

# BrickWays

paths to independence

## newsletter

*“Architecture starts when you carefully put two **bricks** together. There it begins.” Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, German American Architect (1886-1969), pioneer of modernist architecture*

**Brick:** a small, hard block...used to build structures (such as houses) and sometimes to make streets, paths. etc. Merriam-Webster Dictionary

When a young Mary Jean Walters went to St. Teresa's, a Catholic women's college in Minnesota, a well-meaning priest and nun set her up on a blind date. The young man was Robert Brick, who attended St. Mary's, a nearby (then) all-men's university. For two years, dates were chaperoned by the “Father” or “Sister.” Mary Jean and Bob fell in love, then married, on the condition that they move back to Mary Jean's hometown of Traverse City, Michigan. Although she married into the surname, it was a perfect fit.

**“She was petite, but she walked big,”** says son Bob Brick, local ReMax realtor.

Although indomitable Mary Jean was diagnosed with and died from cancer in 2009, her spirit lives on in her five surviving, now-grown, children, many grandchildren, and **BrickWays**, a foundation and corporation that serves adults with developmental disabilities.

*“A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him.” David Brinkley*

Mary Jean's own foundation began with parents Herman and Clarebelle Walters. Her father was co-owner of Walters & Hemming Plumbing — a visionary who profited from the growing fad for indoor plumbing in its fledgling days.

More important was what her parents modeled at home. When Mary Jean's sister was born premature, she was so tiny the doctors advised the new parents to leave the newborn at the hospital. They refused, says Mary Jean's youngest daughter, Becky (Brick) Reed. Although she faced challenges such as repeating

kindergarten seven times, she was no less loved than her spark-plug sister, Mary Jean.

**“She was looked at as a blessing,”** Becky says of her Aunt Hermine.

**“She was part of the family,”** says Tim Brick, Mary Jean's middle son and owner of Brick Wheels.

*Several generations of Bricks (below) stand on the deck MJB's grandson Peter built at home for his Eagle Scout project.*



**Way(s):** *how someone does something; a method or system that can be used to do something; a person's usual habits, actions, qualities, etc.*

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Starting her own family, Mary Jean had her own special-needs child. First-born son John had a difficult birth. He was slow to learn, teased for his differences, and ended up having a nervous breakdown as a young teen. Unable to manage everyday life, he landed in the Traverse City State Hospital where he was medicated, institutionalized, and removed from society and family.

"She hated that John was there," says Bob, of his mother's feelings.

As the 1970s progressed, many felt the same, and these large facilities housing thousands of people with various disabilities were being closed. Mary Jean traveled all over the Midwest and got a master's in education, learning and looking for better solutions that would keep her oldest son in the community.

"Mom's mission was to find a better place for my brother to live," says Tim. "She wanted it to be like a home."

Mary Jean was unstoppable generating support for her vision. She'd camp in chairs at senators' offices, waiting for a minute of their time to discuss legislation to make things better. She also talked to corporations and foundations, garnering donations of money, materials, time, and commitments.

**"No' and 'can't' were not part of her vocabulary,"** says Bob.

Thus was the area's first Community Living Center for adults with developmental disabilities built in 1978. Today, BrickWays manages five properties for independent living.



**Mary Jean (above, in her 80s) didn't let age stop her visit to the Holy Land and riding a camel there**

Mary Jean didn't stop with just housing. She also saw the need for services, money, good management, and community participation, to keep the momentum going and adapt to the changing times.

In 2011, BrickWays became the new official name of the former Grand Traverse Community Living Management Corporation. Tenant Barbara James came up with the name in honor of Mary Jean Brick, who by example and foresight, laid the bricks to carry-on.

**"No man ever wetted clay and then left it, as if there would be bricks by chance and fortune." Plutarch**

### **Management Corporation**

Manages housing, programs, services

Heidi Gustine - President  
Marie Charbonneau - Vice President  
John Sonnemann - Treasurer  
Ashley Wahl - Secretary  
Jim Rossi  
Kathy Britten  
Mike Lewis  
BJ Brick  
Beth Footh - Former Board President and  
Current Foundation Board President



### **Foundation**

Invests money for the long-term growth and support of BrickWays, including operations, construction of projects, and fund-matching for large projects.

Beth Footh - President  
Pete Currie  
John Sonnemann  
BJ Brick  
Bob Brick

### **Staff**

Susan Onan-Swartz -  
Exexecutive Director  
Janet Brzezinski  
Kathy Nowak  
Meredith Gafill  
Julie Murray  
Sherry Oppen  
Jody Cascagnaett



**B.B. Brick with children, Haley and Peter**

**If you ask B.B. Brick** how she volunteered to dance for Swingshift Fall 2017 to raise money for BrickWays Sandy's Fairway project, her answer is pretty succinct.

**"I don't know!"** she laughs. What she does know is the huge impact her late mother-in-law, Mary Jean Brick, had on her.

**"She was so much fun to be around!"**

Married 26 years now to youngest son Terry, who works out of Chicago, B.B. got to know Mary Jean during summers in Traverse. They stayed with "Nana" and Terry's sister, Becky (Brick) Reed and family, at Mary Jean's East Bay home.

That introduced B.B. to one of Mary Jean's foremost passions — creating affordable housing and teaching independent living skills for adults with developmental disabilities.

**"We got to know a lot of them because they always came by the house. Mary Jean's door was always open to them."**

Moving to Traverse City full time four years ago allowed this arm of Bricks to become even more involved in maintaining the vision now known as BrickWays and the community living situations and services for adults under its auspices.

**"My kids and I do the Christmas tree at CLC. It's kind of become our job,"** she says. They try to get residents involved too.

Such continued involvement is typical of ongoing generations of Bricks. How could they be otherwise?

**She truly lived her life by example,"** says B.B. **"She was an influence on my life."**



**"We're hoping people will be generous as people in the Traverse City area always have been,"** says Nancy Kiogima.

**Nancy and husband Mel have danced and provided dance instruction in the Traverse City area for over 30 years. Owners of Night Moves Social Dance company, they will be part of BrickWays Swingshift season kickoff at Kirkbride Hall on August 30.**

**"This is an exciting opportunity to collaborate in a social environment with organizations that have a similar mission to serve! It is awesome to support each other this way,"** says event sponsor and organizer Susan Onan-Swartz, Executive Director, BrickWays. **Cocktails, small plates, and a chance to learn about BrickWays, PeaceRanch and Special Olympics Area 2 mingle with great music and learning some fun moves!**

**"It will be a little bit of swing, a little bit of Latin, and a little country,"** says Nancy. **"We want to make sure everyone can hop in and dance. It will be a fun upbeat evening of dance."**

Mary Jean's daughter-in-law B.B. will devote weeks learning to dance for charity. Come Friday evening, December 15, 6:30-9:00 p.m., she'll perform in public for BrickWays current community housing project, Sandy's Fairway.

"She had a vision," says current foundation president, Beth Footh of founder and first board president, Mary Jean Brick.

**"We exist to ensure that local family members with disabilities remain a part of our community — not apart from it."** Mary Jean Brick (1923-2009)



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Help us save postage \$\$ - send us your email  
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BrickWays is one of the charities in this fall's  
High Impact Productions *Swingshift and the  
Stars Million Dollar Challenge!*  
The goal: raise enough money to break ground  
for "Sandy's Fairway" in 2018. A lovely,  
wooded setting on Renmie Hill Rd., its proximity  
to the TART trail, shopping, and T.C. community  
make it appealing for low to moderate individu-  
als or families seeking affordable housing. The  
site is approved for up to six multi-family homes  
built with quality construction and efficient de-  
sign. Occupancy preferences will be BrickWays  
current tenants, persons with disabilities, veter-  
ans, homeless and the elderly.  
"This is an incredible opportunity to fund  
Sandy's Fairway," says Foundation President  
Beth Footh. "Sandy's Fairway will truly in-  
tegrate adults with disabilities within our  
community who should be able to live  
next door to someone without a  
disability."



Mark your  
calendars now  
for a fun-filled fall!



DANCE & DONATE!



Wednesday, August 30 Kirkbride Hall  
6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Kick Up Your Heels with Night Moves Social Dance owners &  
instructors Mel and Nancy Kiogima  
\$15 Door to benefit BrickWays, Special Olympics,  
Peace Ranch  
• Small plates • Cash bar

Friday, September 29 Right Brain Brewery  
6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Live Music by JEN SYGITT Singer, Songwriter & Host of Eclecti-  
cana 89.7fm WLNZ Lansing, MI  
Silent Auction • Craft beers to benefit BrickWays  
Friday, December 15 City Opera House  
6:30 – 9:00 p.m. *Swingshift and the Stars!*

4-6 p.m. "Olives & Wine" reception sponsors &  
ticket holders  
6:30-9 p.m. Dance benefit - everyone!

Also buy Bonobo Winery \$10 wine certificates all season long - 50%  
of proceeds go to the cause! Or become a Platinum, Gold or Silver  
Sponsor! Call BrickWays 231-932-9030