


Gift guide | Cost to raise a child | Holiday happenings

WOMEN

Green Bay | Appleton | Neenah/Menasha
Oshkosh | Fond du Lac
mywomenmagazine.com

DECEMBER 2, 2014



Arts
advocate
**Karen
Laws**





“I had a mentor who thought it was charming that a young woman from an unknown, unpronounceable place in the Midwest somewhere had found her way to New York and was eager to learn. He sent me off to deal with film crews and interviews and all sorts of things that gave me confidence.”

KAREN LAWS



Profile 16

Karen Laws
by Jennifer Hogeland

Women who inspire 20

Sheros

Special Section 6

Holiday gifts with heart
by Erica Lynn

Gift guide for her and for the home

Body 10

Protect your hearing
by Lauren Waters

Style notes

Mind 24

Cost to raise a child
by Kat Kuehl

Holiday happenings

Aspire 28

Feeling young
by Katie Ellingson

Spirit 30

The season of kindness — EPH
by Sarah Wallenfang

Think local
by Emily Bowles

Risky business
by Scott Petinga

Departments

Checking In..... 4
 Question of the Month..... 5
 Out & About..... 36
 Recipe..... 38

contents

Dedicated
volunteer
and arts
advocate

Karen Laws

BY JENNIFER HOGELAND

PHOTOS BY DEBBIE DAANEN AND ASHLEY SCHMIT,
DEBBIE DAANEN PHOTOGRAPHY, APPLETON

HAIR ARTIST: JEFF JACKSON AND MAKEUP ARTIST:
AMY DIEDRICH, SALON CTI, APPLETON

Karen Laws has always been passionate about the arts. This passion inspired the Kaukauna native to travel to Los Angeles, to dance in Europe, to spend more than 20 years in “The Big Apple” and eventually brought her back to her roots.

While Laws was once at the center of a performance or production, the 71-year-old now devotes her time to supporting community arts organizations behind the scenes.

“I can’t imagine any person’s life without the arts,” she says.

Chasing a dream

Laws grew up as the only child to two schoolteachers. She could easily entertain herself, always coming up with elaborate stories in her head. Laws began dancing at age four and continued to do some type of dance all through college.

After high school graduation, Laws went to school in Madison to study drama. She took a semester off when asked to join a USO troupe and dance in Europe.

Then, determined to build on her theater experience, a young Laws packed her bags for California. Soon after—in 1967 and without a care in the world—she moved to New York.

Laws landed a job at NBC TV Network. She began giving tours and slowly moved her way up the ladder, working as a secretary and then researcher. Finally, 18 years later, Laws became a producer of NBC News.

“I had a mentor who thought it was charming that a young woman from an unknown, unpronounce-

able place in the Midwest somewhere had found her way to New York and was eager to learn. He sent me off to deal with film crews and interviews and all sorts of things that gave me confidence,” says Laws.

As a producer, Laws primarily worked on documentaries. She covered everything from fashion—spending time with Calvin Klein—to war—getting strapped into a B-52 bomber—to investigating murders.

“It was very intense,” adds Laws.

While in New York, Laws made a dear friend, Maury, who eventually became her husband. They met at a restaurant where the two had a mutual friend.

“Maury was a weekend dad at the time and oddly enough our connection began with *The Nutcracker*. His daughter was interested in dance and I loved the ballet so I said I’d take her. We all became friends—I never imagined 44 years later we’d be here, still talking about the ballet.”

The couple had a son, John. Karen juggled a demanding career and motherhood for a few years but shortly before John turned 5 they decided to leave the big city life.

“Maury said, ‘I’m tired of writing the same thing over and over’ and I said, ‘I don’t want to travel

any more,’ so it seemed like a good idea,” adds Laws.

Maury was a conductor and musical director in New York. He is known for conducting and scoring music for animated classics including *Jack Frost* and *Frosty the Snowman*. He was the musical director for *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

Maury’s one condition before settling on the location of their new home was he wanted to have access to an orchestra so if he wrote something he could hear it played. Her requirement—she wanted to live in a big old house and have a garden. Appleton offered both the arts and a beautiful downtown so the Laws headed west 30 years ago.

“It was a good move,” says Laws. “My parents were still alive so our son got to experience his grandparents. I got to have a big old house and garden and Maury has written and conducted with the Symphony and PAC [Fox Cities Performing Arts Center] ever since we moved here.”

Career and community

Laws’ first project upon moving to Appleton was to renovate a neglected house and turn it into her dream home. It wasn’t long after that she got a call from Channel 11 in Green Bay.



Channel 11 was an NBC affiliate and they approached Laws, asking her to join the station. Because Laws wanted to spend more time with her son, she was able to work out a deal where she could work part-time. She dropped her son off at school, drove to Green Bay, worked a few hours and headed home. She produced specials that ran during the station's ratings time for about five years.

"I loved it! It was lively, fun and they were passionate," says Laws. "Some of the people I met there are still good friends."

Then Laws began volunteering. She joined the Arts Alliance, a group that represented all the arts groups in the area, and helped them produce a video to promote the arts in the Fox Valley.

Fox Valley Technical College saw the video and asked Laws to create

one for them. A connection was made and before she knew it Laws became part of the team, leading the Technical College's marketing efforts. Laws worked there for 12 years.

It was during this time that Laws became involved with the Fox Valley Symphony. Laws' love for and support of the Fox Valley Symphony earned her a position as president of the board. She has been involved with the board ever since.

Laws was involved in the Women's Fund for the Fox Valley Region; she was one of a small group that came up with the idea to organize an annual luncheon.

"Five or six of us sat around one day and said, 'You know, no one really knows we exist.' We thought about what women like to do and we came up with the idea of having a lunch. We hoped to get 300 people to come to a lunch right after Labor Day; we'd get everyone in and out with an hour and a half program. Everyone contacted their friends and we had 850 people the first year. It was so exciting," says Laws.

She became president of the Women's Fund shortly after.

Laws devoted the last 10 years of her professional career to Goodwill Industries as vice president of marketing, development and community relations. She left a year ago.

She has been on the board for the PAC for the last six years and Laws is a member of the YMCA corporate board. She also shares her time and talent with Step Industries.

"I have a group of friends that do really important work with recovering alcoholics and addicts through Step Industries so I enjoy supporting that organization too," adds Laws.

Laws fills her days with community work or hanging out with her husband.

"Almost every day there is a meeting of some kind or I'm having lunch with someone to talk

about a project, or Maury and I have something to do around the house. I don't really have a typical day anymore, and that takes some adjusting," says Laws.

Because she isn't one to sit still, it's no surprise Laws has two projects in the works at the moment.

The first, Laws agreed to dance the role of the grandmother in *The Nutcracker* ballet at the PAC on December 6 and 7, 2014. She began rehearsing for her part in early November although she took up dancing again at TC Dance Club. She even competed in the local *Dancing with the Stars* in the early years.

"Dance is good for the body, mind and soul," adds Laws.

Her other project is for the Fox Valley Symphony.

Laws explains she is helping put together a "Sinfonia," which will be made up of members of the community that used to play an instrument or always wanted to play an instrument—she is still recruiting musicians.

A performance date is set for March 21, 2015. Money raised that evening will benefit the youth orchestra as well as the adult symphony.

Imagining the future

When asked to share words she lives by, Laws recalls wisdom offered by John Wooden, a well-known UCLA coach, suggesting, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts." Laws says, "I love that quote. It reminds me I always have something to learn."

She tries to apply that philosophy to her board commitments. Laws says, "When you are volunteering, you volunteer in all sorts of ways—with your time and treasure—and sometimes you are asked to lead but more often than not you are asked to follow. That, to me, is equally important. That is when you need to listen and learn and find out where you can help."

When Laws imagines what the next five or 10 years will bring,



Up Close and Personal

KAREN LAWS

Tell me about your family.

I have two stepchildren. Wendy lives in Phoenix and Christopher lives in Cape Cod. Maury and I have a son, John, who lives in Chicago. We also have a darling dog, Lacie, who is 14 years old.

Do you have any hobbies?

I always need to be doing something, so I needlepoint. I also love to read and watch movies.

What is your favorite movie?

Singing in the Rain—I can't tell you how many times I've seen it.

What is something few people know about you?

My true goal in life was to dance with Gene Kelly but I never did. I also somehow know the lyrics to popular and obscure songs from 1940-1970.

What do you look forward to most in winter?

I love the first beautiful snowfall—when the snow is glistening, it's clean and it's quiet. It's like living in a snow globe.

she suspects she'll have to give up some of her commitments.

"I'll probably have to slow down a bit, but I don't want to," says Laws. "I'll certainly be here because it's my home. Our friends are here and we have a good life here. I may not be on any more boards but I'll certainly be supporting those

that have touched my life."

One of those organizations she intends to continue supporting is the Fox Valley Symphony.

"I want to see the Symphony flourish. I want another generation to be able to appreciate it just as much as I have," she adds. **W**