

# Honoring KATHLEEN LEITNER

WORDS BY LISA STAMOS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA M. BARRETT

## The Power of Quiet Leadership

FOR SOMEONE whose personal life, profession as an attorney, and civic leadership have been so beautifully aligned and successful, there must be an exceptional approach in personal thought. For Kathleen Leitner, one of the greater Barrington area's most accomplished community leaders, that approach is derived from her training as an attorney—a profession shared by her grandfathers, father, and two of her five brothers (she also has two sisters).

The foundation of legal training is rooted in logic and requires the development of critical thinking skills, and the ability to analyze, evaluate, construct, and navigate arguments. Kathleen's secret sauce, added to this, is her ability to listen objectively to other's views and build consensus. She was trained at DePaul Law School in the city.

"It's a way of thinking," Kathleen said. "It's a way to figure out how to approach life. Law made sense to me, offering a set of rules, parameters, and the ability to take the emotion out of an issue to figure out what works, what's right." She adds, "Don't complain unless you can offer a solution."

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HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED  
ABOUT **KATHLEEN LEITNER.**

Kathleen's parents were civically involved. She was born and raised in Syracuse, New York, and then moved to Chicago in 1981. After obtaining her law degree, she worked at a small boutique firm and then a larger firm handling leasing and commercial lending contracts. Kathleen and Mark met in Chicago, later learning they lived in the same building. Their two daughters, Marley and Katherine, were both born in Chicago. As many couples realized, they desired more space for their growing family.

Some close friends lived in the Biltmore neighborhood of North Barrington. While visiting them, Kathleen and Mark learned about Tower Lakes, and soon they bought a home there. "We really didn't need to take vacations, because Tower Lakes had it all—water for swimming, canoeing, neighborhood events, progressive dinners, and our famous Fourth of July celebration which lasts for several days."

### A HEART AND HEAD FOR CONSERVATION

Kathleen's philosophy on getting involved in community leadership is simple: "Do it. Jump in." She started in Tower Lakes on a local youth committee, was elected to the homeowner's association board, and eventually served as Tower Lakes' Village President for two terms. She is also a founder of and has served on the Tower Lakes Community Foundation. A lesson learned is that as a leader, you need to find volunteers to do the work.

Kathleen also served for eight years as a member of the Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG) on Legislative, Finance, Policy, and Long-Range Planning committees. She represented BACOG in the formation of a 70-community member NW Water Planning Alliance. She is also a founder and member of the Tower Lakes Community Foundation. As a six-term president of Citizens for Conservation, Kathleen helped guide a capstone achievement for the greater Barrington area. Under her leadership, CFC acquired the 246-acre Hill 'N Dale Farm south property from the Duchossois family.

"BACOG offers a chance to look at the big picture," Kathleen said. "As a group, we needed to do what's right. We worked together. We didn't talk politics—we talked about policy for our entire area and brought the messages home to our respective villages." She is passionate about water, the aquifer we live above and draw from. "We have limited land and water supplies. Education is important, including knowledge about native plants and their ability to filter our water.

Kathleen's service to our region is immeasurable. She notes that to be successful, you don't have to be the loudest person in the room, or the last to talk. What is needed is to listen, be pragmatic, and search for a solution. She humbly adds, "I may have an opinion, but I will listen to conflicting viewpoints, because sometimes I may not have the right answer and others do."

### Janet L. Agnoletti, FORMER BACOG EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Kathleen and I started working together when she was elected Tower Lakes Village President and I was BACOG's Executive Director. As a member of the BACOG board, she was interested in all things "regional and cooperative." Kathleen served on multiple committees every year. When BACOG had legal needs, Kathleen the attorney stepped up. She participated in our events and was skilled at nudging others to participate as well.

Kathleen and I shared enthusiasm for "lobby days" in Springfield, where she showed her fun side. In meetings with State legislators, Kathleen could explain our local concerns about bills and then charmingly advise they vote a different way, our way, that is. Later in the day, we would meet our legislators again and all have a chuckle.

When I retired, Kathleen invited me to the Citizens for Conservation (CFC) board. Her leadership in finding consensus among many ideas and personalities was key to the board developing a strategic plan, the foundation for CFC to evolve as an organization. She also was dedicated to the purchase of the new CFC Hill 'N Dale Preserve, considerably expanding our holdings.

### Patty Barten, NEIGHBOR AND COLLEAGUE

Kathleen's various leadership contributions unfold like reading chapters in a great book. After years of working together, I still say "I didn't know you held that role or did that." Kathleen's handy work is reflected in so much around us. Kathleen is a team builder, always honoring the skill, talent, and efforts of others. She is quick to say that "you don't get anything done by yourself." She is talented at seeing opportunities, making connections, and matching people's skills to important activities. That engagement delivers big results both today and for tomorrow. I think the book of Kathleen should be described as an action-filled, community-invested, people-oriented, future focused, creative, leadership must-read. We are fortunate Kathleen shares her talent with our communities.

### Steve Burgoon, CHAIR, TOWER LAKES COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Burgoons have had the privilege of working with Kathleen and the Leitner family since the day they moved into Tower Lakes in 1992. Kathleen's two daughters and two of our daughters became fast friends and grew up together throughout their years at BHS. Today, we get to fawn on grandchildren and the men in the girls' lives, including Mark, Kathleen's dedicated husband. Kathleen was involved in various Tower Lakes Improvement Association (our HOA) committees. Kathleen then moved to Village to Tower Lakes municipal roles. Using her vision, awareness, collaboration, and negotiating skills, she led the charge to establish the Tower Lakes Community Foundation. She ensured two meaningful projects, the Tower Lakes Preserve and the new Tower Lakes Village Hall and Community Center, were completed. Today, Kathleen continues to impact Tower Lakers with her legal practice. Kathleen is all about the people, helping to make Tower Lakes better. Kathleen is a friend of mine and a friend to all.

### Andy Hay, VILLAGE OF TOWER LAKES PRESIDENT

Kathleen has been a pillar of the Tower Lakes Community. Her leadership of the Village Board is what inspired me to step up and volunteer and led to my tenure as president. Her tireless efforts to preserve our environment set an example for all to follow. She achieves great things without any hint of ego; she quietly and unassumingly gets things done and has a knack of bringing together teams of like-minded people and aligning them behind shared goals. Thank you, Kathleen, for all that you have done for Tower Lakes and our surrounding environment.



**Karen Daulton Lange, VICE-PRESIDENT, CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION AND COORDINATOR, FLINT & SPRING CREEK WATERSHEDS PARTNERSHIP**

I met Kathleen Leitner when she was Village President of Tower Lakes, and I was serving as Village Administrator of Lake Barrington. Her leadership stood out as thoughtful, collaborative, and grounded in what was best for the community. After I retired, Kathleen invited me to join the CFC Board, where she was president. I came to appreciate her depth, whether on restoration projects or inspiring volunteers to roll up their sleeves and get involved. During her tenure, CFC achieved one of its most significant milestones: the purchase of Hill 'N Dale Farm, preserving nearly 246 acres of open space for future generations. It was a bold vision, realized through her persistence, collaboration, and ability to bring people together around a common purpose. Kathleen leads with integrity and humility. She listens deeply, inspires trust, and quietly turns vision into lasting impact. She truly embodies what it means to be quintessential—caring, committed, and transformative. I'm grateful to have worked alongside her, and to call her a friend.

**Kim Duchossois, FRIEND**

Although familiar with Kathleen's name in our community, it wasn't until discussions began about the acquisition of Hill 'N Dale Farm's south property to become what is now CFC's Hill 'N Dale Preserve, did I have the privilege to know her up close. Thanks to Kathleen's fellow CFC board members and our neighbor, Ginger Underwood, initiating the discussions, one of the most meaningful events (plus wonderful new relationships!) evolved for our family for our stewardship of Hill 'n Dale Farm. Forever grateful we are.

Kathleen pursued the goal of CFC's acquisition with determination, strategic collaboration, extremely thoughtful planning, and communication. Countless hours were devoted as she led the CFC team to the goal line. Her legal training was invaluable as we progressed. She was always professional, highly organized, and collaborative throughout the process. Unimaginable volunteer hours by Kathleen and the CFC team were spent on the year-long acquisition process requiring procurement of significant grants and discussions with dozens of generous neighbors and conservationists. Kathleen powered through, always with grace... even through the very few hiccups. It was an extraordinary and exciting process in which Kathleen provided continual education and exemplary leadership for all involved. She deserves special recognition for a historic achievement to preserve our community's open space, but also for being an exceptional volunteer leader amongst us all. Heartfelt congratulations.

**Kit Leitner, DAUGHTER**

People are always surprised when they hear that my mom was the mayor of my town growing up. Imagine their disbelief when I mention that she was also an attorney, a lovely painter, a leader in nature conservancy, and somehow still earned Mother of the Year at the barn where we took riding lessons. Mom always managed to stay passionate about what she was doing. No matter how late she got home from a Tower Lakes Village Board, BACOG, or CFC meeting, she was always excited to tell us about the progress they were making on their current project. (Who knew water treatment could be so exciting?!) While I may never live up to her many accomplishments, I'll try my best to make her proud by giving back as much as I can. Je t'aime, Maman!

**Marley Leitner, DAUGHTER**

In my 36 years with my mom, I've been amazed by her in countless ways. Now that I am a mother myself, I've spent time reflecting on what she has taught me and what I hope to pass on to my daughters.

I have always known my mom to be confident, sharp, and fearless. I never questioned whether she was in my corner. She showed up for me, fought for me, and truly understood who I was and what I needed. She has always been my number one advocate.

One of the most important lessons she taught me was to give back more than you receive and to show up for those around you—your family, your friends, your community, and the causes you believe are good and right. My mom has lived those values. She has been a public servant for most of my life, tirelessly dedicating decades to building foundations and conserving land and resources for future generations. For those who know Parks and Recreation, she is my real-life Leslie Knope.

Every mother hopes to leave the world better than she found it for her children. My mom has done exactly that—for me, for her granddaughters, and for countless others. What an honor it is to call her my mother.

### **Mark Leitner, HUSBAND**

We met at the bus stop on Chicago's North Side. Shortly thereafter, we discovered we lived in the same building! And so, the courtship began. Kathleen was working full-time at a law firm and attending law school at night. Cellphones didn't exist, so I left dinner invitations taped to her door—often with flowers. From our regular late-night dinners and discussions, it was obvious to me that she was the one for me—confident, curious, genuine, and community focused.

After receiving her law degree, we married and moved to a townhouse in South Loop where we celebrated the arrivals of our two wonderful daughters. Hearing from friends that Tower Lakes was a great family neighborhood, we moved here in 1992. Kathleen quickly became involved with the community. Her efforts, along with so many talented volunteers, have made Tower Lakes an even better place to raise families and call home.

Throughout these years Kathleen has maintained her law practice. She is an avid reader, artist, and international traveler. All while being a wonderful wife, partner, friend, sister, mother, and grandmother.

### **Mary Magro, TOWER LAKES VILLAGE PRESIDENT**

Kathleen has always been a kind and gentle leader. She has calming influence, never raises her voice, and speaks with reason and respect. In Tower Lakes, Kathleen has brought insight into every project or committee she has been involved with. She was instrumental in purchasing land to add an additional park for our community. She had opened her home for our Progressive Dinner and welcomed parade-goers after our Fourth of July Parade. She always has a smile on her face for every neighbor that drives past her home and she and Mark have raised two beautifully intelligent daughters, in whom you know Kathleen has instilled love, respect, and joy. I am grateful to call her a friend.

### **Kelly Mazeski, PRESIDENT, CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION**

Kathleen Leitner's six-year tenure as president of CFC was marked by vision, energy, and a deep commitment to protecting open space. A charismatic and dedicated leader, Kathleen guided CFC through one of our most significant achievements: the successful purchase of Hill 'N Dale Farm in Barrington Hills. This immense effort preserved the iconic property as a new CFC Preserve, an enduring gift for all who appreciate its natural beauty.

I got to know Kathleen after she recruited me to join the CFC board in 2024 prior to my election as president in 2025. She has been a generous mentor and trusted sounding board, offering thoughtful advice and unfailing support. Just as important, she has become a friend.

### **Sam Oliver, CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION**

Kathleen is a shining star in her commitment and contributions to the entire Barrington area. Her skills, talent, professional background, and



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dedication to the big picture are extraordinary. She has staying power and quiet, steadfast energy. Over the years and in a wide spectrum of projects that have benefitted our community she has brought strength, stability, and growth each time she has answered the call to lead. She brings people together to solve problems and inspires confidence that there are people all around us who care deeply about our land and our life here.

### **Margarita Patmore, FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR**

I have known Kathleen since 1995, and over the years she has become a dear friend who inspires me every day. She combines a brilliant mind with a genuinely kind heart, making her a deeply respected and appreciated leader. Kathleen brings thoughtfulness, integrity, and an unwavering sense of purpose. As president of Tower Lakes, she led with clarity, courage, and sincere care for the people who live here, especially during moments that required patience, judgment, and balance. Later, as president of CFC, she strengthened the organization, leaving it more effective, efficient, and impactful because of her steady, values-driven leadership.

What I know about Kathleen comes from morning walks, long conversations, yoga classes, afternoons spent painting, friendly card games, and laughter. I also have the rare privilege of having raised our daughters together. Watching them become the capable, kind, and grounded women they are feels like the truest reflection of Kathleen's values and legacy. I am deeply grateful for her friendship and for the lasting, meaningful impact she has had on my life and our community. 