



Michigan Association  
of Community and  
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## Honoring Ken Walsh, former Executive Director at MACAE and lifelong advocate for adult education



MACAE, the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education, is sad to announce that we learned in the last couple weeks of the passing of Ken Walsh, the former Executive Director of MACAE, former supervisor of Adult Education for the Office of Extended Learning and lifetime advocate for adult and community education.

“I was warmly welcomed by Ken Walsh when I started as the Outreach Coordinator at MACAE in 2018. He called me to congratulate me and to help me understand the history of the adult education landscape in Michigan. I was so appreciative of that thoughtful consideration. I know now from hearing the testimony from others that kindness was part of his leadership style. Our condolences are with his family.” Patrick Brown, current Director of MACAE stated.

Ken Walsh had an extensive background and professional experience in education. He started his career as a teacher and coordinator with the Lansing School District from 1962–1966. He then served as a consultant with the Michigan Department of Education from 1966-1970.

In 1970 he joined the Michigan Department of Education’s Office of Adult Extended Learning. He served as the Supervisor of Adult Community and Alternative Education from 1970–1997. During this time Ken’s work took him many places including visiting the Dominican Republic, serving as a consultant for building their adult and community education systems. This was part of the Partners of the Americas Program. During that time he also served as the State GED Administrator from 1977 to 1997.

In 1986-987, Ken was accepted as a distinguished Fellow in the Michigan Education Policy Fellowship, a leadership development program involved in educational policy making.

Dr. Ronald Gillum Sr. served as the Director of the Office of Adult Extended Learning and supervisor of Ken for nearly two decades and worked alongside Ken for much of that time. When we reached out to him by phone he was saddened by the news: “I remember Ken's dedication, his willingness to work well into the late evenings, very early mornings, many weekends, and his very positive attitude about the work we were assigned to do for the adult students in Michigan. He rarely complained about the work assigned to he and his staff, but was never shy about voicing his opinions or making

recommendations. Ken was well liked and respected by his staff, other MDE colleagues and local state and Federal education officials.”

Ken was instrumental in helping to create the adult education state funding model (presently called Section 107). Dr. Gillum reflected on Ken’s work: “We worked together on countless projects during our 20-year history. Our work on sections 107 and 108 of the state school aid act come to mind. We spent untold number of hours working each year on those sections of legislation to make sure that funding would be secure for our school districts to offer quality services for our adult student population. The Michigan Adult Literacy Initiative is an activity that we conceived one late Friday night after several bottles of beer some hard liquor and glasses of wine. Ken, our late colleague Mae Mittag and I had a brain storming session that night when perhaps we should have been home with our respective families. But this was an idea/concept that we simply had to make a staple of our services. We wrote the concept paper and had it reviewed and refined by adult and community educators across the state. We presented the concept paper to the State Board of Education with the caveat that we would do all in our power to eliminate adult illiteracy in five years”.



After leaving the State Office, Ken worked as a consultant for ATS Educational Consulting Services. He first joined the MACAE Board in 1998 as the Oakland County Community and Adult Education (OCCA) Representative (1998-1999). He served as an At-Large Member from 1999-2001. He then served as the MACAE Treasurer from 2001- 2004. He worked closely with Executive Director Pat Shafer (pictured with Ken).

Longtime MACAE Member Howard Weaver was a friend, colleague and employer of Ken since Ken’s early career. “I first met Ken when he worked in the state in the early 60s. And I worked with him in a variety of roles through his time. Ken also worked with us, (ATS Educational Services) for a number of years. He was a great leader and did so much. He was a great family person. He really brought a lot to the table...we’ve lost, unfortunately, a true leader in Ken Walsh.”

Patricia Walstra, former MACAE President shared how Ken was a true advocate for lifelong learning. “The news of Ken Walsh’s recent passing has brought back some fond memories. My first encounter with Ken was over 25 years ago when he worked in the MI Department of Education’s Office of Adult Education. He had a rough and tough exterior and a presence that made you question your adult education professional choice. Some would say he ‘enforced the rules’ and only smiled if he absolutely had to. In my perspective, it wasn’t until he became the executive director at MACAE that the rough and tough exterior began to fade and a gentle, compassionate and dedicated leader emerged to ‘fight the good fight’ for adult education programs and students. Ken had a sincere way of expressing the urgency to ‘stay the course’ for our adult learners and forged relationships to support the fight.”



In March of 2004, Ken became Executive Director of MACAE, and served in that capacity for three years. During that time he was instrumental in working for for adult education prioritization in the state budget and its connection to many aspects of community and educational life.

Gary Tweddle, former Director of Adult Education at Hazel Park and colleague of Ken Walsh shared on his mentorship: “Ken did ABE and the federal grant at the state for many years. He really stepped up and helped me. When he talked about ABE students, he just truly cared. He always looked at the positive and how to help. When he was at MACAE he made a real effort to go out and see programs especially when Section 107 funding came along. He really helped me understand adult education, how it worked and I was so appreciative of him.”

Ken was known for his great sense of humor and personality. Here he is pictured alongside Mary Marcil (former member) for a themed fall conference day.



Dianne Duthie, former Director of Adult Education for the State of Michigan shared her professional relationship with Ken: "I feel privileged to have known Ken Walsh. Adult Education in Michigan was blessed to have a leader so special and caring. Ken was an exceptional mentor and a good friend. He always had time to listen, give advice and assistance when needed. He was a wonderful source of encouragement and a shining example of a true adult educator. May Ken's memory be eternal."



Bob Steeh, Past President of MACAE worked with Ken in a number of capacities over the years and reflected on how Ken was a great mentor and his impact in shaping adult education today. “I was in Arkansas, when I received the sad news. One of my early mentors, who helped shape some of my views on education, work, and many other things, passed away.

Ken worked at what he loved, education. He was dedicated to his work at the Michigan Department of Education and Michigan Association for Community and Adult Education (MACAE). He was committed to advocating for equal access and quality education for all people (especially adults looking for a second chance). For Ken it was incredibly simple, all people should have an equal opportunity to public education.

While Ken was the Executive Director for MACAE, he brought wisdom, experience and knowledge to our association when we needed it most. His compassion toward every person and his drive to right the injustice towards those not receiving the same opportunities as others is one of his greatest qualities. I learned from his views and perspectives and his wealth of knowledge. Ken was a great communicator, both in the written and spoken word and he did a wonderful job keeping our MACAE membership informed as to what was happening in education throughout the state.”

In later years, Ken was diligent in helping to track the history of adult education in Michigan. He was awarded the MACAE Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions in the field of education and lifetime commitment to MACAE and community education. In addition, the State of Michigan

Department of Labor and Economic Growth awarded him a Lifetime Achievement Award for Distinguished Service.

Ken's body of work was impactful. His philosophy of educational leadership could best be summed up in his own words from 1992: "Effective professional development not only improves the knowledge and skills of educators but extends the abilities of an organization to renew itself. Adult learning must be a priority if education is to fulfill its promise and its mission. Well planned, thoughtfully executed professional development can make a difference for teachers, leaders and learners."

Our thoughts go out to Ken's wife Marilyn and his family.