

A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

New board member has love for community work

As the wife of a former executive with Monsanto Chemical Corporation, Heather Wilcauskas is aware of the positives that can come from sacrifice. The frequent moves kept Wilcauskas from starting a career of her own, but they provided the outlet for her to pursue her passion: community service.



Heather Wilcauskas

Wilcauskas, who was recently named to the Arts Center's Board of Trustees, is a 1964 graduate of Mount Holyoke College. The school means a great deal to Wilcauskas. In addition to being an active member of the alumnae clubs, she also saw both her daughters attend the college that helped shape who she is today.

"Mount Holyoke gave me an education that really left me feeling I was capable of doing anything I wanted to do," she said about attending the college in the early '60s, at the beginning of the women's movement. "It just left me with, probably, a more positive self image than I had before. I am a big proponent of women's education."

After graduation, she married Gene Wilcauskas, who was then serving in the Air Force. After he took a job with Monsanto, Heather resigned herself to a career in community service because of the couple's frequent moves: St. Louis three separate times; Hudson, Ohio, twice; San Jose, Calif.; and Sao Paulo, Brazil, twice.

Along the way, she volunteered a lot. While

in Hudson, she was elected to the local School Board and volunteered as a teaching assistant. Currently, she's active in her residential community, serving on the Somerset POA Board of Directors since December 2001 and the Leamington Board of Directors since January 2010. "I think it is important to give back to the community where you live," she said. "It feels like I am earning my keep on earth."

Her husband passed away in 2009, but the couple were both avid supporters of the Arts Center. Theater and art have always played a big role in the Wilcauskas family. She recalls seeing *Hair* in San Francisco in the late 1960s with a group of corporate executives and their wives. The at-the-time controversial musical received mixed reviews from the group, but Wilcauskas "thought it was great!"

While living in Hudson, the family were avid fans of theater at nearby Kent State, and would travel to Chicago and New York to see shows. Youngest daughter Sheri was even a singer and involved in community theater. Not that her

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daughter got her talent from her mom. “I can’t carry a tune if you wrapped it up and put it in a basket,” she said with a laugh.

The Wilcauskases bought their first property on the island in 1996 and moved here permanently in 2005. Trips to the Arts Center have been frequent. She even introduced the youngest

member of the Wilcauskas clan to live theater, taking her 4-year-old grandson to see *Annie Get Your Gun*.

“We weren’t sure he could last through, but he was so enthralled,” she said. “That was his first theater experience, and now he loves it. So we take him every time.”