

## **Women of Distinction Biographies**

### **Ann Hendricks**

Ann Hendricks is an example of a servant community leader. Ann's passion for education led her to successfully pursue a seat on the Mankato Area Public School's Board of Education, which she has served for 14 years. During this time period, she has helped successfully pass two critical referendums, assisted in the development of the Greater Mankato Area Diversity Council, played an important role in the creation of positive activities and programming for female students, and always looked at a broader vision of providing unity and sharing purpose across the district and community.

Ann has worked tirelessly to empower women and eliminate racism through her work as an educator, and through her personal experience. She has taken the initiative to develop and implement individual treatment plans for young women through her work at Minnesota Security Hospital, which has been recognized at a national level. Ann has mentored young women by focusing on their academic skills, self-esteem and preparing these young women to re-enter society.

As an educator and professor at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Ann is a true mentor, is passionate about her content and provides tremendous inspiration as well as imparted valuable knowledge to the future teachers. Her professional work with special education has made her particularly attuned to issues of discrimination and the need to understand individual differences in order to create fair educational opportunities.

Ann grew up on a small farm in Garden City. She has been married to her husband, Brad for 31 years and they have three children, Sam and his wife, Amy; Max, and Olivia. In addition to Ann's work as a special education teacher for St. Peter Public Schools at the Minnesota Security Hospital, Ann also works part time at Scheels Gift Lodge because it allows her to tap into her creativity.

## **Katie Nerem**

It is one thing to be a member of a volunteer organization or cause, but it is another thing to be a leader. Katie is a leader. Over the years, Katie has carefully chosen to be involved in organizations which she genuinely feels a passion for the mission and can contribute her talents to the cause.

Katie has been a long-time member and supporter of the YWCA. She worked tirelessly as a board member and chair to lead the organization through many challenges in the last several years, and had the foresight to recognize that critical changes were needed. When asked if she was willing to stay on as board chair to ensure continuity in leadership through this process, Katie didn't hesitate to continue her role. During the organization's transition, Katie was also instrumental in helping the YWCA refocus its programs on the true mission of the YWCA, by assisting in the development of the Elizabeth Kearney Women's Leadership Development program, conceiving the Women in Politics Salon, and helping to secure funding for the Walking in Two Worlds program.

As a strong supporter of diversity, Katie has also taken on active roles by serving on the Greater Mankato Diversity Council, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Committee and while leading the Mankato Clinic Foundation, further refining and strengthening Project Kindness in Mankato Area Public Schools. In addition, Katie has given much of her time ensuring our community remains focused on progress, which is evident in her involvement with Greater Mankato Area United Way, Envision 2020, Inter-City Leadership and most recently the Blandin Community Leadership Institute.

Katie continually empowers women through her unconditional support to individuals and women-based organizations and programs by encouraging them to achieve new heights and weather the storms with dignity and grace.

Katie is the Assistant County Administrator for Blue Earth County, where beginning as an intern, she has worked in a variety of positions for 10 years. Growing up in northwest Iowa, she moved to Mankato in 1993 to attend Minnesota State University and has called Mankato home ever since. She has a bachelor's degree in Public Administration and Public Relations from MSU, a Mini-masters in Healthcare Administration from St. Thomas University, and is currently busy completing a Masters in Public Administration from Hamline University in St. Paul. When she isn't studying or writing papers she enjoys boating, golfing, running and traveling abroad.

## **Stacey Straka**

Stacey Straka has unselfishly donated her time to enhance the livability of Greater Mankato through support for both our business community and non-profit sector over the last 25 years. As a young woman moving to Mankato she put her exceptional creative and marketing skills to work by promoting successful activities in downtown Mankato and has continued these efforts into her work today.

To improve greater Mankato's quality of life, she has been involved with many celebrations and festivals over the years, including Bend of the River Festival, Fourth of July Celebration, Celebration of Lights, and served as committee chairperson of the Mankato International Festival from 1989 – 1992 to celebrate the diversity in our community. She has also taken an active role in the development of Mankato through the Riverfront 2000, Envision 2020, Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the City Center Partnership.

Stacey has also taken an active role in education, by serving in a variety of leadership roles with Educare Foundation and has been a mentor for many young women and men who are graphic art students at Minnesota State University and South Central College. Stacey, personally, has helped support several important programs and events that support women and children in our community, including the March of Dimes Chef's Auction, YWCA's Elizabeth Kearney Women's Leadership Development Program and MSU Maverick Walk for Women's Scholarships. In her role with the Mankato Area Foundation, she has supported key initiatives aimed at enhancing our diversity, including the Diversity Council, Fallenstein Field, YWCA Walking in Two Worlds, Martin Luther King Commemorative Board and the La-Mano Celebration.

Stacey is the principal and co-owner of Red Door Creative. Stacey and her husband, Rick have two children, Colby & Madeline who both attend Mankato West High School. Stacey enjoys spending time with family and friends as well as working with the Mankato Area Foundation, Blue Earth County Historical Society, the City Center Partnership and Christ the King Lutheran Church.