructor at Mount Mary University, web designer and manager of digital design at Kohl’s Corporation and senior design manager and creative director at BuySeasons Inc., a Milwaukee startup that became a major online costume retailer. In 2016, the company, which had been sold 10 years earlier, cut a third of its workforce, including Marilka.

“In an instant 200 of us were gone. People I had hired. People I worked with. People that I cared for,” she said.

That summer as Marilka, a Milwaukee native, was packing her bags for Pittsburgh and not happy to be leaving her hometown, a position at Associated Bank appeared.

“It was in this time that I really felt the heart and soul of Rotary wrap around me,” she said. “Everyone was so warm and so helpful. It left a deep impression on me. That’s one reason I talk up Rotary. It’s personal. It helped shape my identity here in Milwaukee. Once I had my mojo back, I knew getting involved with Rotary was part of how I would give back to Milwaukee and the community I love so much.”



As an active board member and volunteer, she is passionate about her involvement with the Women’s Fund of Greater Milwaukee and its mission to mobilize philanthropy and foster unity for gender equity.

Marilka served on the Rotary board for three years, is a founding member of Connecting the Community Grants program and traveled to Guatemala in 2019 with members of the World Community Service Committee. She is a regular participant in the RCM Scholarship Golf Classic and frequently attends Rotary social events.

Her other community commitments include serving on the boards of the Women’s Fund of Greater Milwaukee and Milwaukee Film and as Mount Mary University trustee and alumnae & donor relations committee member. The daughter of Rotarian Barbara Vélez, Marilka resides in Wauwatosa with her husband David Muehlbauer and their French Bulldog Guava.



Marilka’s happy place – walking on the beach with her Frenchie, Guava.

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 and edited by Mary Bolich.