



## Ilona Mae McCauley

June 4, 1939 - August 4, 2023

Ilona (Lonni) McCauley

Lonni's life was cruelly cut short on Friday, August 4, 2023 by a virulent and unstoppable infection. Her body had already been weakened by treatment for Colon Cancer and could not fight it off.

Born to Helen and Harm E Heidebrink on June 4, 1939, she grew up on the family farm six miles south of Rushmore, Minnesota. Her early education began in a one-room schoolhouse with about twenty other children mixed together in grades 1 to 8. Her scholarship led to skipping from second grade into fourth grade. She graduated from Worthington High School in 1956. Lonni and future husband, Dave were classmates in high school, they knew each other but never dated.

She had many stories of life in rural Minnesota - the highlights being riding her favorite horse, Queen; Saturday night dances at area dance halls (her favorite being the Hollyhock Ballroom in Hatfield); and women's fast-pitch softball games against rival towns and churches (Lonni played shortstop, her Mom played third base and her Dad was coach).

Within a few weeks of graduating high school, at age 17, she moved to Minneapolis with a couple friends and enrolled in the Minneapolis Business College. Her early years as single working girl were a whirligig of adventures and travels. One highlight being a trip to Mexico in 1959 where she and a girlfriend cut a wide swath through the country leaving countless latin men in

their wake. She also participated in a Minneapolis fast pitch league which led to entering the World Softball Queen Competition during the 1958 World Fast Pitch Tournament. SHE WON! That success did much to enhance her self-reliance.

Lonni and Dave reconnected, started dating and fell madly in love. They were married on November 24, 1960. They eloped because Lonni was Protestant and Dave was Catholic which was quite scandalous back then. They soon moved to Coon Rapids and started a family. Living in a young city offered Lonni several outlets for her pent-up homemaker energy. She participated in bowling league, tennis, bridge club; attended neighborhood pet fairs and PTA meetings. Most notable is that she joined the Coon Rapids Federated Women's Club with a slew of fantastic women who became lifelong friends. Lonni and Dave's circle of friends grew with the common goal of developing Coon Rapids into a great place to live, work and play. Their group served on committees and commissions, beautified public spaces and even helped bring soccer to the area!

When the children were old enough to take care of themselves, Lonni restarted her professional career and her post-high school education. She first enrolled at Anoka Ramsey Community College and then eventually graduated from Metropolitan State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Public Affairs. During her long and varied career, Lonni held many leadership jobs such as Executive Director of the North Hennepin Chamber of Commerce, the Anoka Technical College Foundation and the Minneapolis League of Women Voters. She also ran her own meeting and event planning business - Events of Distinction.

One of Lonni's greatest achievements was as founder of Mediation Services of Anoka County. She received training as a mediator, practiced on her teenage children, and began mediating disputes between neighbors, landlord/tenants, cities/residents, crime victims/offenders and in Conciliation Court. She was a volunteer mediator for over 25 years - even using Zoom for virtual mediations during Covid.

Another great achievement was the stabilization and expansion of Stepping Stone Emergency Housing. She joined forces with husband Dave to not only revamp the administration of the organization but also obtain and rehab a larger building which tripled the shelter's capacity.

As if these accomplishments weren't enough, Lonni ran for Mayor of Coon Rapids in 1998 with the promise that she might ruffle some feathers but she'd only serve one term. She won the election and, as promised, served for one term - from 1999 to 2003. She was also appointed by the Governor to the Metropolitan Airports Commission in 2005.

She was an ACTIVE member of the League of Women Voters organizing countless candidate forums and town hall meetings. While with the LWV, Lonni's rural farming roots resurfaced and her focus turned to soil and water. She saw the need to advocate for healthy soil and protect fresh water. She served on the board of the LWV's five-state Upper Mississippi River Region and coordinated Minnesota's 25% by 2025 initiative to reduce water pollution. Lonni was also a volunteer for many organizations that benefitted children. These included founding the Kinship Foster Care program, coaching youngsters at Minneapolis' InnerCity Tennis, volunteering with international youth teams at the USA Cup Soccer Tournament, and being a reading tutor at Crooked Lake Elementary School.

Lonni enjoyed tennis, skiing, reading, eating outside, live music, theater, gardening, Body Pump at the YMCA and world travel. She loved entertaining and often had friends over for dinner. Most of all, Lonni adored spending time with family. She worked tirelessly to get her children and grandchildren together for holidays and birthdays and relished in dinner table conversation. She took delight in her role as Grandma and loved hosting with Dave (Grandpa) their annual summer "Camp Runamok" for their four grandchildren. Lonni is preceded in death by her parents and brother, Randy. She is survived by her loving husband, Dave; brothers Gary (Diana), and Harlan (Eunice); sister Adelle Widmer; Sons Kerry (Cathy) and Patrick (Janine) and daughter

Susan (Brian) Schirmers; grandchildren Bridget Schirmers, Megan Schirmers, Claire McCauley and Connor McCauley. Lonni is also survived by her special friend, Youmei Hou and daughters, Jingjing and Yanyan.

Everyone who knew her, worked with her and played with her will miss her intellect, leadership, hard work, joy and laughter.

In lieu of flowers, memorials preferred to Mediation and Restorative Services Donate - Mediation and Restorative Services ([mediationservice.org](https://www.mediationservice.org)) or League of Women Voters <https://www.lwvumrr.org/donate.html>

Lonni's Celebration of Life will be held on Wednesday, August 30, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. at the Coon Rapids Civic Center, 11155 Robinson Drive, Coon Rapids, MN 55433.

# Tribute Wall



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Ilona Mae McCauley.

September 13, 2023 at 04:47 PM



“ I worked with Lonni at the LWVMpls office when I was President and she was Executive Director. I was working full time and she was the only reason I agreed to the accept position. She was a wonderful advocate for the organization and such a calm solver of problems. She got me through so many difficulties and knew just how to get things done. Candidate forums, staff problems, and networking with businesses. She tackled it all. We worked on several fundraisers together and educated voters at unique venues. I fondly remember when we partnered with A&W Root Beer to hand out ice cream on the Nicollet Mall for LWV's (and A&W's) 75th Anniversary and she managed to get The Dakota to volunteer their freezers for the event. As a jazz lover she was probably one of their best customers and who could refuse her request?. My deepest condolences to her family and friends. She was an extraordinary woman. ~ Deborah Jindra

Deborah Jindra - August 14, 2023 at 11:06 AM



I meant LWV 90th anniversary - Lonni would have wanted accuracy!

Deborah - August 15, 2023 at 10:37 AM

KE

“ 2 files added to the album Auntie Lonni



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**Kelli** - August 10, 2023 at 07:29 PM