



Oconomowoc Enterprise

OAF founder, former Enterprise owner Joan Brown dies

Remembered for her commitment to community

By Alex Nemec
anemec@conley.net.com
262-513-2661

OCONOMOWOC — Joan Brown, one of the founders of the Oconomowoc Area Foundation, former owner of the Oconomowoc Enterprise and a well-known community philanthropist, died on Nov. 20 at the age of 89.

She died on what would've been her 66th wedding anniversary with her late husband Bruce, who died in 2014. C.W. Brown, Bruce's father, bought the Enterprise in 1936 when it was having financial troubles. Bruce and his brother, Bart, eventually found their own roles at the newspaper, and some of their children also got involved. Bruce was responsible for the commercial printing operations of the newspaper, while Bart was responsible for the newspaper, advertising and editorial content.

Joan was an active member of the community being involved in the OAF, Oconomowoc Rotary and was instrumental in getting the new YMCA at Pabst Farms built.

OAF Foundation Coordinator Maribeth Bush was a longtime friend of Joan's and said she got to know her through the OAF board.

Bush said even after they stepped down from the board, that Jo and Bruce would still attend OAF events.



Submitted photo

Joan Brown, left, with her husband, Bruce, at a dinner prior to his death in 2014. The Browns were former owners of the Oconomowoc Enterprise.

"They loved to attend events and they were wonderful," Bush said.

When the OAF was founded, Bush said Jo recognized she needed to put her money where her mouth was to help the community. "She was a part of a solution," Bush said. "When the foundation was founded, it was evident there were needs in the community and we had to grow the foundation and help our nonprofits."

Sarah Williams-Berg, director of community relations at Shorehaven and a member of the Oconomowoc Rotary, said Joan was a connector.

"She found friendships and nurtured them," Williams-Berg said. "She bridged generations with humor and grace. She believed life should be celebrated, family embraced, those fleeting

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— Maribeth Bush,
OAF Foundation Coordinator
and lifelong friend of Joan Brown

gleeful moments treasured and perpetuated."

Stacy Giddings, who also works at Shorehaven, said despite Joan having many accomplishments in journalism, philanthropy and travel she remained grounded and humble.

"Her advice to her children and grandchildren is 'be proud of who you are and always try to see the humor in things,'" Giddings said.

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Submitted photo

Joan Bruce and her caregiver Kelly Morgan.

Brown

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Bush said Joan was a social person who loved to laugh, play bridge and have fun.

“She was a social person and she loved people and loved her community so it was a great mix,” Bush said.

Joan’s son Carter said he had the chance to see his mom in February before the pandemic went into full gear. But given the state of the world, he actually got to talk more with his mom than he typically would.

“This last year, calling her on the phone and hearing that cheer and doing video calls with her and seeing her face,” Carter said. “In a good way, there was more contact because we had a family Zoom call on Sundays at the same time.”

Carter said his mom was herself until the day she died, wanting to be active in the community.

“She got up every day and wanted to get so dressed up and wear her jewelry and things,” Carter said. “The day she passed away she wanted to get up and tour



Submitted photo

Joan Brown with Alderman and Oconomowoc Area Foundation Board Member Lou Kowieski at the Oconomowoc Farmers Market.

around the lake and get a doughnut ... She was strong and super happy all the time. She always had a sparkle in her eye.”

As Bush became a bigger part of the OAF, she found herself being honored to sit at the same table as Joan and Bruce.

“My role now has grown quite a bit since then, but

they were my cheerleaders and I will always appreciate that and hold them in my heart,” she said.

Bush added that everybody should have a friend like Joan.

“She was just an extraordinarily kind woman and I’m honored that I knew her,” she said. “It was a privilege of my life.”