

## Carol Alexander Barnes

Managing Partner, KCB Buildings, LLC  
Member since April, 2023

Carol Alexander Barnes is a woman of rare gifts. Although she joined Rotary less than a year ago, the ease with which she greets her fellow members any given Tuesday, always by name and with her signature warm smile, projects the poise and confidence of a longtime member. Carol possesses a genuine love of people, and it's not an exaggeration to say that Rotary is in her blood.

Carol has attended Rotary Club of Milwaukee lunches with her grandparents, Robbie and Joan Robertson, since she was old enough to appreciate the annual United Nations Celebration program sponsored by the AD Robertson Fund. Carol's grandfather was a Rotary president in 1957. Her maternal great grandfather and her uncles were also Rotarians.

"My grandpa just loved Rotary and always talked about it. He taught me that Rotarians are smart, successful people who care about the success of the city. I thought to myself, 'when I become a real adult, I'm going to join Rotary.'"

Carol grew up in Whitefish Bay, in a house across the street from her grandparents, who she credits as her most influential role models.

"I was always running across the street to spend time with them. My grandpa and I ate BLTs on Sundays. My grandma and I went to ballet matinees."

Carol remains close with her grandmother Joan, who is now 107 years old. Despite their generational divide, the two share similar philosophies on life.

"In some ways she's very conservative," Carol explains. "In other ways, she's so progressive. She really cares about finding peace in our community and abroad. She just blows everybody out of the water."

In her earnest desire to connect with others, Carol lives the example of the Four Way Test's third tenet, that what we say, think, and do should "build goodwill and better friendships." Regardless of race, politics, or age, if you're a kind and interesting person, Carol wants to befriend you, and she'll probably try to recruit you to Rotary, if you're not already a member. She has already sponsored two new members.

"But I have a lot of recruits in the pipeline," she says with a smile. "I'm so interested in people and what they are doing, and I got that from my grandparents. I love connecting great people to make great things happen."

You can find Carol most weekday mornings in the Pfister Café, where the hostess greets her with an enthusiastic hug. It's her favorite place to conduct business meetings for KCB Buildings, the boutique architecture firm she shares with her husband Keith Barnes, also a Rotarian. KCB specializes in residential as well as small mixed-use commercial buildings, and business is booming. In addition to servicing private clients, KCB is in the process of partnering with local nonprofits to create affordable housing with the goal of moving more people into home ownership. It's this venture that Carol finds the most exciting.



“It’s about fairness and what’s best for the individual,” Carol said. “We need to bridge the east and west sides of our city.”

Carol’s Milwaukee roots run deep. For generations, her family has worked as builders and in the insurance industry in Milwaukee. In a fun twist, her great-great-great-great grandfather was the contractor and stone mason who built the Pfister Hotel, as well as the Milwaukee Club, the Milwaukee Central Library, and other historically significant buildings in the city. Carol’s devotion to Milwaukee has led her to roles as a board member of local organizations, including Friends of the Milwaukee Public Library and Art Intersection MKE Community Partners.

Carol and Keith reside on the Eastside of Milwaukee with their two sons, Oliver, 8, and Elliott, 4. Their family enjoys going to the theater, especially to programs at the Skylight Opera House and Stackner Cabaret, and collecting and listening to old records. Carol and Keith share a strong bond through their love of art and architecture, and they try to instill this appreciation in their children. This past summer, the family spent a month abroad in Florence, where Carol studied art as an undergrad. Oliver attended a daily art camp run by one of Carol’s former art instructors, studying street art and sketching statues in the Uffizi Gallery.

Before settling into her current role with KCB Buildings, Carol pursued her love of art through a bachelor of fine arts at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, an early career in fashion and jewelry design and even a brief stint as a taxidermist, interning with the renowned Gary Senk. Carol still appreciates a good fur coat. Her experience coordinating runway shows and fashion shoots shines through today in her stylish, fun sartorial choices.

Her New Year’s goal for 2024?

“I’ve got to get a new fancy suit to wear to Rotary. Something really wild. Rotary is the place to be.”