

Sheila Brogan

Ridgewood Volunteer, Science Advocate, Geriatric Social Worker

Sheila has devoted her professional and personal life to improving the lives of others spanning from the youngest to oldest in her community of Ridgewood.

As a member of the Ridgewood Public School Board of Education for 23 years, Sheila has served on the communications, curriculum, facilities, finance, safety, and health committees. She also regularly attends New Jersey legislative sessions on these and other topics related to the public school system.

Sheila has helped to assess, identify, and develop programs to address the community's needs regarding alcohol and drug problems as a former Chair of the Ridgewood Community Task Force and Municipal Alliance Committee.

Volunteer leadership includes serving as chairperson of the Northwest Bergen History Coalition and former president and board member of the Ridgewood Historical Society. Sheila's fundraiser "Ridgewood Unplugged" brought local musicians to perform inside the School House Museum and Hermitage Museum thereby raising monies to maintain the buildings and expand their community outreach.

Sheila coordinates the annual "Super Science Saturday" non-competitive event to showcase a variety of scientific explorations and applications in the community. Students are afforded the opportunity to present alongside professional scientists in this unique educational mentoring celebration of science.

To address the needs of Ridgewood's adults aged 55 and older, Sheila founded and co-chairs "Age-Friendly Ridgewood" to promote awareness of issues ranging from housing, health care, transportation, pedestrian safety, and programming.

Professionally, Sheila works as a Geriatric Social Worker for the Bergen County Division of Senior Services. She facilitates a caregivers' support group and assists older adults and their families by providing information and referrals for medical benefits and other resources.

Sheila was nominated by Jeanne Johnson, Third Vice President, Woman's Club of Ridgewood.

Vernoy Paolini

Educator, Curriculum Creator, Humanitarian Advocate

Vernoy taught for 37 years yet her impact on students locally, globally, and intergalactically lives on ad infinitum. Her hands-on curriculum exposed students to national tragedies remembered in historic sites in the U.S. and Canada, to human atrocities in Sudan and Armenia, and to limitless potential of space travel.

Vernoy envisioned, implemented, and led numerous programs that shed light on difficult subjects while making a positive difference. "Peace Day" presentations expose and educate students by bringing them face-to-face with Holocaust survivors, former child slaves, and victims of violent bullying. It has been adopted by schools in several states and earned national acclaim by winning a Mid-Atlantic Regional Emmy Award. Vernoy co-founded the Skylands Youth Symphony and served as president. She led a field trip to Arlington National Cemetery for the premier Wreaths Across America Day. Her students were the first New Jersey "Space Talkers" conversing with astronauts on the International Space Station.

The tragedy of 9/11 inspired Vernoy to transform an act of bravery into a national classroom curriculum. She serves as Project Manager and Lead Writer for the "Red Bandanna Project" and collaborated on documentary content about the impact of 9/11, Holocaust, and Sudanese genocide acts of terrorism. She mobilized a Tour of Gratitude to Gander, Newfoundland and spoke at Canada's National 9/11 Remembrance Program.

Locally, Vernoy launched letter writing and fundraising campaigns to purchase equipment for firefighters and police officers. As a member of the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, Vernoy not only collaborated to establish the Northern New Jersey Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Sussex County but also took the next step and served as president.

For her global-focused curriculum, volunteerism, and leadership, Vernoy has earned numerous awards including NJ State Governor's Teacher Award, Teacher of the Year for Sussex County and Masons of NJ, Citizen of the Year for Vernon Township and Vietnam Veterans of America, Service Learning Award from the State of New Jersey, and Outstanding Teacher of the Holocaust by the NJ Commission of Holocaust Education.

Vernoy sees voids and has filled them with content and solutions so others would experience intellectual and emotional growth through engagement.

Vernoy was nominated by Maria Dorsey, President, Vernon Township Woman's Club.

Karen McLane Torian

Executive Director, SHEELD

Karen has been a productive alumna of Douglass College, Class of 1973, both professionally through faith-based non-profit organizations and personal endeavors to empower positive differences for others.

Currently serving as executive director for SHEELD, the Shiloh Economic and Entrepreneurial Lifelong Development Corporation, Karen and her team address the needs of members of the Greater Plainfield community. During the COVID pandemic as financial and food insecurity needs grew, Karen expanded outreach to help more individuals and families.

Previously, Karen worked for the Newark Housing Authority (NHA). Her leadership oversaw the growth of NHA's Stella Wright Homes HOPE VI Grant from \$35 million to \$200 million, providing the funding for the creation of five new communities in Newark's Central Ward as well as two centers and five new parks. Further successful grants enabled the modernization of existing family and senior residences to help build a better Newark.

Beyond seeing the need for improvement, Karen engages others to transform ideas into action. As Director of Multi-family Programs at the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, Karen worked with colleagues to adopt Harrison Elementary school and sponsored holiday and mentoring activities for students.

Karen is devoted personally and spiritually through her church's food pantry, clothing distribution, grief comfort, and deacon pastoral care ministries. Fundraising efforts through "Sunday of Hope" raised over \$500,000 for the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Karen has applied her leadership and organizational skills to strengthen existing programs and develop new initiatives as the Associate Alumnae of Douglass College (AADC). She served with distinction as a member of the AADC Board of Directors, AADC Black Alumnae Network (BAN), and Rutgers Board of Trustees. Karen also was the 2018 Chair of the AADC BAN Jewel Plummer Cobb Sisters Conference. Karen was a Gustav Heningburg Civic Fellow in 2003 at Rutgers Newark – Institute on Ethnicity Culture and the Modern Experience (IECME).

In recognition of her continued support of and important service to the AADC, Karen was presented with the 1996 Alumnae Recognition Award and the Corwin Award in 2018.

Karen was nominated by Valerie Anderson, Associate Alumnae of Douglass College, Executive Director.