

2019 AARP Andrus Award for Community Service: Tom Frazier

Submitted by the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) of Dane County, Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN), and Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Dane County.

We are extremely proud to "work" with Tom and many of us call him our mentor.

Tom is a rock star!

1. Please describe the volunteer work that inspired you to nominate this individual for the award.

Tom is the consummate volunteer. After working 26 years as the Director of the Coalition of Wisconsin Groups (a statewide advocacy and legal services organization), he immediately turned his retirement to volunteering full-time for several non-profit or governmental community agencies—advocating at the state and local level.

Tom has served on the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) of Dane County's Legislative/ Advocacy Committee since 2010. Tom has drafted numerous position statements for the committee to analyze and then submit to the AAA Board for approval. Topics have addressed advocacy at the national level (President Trump's Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Proposal cutting \$49 million to transportation and eliminating vital programs for older adults; President Trump's Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Proposal impacting vital safety nets for older adults), state level (endorsing numerous bills concerning Silver Alert, Adult Guardianship, Dementia Programs & Services, and Caregiver Tax Credits; expanding Medicaid), and local level (creating a Dane County task force to study a cost-effective way to serve Medicaid-ineligible seniors with mental health needs). Teamed with another committee member successfully advocated for \$401,864 in new county levy funding over a five-year span.

Immediately upon retirement, Tom was also appointed to the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging's Advocacy Committee and has served in this capacity until 2019. He led a community wide effort to save senior centers. Tom interviewed and published the feelings of the older adults who use the centers and organized a public movement to ensure older adults are involved in any decisions.

Since its' inception in 2010, Tom has assisted with the planning and implementation of Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) activities including writing advocacy materials; attending press conferences; conducting training at the local, regional and state levels; and planning and participating in the annual statewide Aging Advocacy Day event (300 people attended this year).

Additionally, Tom was instrumental in establishing the Dane County Aging & Disability Resource Center and served on the Governing Board since it was created in 2012 and served as Chair (2012-2018).

As co-chair of the Long-Term Care (LTC) Coalition, Tom worked diligently to expand Wisconsin's home- and community-based Medicaid long-term care system (Family Care and IRIS) statewide and protect the system from privatization. In 2019, the LTC Coalition under Tom's co-leadership, established two workgroups—one focused on the long-term care workforce crisis and the other to address changes the coalition wished to see in the state's upcoming renewal of its federal waiver for Wisconsin's Family Care program.

He is also a member of the state's Advisory Council for the SeniorCare program, a simple and low-cost prescription drug assistance program for Wisconsin older adults; writes a monthly column on aging issues for *50 Plus* news magazine; and co-hosted a local-access TV program called "Senior Beat."

2. How has the nominee's work supported AARP's vision and purpose?

"A society in which all people live with dignity and purpose, and fulfill their goals and dreams" is an admirable vision for AARP but is also embraced by Tom throughout his life. He is a tireless advocate working to shape public policy to improve the lives of older adults. As a volunteer, Tom works diligently to protect and support programs at the local, state, and federal level that make it possible for older adults to maintain their independence and remain living in their own homes for as long as they desire. His efforts include securing additional county funding for aging programs, helping to expand the state's Aging & Disability Resource Centers and Family Care program statewide and protecting them from privatization, protecting the SeniorCare benefits and helping to support an unprecedented 10-year Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) waiver extension of the program, helping to grow funding for and modernize the Older Americans Act programs, and fighting to support and improve Medicare and Social Security benefits.

As recently as last week, Tom presented a State-wide proposal for the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network to adopt, *Why Every County and Tribal Aging Unit Ought to Create an Advocacy Committee*. This three-page proposal succinctly addressed not only the need for County Advocacy Committees, but also contained easy to follow steps how to create the committees to ensure they are successful, represent the needs of older adults, and include the voices of older adults. This proposal was unanimously adopted by all WAAN members. AARP's vision of giving voice with dignity and purpose is truly reflected throughout Tom's proposal.

3. How has the work of the nominee improved the community or enhanced the lives of its residents for which/whom the work was performed?

In addition to Tom's work to support the financial and overall health and well-being of older adults, he has also been instrumental in training at the local, regional, and state levels to help grow and strengthen Wisconsin's grassroots aging advocacy network. He has provided hands-on training, manuals, and workshops to help older adults (and others) connect to available resources, learn the practical skills needed to become partners in the policymaking process, and become competent and confident voices on issues of importance to them.

As a show of respect and gratitude, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi issued the following proclamation (July 2019): *"On behalf of the citizens of Dane County, I am pleased to extend our appreciation and gratitude for his lifetime of service to our older citizens and for his continuing strong advocacy in support of aging programs. His dedication and contributions have improved the lives of many citizens and helped us to maintain a strong commitment to the aging community of Dane County."*

Additionally, Governor Evers awarded Tom a Certificate of Commendation on 19 June 2019, citing Tom's *"significant contributions and ongoing leadership has improved the lives of countless Wisconsinites and made our state a better place for all of us. This commendation is presented with my sincere appreciation and gratitude for Tom's lifetime of service to older Wisconsinites, his significant role in bringing SeniorCare and Family Care to fruition, and for his continued advocacy in support of aging programs. On behalf of Wisconsinites across the state, thank you for your significant contributions."*

4. What is inspiring, courageous, unusual or innovative about the nominee's achievement?

Tom eats, sleeps, and breathes advocacy work! He is constantly planning and strategizing how to get more people involved and helping to build and strengthen the grassroots network. When these activities were no longer "required" of him as a part of his job, he continued on as a

volunteer spending countless hours developing materials and articles, preparing training resources, conducting training, coordinating/facilitating group work, and inserting his own voice and others on matters of importance to older adults. He practices what he preaches and is always interested in building others up and not worrying about who takes the credit.

Tom has used his communication skills as a columnist for *50 Plus* news magazine and as co-moderator of *Senior Beat* to keep older adults informed about issues which affect their lives and to encourage others to become informed, involved citizens. Often these columns have riled people who disagree with Tom's viewpoint on such issues as Social Security Solvency, Medicaid expansion, and civility. However he has a large base of supporters who commend him by regularly expressing phrases like *"never gives up, knows how to get things done, master of practical policy, all about building relationships, makes advocacy look easy, great integrity and effective, good mentor, and advocacy is in his fiber; it's personal."*

5. How has the nominee's work impacted other volunteers or inspired others to volunteer?

As mentioned earlier, Tom talks the talk and walks the walk. His commitment to sharing his knowledge, experience, and passion for advocacy work helps energize those around him and helps others to achieve what they thought might never be possible.

After recognizing a need for grassroots advocacy for programs and services for older adults, Tom co-created a new training program for the older adults living in Dane County. Using his vast knowledge and experience as a former lobbyist, he formed Senior Advocacy Training (SAT) in 2014 to empower older adults through intensive advocacy training each year. Over 70 older adults have, (1) Learned to be effective advocates for the Dane County older adult population through an understanding of the legislative and budget processes, ability to communicate issues, and knowledge of available resources; and (2) Learned citizen advocacy leadership skills to empower them to assume roles on County, local government, and community commissions, committees, advisory boards, and/or organized senior advocacy networks.

As a result of his personal advocacy as a vital member of Dane County Area Agency on Aging's Legislative/Advocacy Committee and inspiring SAT graduates to advocate, Dane County increased funding for older adult programs and services by \$401,864 over the past six years.

His letters to the editor, his articles in elderly publications, his presence at gatherings, workshops, and public hearings all have a positive and inspiring effect on older adults and others who advocate for the elderly because his passion and heartfelt concern are clearly evident.

6. Does the nominee volunteer with AARP?

As an active member of the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network, Tom works with local AARP staff as a volunteer on legislative and budget issues. Furthermore, he is involved in numerous coalitions where AARP also has a presence. All of his work is in alignment with AARP policy priorities. [Actual submission only allowed to respond "Yes"]

7. Does the nominee receive any compensation or stipend for his/her volunteer service?

Tom is a true volunteer! He is not paid for his time nor does he claim any expense reimbursement. At one time he was paid for his *50 Plus* column, but he now does it gratis. [Actual submission only allowed to respond "No"]