KAREN RAU
by Breanna Butler

Marshfield, Wisconsin has always held a special place in Karen Rau's heart. A proud native and Columbus High School alumna, she fondly recalls growing up in the community. Some of her favorite childhood memories include riding her bike to Hefko Pool on hot summer days and stopping at Dairy Queen for ice cream on the way home. And if there was an animal that needed rescuing along the way, Karen stopped to help.

This compassion for animals laid the foundation for what would become her defining mission: starting Marshfield Area Pet Shelter (MAPS). As an adult, Karen aspired to create a haven for homeless animals in Marshfield, a place that, surprisingly, the city had never had before. Emotional visits to the previous holding facility for stray cats and dogs made her realize that the community needed to do better for local animals.

After her mom passed away in 2011, Karen felt moved to do something she would be proud of, so she pursued her dream of starting a shelter for Marshfield. It was a deeply personal mission, driven by love and the desire to create something meaningful. The inaugural community meeting, where Karen shared her vision, was a turning point. After witnessing how many people showed up to hear more about her cause, she was inspired because many other caring individuals wanted the same dream she had.

The path to creating the Marshfield Area Pet Shelter was not without its challenges. At the beginning, the shelter was little more than an idea and building credibility in the community was a formidable task. With Karen as the leader, a group of volunteers spread the word and the shelter's reputation grew. With determination and resilience, they overcame these initial hurdles.

A significant breakthrough came when the shelter established its adoption center at the mall, capturing the attention of local businesses and the City of Marshfield. This strategic move catapulted MAPS onto the radar of city officials, who eventually offered the old airport terminal building as a temporary shelter in 2015. The shelter then took over the city's stray animal contracts. Momentum was building.

Karen's relentless efforts and the support of the community culminated in a major achievement: raising $1.2 million to construct the shelter's permanent home. In August 2020, the dream Karen had nurtured for so long became a reality as they moved into their new facility. Karen left her job at Marshfield Medical Center to become the shelter's first Executive Director, a role she maintains to this day.



Karen Rau

Karen's involvement with animal welfare has not gone unnoticed. Her dedication has been recognized at the local, state, and national levels. In December 2014, Karen was awarded the prestigious Jefferson Award for her efforts. She has also been named one of Marshfield's "People of the Year" in both 2015 and 2019 and was featured on the cover of YOU Magazine in 2017. Additionally, she was highlighted on a popular program "Inside Edition" in April 2019. Though the recognitions are appreciated, Karen is most proud of the relationships she has made along the way.

The shelter has not only transformed the lives of countless animals but has also had a profound impact on the staff members and the 40-plus volunteers who have dedicated their time and energy to the cause. Lasting friendships have blossomed among individuals who share a deep passion for animal welfare.

Looking to the future, Karen maintains her commitment to the mission she holds so dear. Her next dream is a low-cost spay and neuter clinic, a goal that reflects her unyielding dedication to the welfare of animals, even as she recognizes the challenges ahead.

Karen Rau's journey as a passionate advocate for animals has left an indelible mark on Marshfield. Her commitment, determination, and love for her community and its animals serve as an inspiring testament to the transformative power of one person's vision. As Marshfield celebrates 150 years, Karen's legacy as an advocate for animal welfare stands as a remarkable and celebrated part of the community's history.