



Kakki Taliancich

Dick Knight 2022
Award Winner



THROUGH QUIET, HUMBLE service, Richard F. "Dick" Knight moved the needle on philanthropy and community service on the Northshore unlike

any other. The strength of his character allowed him to build personal and professional relationships that ultimately served our community in deep and meaningful ways. To honor his transformational service, each year the Northshore Community Foundation presents an award in his name to a nonprofit leader who represents his dedicated character and immeasurable impact.

While it is common for this award to be given to a director of a nonprofit, for the first time this year, we celebrate the contributions of someone who has never officially served at the helm yet has been critical in steering the ship. Kakki Taliancich, long-time Associate Director of the West St. Tammany YMCA, is the 2022 recipient of the Annual Dick Knight Award for Nonprofit Service to her community.

"We honor Dick's legacy by recognizing the steadfast servant-leadership Kakki has demonstrated throughout her long career. Her remarkable, unwavering commitment to the mission of the YMCA perfectly represents the spirit in which Dick lived his life," Bourgeois said.

In 1986, with her young daughter in tow, Kakki waited patiently for a membership spot to open up at the small Old Metairie YMCA. She was



eventually able to join, but little did she know this was the beginning of a relationship with the organization she would serve for 35 years.

From her Midwest roots in Omaha, Nebraska to transplanting to New Orleans in her 20s, Kakki has always had a heart for people. Her early career in customer service used that heart and patience, including successfully running a sandwich shop with her husband in Chalmette. When she had her daughter, however, her real connection to the YMCA began and she not only became a member, but it also became part of her life.

When Kakki started going to the Metairie YMCA, her plan was simply to work out and have a safe daycare for her daughter. Fate had other plans, and there she met Sandra McDonald, a Y Director, and her future best friend. In very short order, Sandra saw something in Kakki that personified the Y mission – her love and compassion for all people. Kakki was hired to be a part of the team and she has been on that team ever since.

After moving from Metairie to help open the new St. Tammany Y, things began to come full circle. There was a young neighborhood boy who continually jumped the fence when he thought

no one was watching, so he could play some basketball. Someone was watching though, and Kakki made sure the boy knew he was welcome to come through the front door, weather he could afford it or not. She made him a "volunteer" and that boy started with cleaning and sweeping and later became a camp counselor.

Fast forward twenty something years and that young boy would be hired to be Kakki's new boss as the Executive Director of the West St. Tammany YMCA.

"It's funny how it goes around. He grew up and did a complete turnaround at the Y," she said of her boss.

The opportunity for a life transformed exemplifies Kakki's 35 years of service. "I cannot think of a single person who deserves this award more than Kakki," said Joey Roberts, Executive Director of the West St. Tammany YMCA. "She brings the kind of love and commitment that you cannot explain on paper."

Kakki credits her father with her tireless work ethic but also explains how she never wanted to climb the ladder or take the Executive Director title. "I never aspired for that position. I wanted the freedom to work directly with the people who came in and not get bogged down," she said.

Kakki has recently retired from the West St. Tammany YMCA Associate Director position and she, her husband Bob, daughter Erinn and granddaughter Blake are all moving to a little 6-acre farm with a pond in Folsom to garden and fish and raise horses. "It is something I have always wanted. It is my little slice of Heaven and being able to spend more time with my granddaughter is the icing on the cake," said Kakki. A very fitting retirement from a professional life served committed to others.