

Lenore Bethka Wersten '65

Outstanding Service Award



At the end of her junior year, Lenore Bethka Wersten left Skidmore to marry U.S. Air Force Lt. Tom Wersten. She completed a bachelor's degree in history from Oregon State University in 1965. But as she pursued careers in business, teaching and community service, this Capital District resident's special bond of love and loyalty to her Skidmore classmates only grew stronger.

Together they had experienced some of the most consequential and harrowing events in American history: the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Skidmore was hosting an international student conference on that grim November day. A member of the conference committee, Lenore recalls having to pay for participants' rooms in hotels across the city of Saratoga Springs. "I asked my roommate to accompany me because we were all walking around in shock."

But she has far more happy memories, including freshman bib burning, Happy Pappy and Spring Fling weekends and concerts with Peter, Paul and Mary and Pete Seeger.

A freshman course in English composition with Miriam Berkowitz was "exciting." Studying business law with was "of immense help" to Lenore during her 13 years in business. She took a number of courses in art history that "opened up a whole new world to me." A docent in the Rochester Museum of Art, Lenore has spent untold hours in museums in Boston, New York City and London. She was thrilled when, during a trip to Hong Kong and Thailand, she was able to take in buildings, statues and artwork discussed in an Asian studies course. "I never dreamed that I would see these things up close and in person. All of this learning added great joy and depth of understanding to my life."

Lenore gives back as a way to express her gratitude for an education that has helped her to thrive in business, travel the globe to experience great works of art and remain an informed, engaged citizen. A prolific volunteer, she has partnered with **Sue Steele Isbell** as class co-president since 1990. Lenore also celebrates her 55th Reunion as co-chair (for the fourth time) along with **Ellen Judge Swanson**. A perennial class agent, Lenore spent years strengthening classmate connections as class correspondent. "Our class is very close," she says, adding that she feels fortunate to have maintained such close friendships. "We have been there for one another for more than 50 years."

Lenore and a small team of Reunion planners called every member of the Class of 1965 to extend a personal invitation to attend their 50th. Lenore personally phoned over 70 transfer alumni. "The conversations were so warm — it was as if we'd seen one another yesterday!"

Active in her community, Lenore raised a family while volunteering at her children's schools, the local chamber of commerce, her church and Girl Scouts, and she was also a longtime docent at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, New York. She spent 15 years substitute teaching in Shenendehowa Central Schools, about 20 miles south of Saratoga Springs in Clifton Park. Her proudest moment in that career, she notes, was the day a troubled ninth-grader she had taught previously told another student, "Mrs. Wersten can ask me anything and I will do it. She has earned the right." I've had former students come back to thank me for my interest, concern, help and encouragement. It was nice to know that I had made a difference in their lives."

After she retired from teaching in 2012, Lenore appreciated the opportunity to get in-depth career counseling at Skidmore's Career Development Center. "The staff was great; their guidance really moved me forward professionally at a time when I wasn't sure what direction to take."

Although delighted to be honored, Lenore is quick to point out that her contributions were part of a team effort. "I have volunteered not only because of the excellent education I received at Skidmore, but also because I am truly proud to be a member of the Class of 1965."