

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Walleye Weekend 2018: Bench Dedication to Honor Festival Founders**

*FOND DU LAC*—Walleye Weekend’s founder and first co-chair duo will have permanent recognition of their community achievement with the installation of two benches in Lakeside Park during the opening celebration of the festival’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The dedication ceremony is scheduled for Friday, June 8, at 4:15 pm on the park’s Oven Island, just north of the shelter. The benches honoring Walleye Weekend founder Jo Ann Ward and inaugural co-chairs Tom Hierl and the late Bruce Stumbras will overlook the channel, a beautiful and integral part of both the festival and the park.

“These benches will provide a fitting vantage point for festival and park visitors to appreciate what these three worked so hard to create,” said Fond du Lac Festivals Executive Director Leanne Doyle.

Ward had the idea to honor the first co-chairs who supported her vision, while Fond du Lac Area Foundation Executive Director Sandi Roehrig almost simultaneously had decided to dedicate a bench to Ward in celebration of Walleye Weekend’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

“Jo Ann Ward is one of the most visionary women I have ever met,” said Roehrig of the first executive director of the Fond du Lac Convention and Visitors Bureau, noting Ward also was influential in the growth of EAA in Oshkosh and worked to get the International Aerobic Competition (IAC) to Fond du Lac. “Her ideas and the ability to motivate individuals are responsible for many icons, organizations, and festivals that still exist in Fond du Lac today. In reality, I believe there should be a statue in the park commemorating Jo Ann and all of her accomplishments that have helped to shape Fond du Lac into the community it is today. Jo Ann Ward has really made a positive difference in our community.”

Roehrig, with the support of her sister, Cheri Basler, is using their parents’ fund, The Bob and Dorothy Royea Fund of the Fond du Lac Area Foundation, to donate the bench. Roehrig and her mother, Dorothy Royea, used to volunteer together on behalf of the FDL Convention and Visitors Bureau as ambassadors at the Fond du Lac EAA Booth for Ward and her group of volunteers.

Ward is using her own FDL Area Foundation fund to dedicate the bench to Stumbras and Hierl, who served as inaugural festival co-chairs in 1978. At the time, Stumbras was board president of the newly founded FDL Convention and Visitors Bureau; among a long list of responsibilities

for bringing conventions and tourism to Fond du Lac, he had charged new director Ward with building an identity for the community. The county fair was the only major event at the time, and the community was absent from state and Midwest travel guides.

“I give Bruce Stumbras much credit for his vision and determination,” said Ward of her former colleague who passed away in Orlando, FL, on April 9. “He was joined by prominent businessman Tom Hierl, and the two led the event for 1978 and 1979. Bruce Stumbras and Tom Hierl were a fantastic pair of leaders.”

Luring the national walleye tournament to Fond du Lac solidified Ward’s plan for the then-new festival. Since it began, Walleye Weekend has been featured in numerous magazines and on national television, including the Today Show and Good Morning America. Video from Fond du Lac Festivals has entertained audiences on the Brewers baseball scoreboard, and the mascot has represented Fond du Lac at the state capital and on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Ward reported that Walleye Weekend was named one of the 100 best events in the nation by the American Bus Association and National Tour Association.

For complete details of Walleye Weekend 2018 festival events and schedules, including music performances and tournament registration information, go to [www.walleyeweekend.com](http://www.walleyeweekend.com) .

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