

TRP Board Member Spotlight - Kay Champagne



When John Laine reached out to Kay Champagne in early 2009 to join the Texas Ramp Project, annual revenue stood at \$146,000. Since then, donations have increased every year, breaking the \$1 million mark in 2015. Revenue in 2021 will approach \$1.5 million. Rising income has allowed TRP volunteers to build more than 21,600 ramps for their fellow Texans in need.

“Without a doubt, the biggest single reason behind the expansion of the Texas Ramp Project over the past dozen years is the talent and the ability of Kay Champagne to raise funds from various foundations,” says Garner McNett, president of the Texas Ramp Project’s board of directors.

“I have been amazed at all the committed people I’ve met through TRP,” Kay says. “I talk to so many volunteers in the course of writing grants for the various regions. They are all wonderful and willing to help. I can’t think of any job—volunteer or paid—where I could have a greater positive impact on such a large number of people.”

When Kay Champagne retired in 2008, she looked forward to active involvement in just the right thing. She had three requirements. It must take advantage of her skills and expertise, developed over a 35-year career in writing and editing. It must allow her to give back to a community that had done so much for her. And she must be passionate about it.

Exactly one year later, she was offered two opportunities: start up a speaker program at her church, and write grants to foundations to raise funds for the Texas Ramp Project. She chose both. The speaker program, dubbed GUSTO!, was aimed mainly at older adults and retirees. Kay handled the publicity and outreach for the next nine years. The program is still going strong today, even after COVID.

And so is the Texas Ramp Project.

Kay grew up in Wisconsin. After earning a journalism degree from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, she lived for several years in Minnesota, including four long years in Duluth, America’s icebox. After a particularly nasty winter that brought over 150

inches of snow, she and her family moved back to Milwaukee and ended up in Dallas in 1979.

Kay has been a newspaper reporter, medical editor, personal computer research editor, and technical publications manager. Her first brush with fame was covering the Beatles as an intern reporter for the Milwaukee *Journal*. In other capacities, she edited articles for a medical journal by heart specialist Dr. Michael DeBakey, who developed the first artificial heart; worked with the celebrated Dr. Portia Isaacson, a pioneer in the personal computer industry; and edited the user manual for the President's secure phone.

Her last stop was at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, where she spent 11 years as director of publications. In addition to editors, designers and webmasters, Kay oversaw a print shop complete with a four-color press. A highlight at the Fed was editing the acceptance speech for a colleague who won the 2004 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics.

Kay and her late husband, Duane, raised two daughters. The family now includes five grandchildren, ages 13 to 18. She is a long-time member of King of Glory Lutheran Church in Dallas, where she sits on the church foundation's grants committee.

In her spare time, Kay enjoys travel, theater and reading. Her most impressive trip took her to the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, carved out of rock over 2,000 years ago. Her most moving trip was a civil rights conference in Alabama, where 250 people recreated the march from Selma to Montgomery (well, at least the beginning and the end). There was not a dry eye in the crowd.

But most of her time and energy still go to writing grants. "The Texas Ramp Project has done so much more for me than I have done for it," she says. "My work with this amazing organization is hands-down the most important work I have ever done."

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