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Karen & Randy Williams

Karen E. Williams of Franklin, TN, has served on the Humanities Tennessee board of directors since 2010. She and her husband, Randy Williams, are generous supporters of several HT programs, including Letters About Literature, the Young Writers' Workshops, the Southern Festival of Books, and Authors in the Round. We took some time to learn a bit more about their hobbies and passion for the humanities:



What do you do professionally?

We are now retired. We had long careers in service-related industries. Randy was in municipal management, serving as a city manager in Paris, TN, then as a municipal management consultant for the University of Tennessee, then as a municipal insurance consultant for the Tennessee Municipal League Risk Management Pool. Karen worked for the forerunner companies (South Central Bell & BellSouth) of the current AT&T in customer service and public relations management. She was the first female hired in Tennessee as a management assistant in the business office operation. We've always believed in giving back and serving our fellow citizens in many ways, including our work with Humanities Tennessee.

What do you do for fun?

Travel: I'm writing this from Gulf Shores and we will spend a night in New Orleans later this week on our way to the Houston, TX area to visit family. We're also planning trips to Disney World, Alaska and the Canadian Rockies later this year. *Exercise:* Retirement is a time to be able to set our own schedule and include the things we always knew we should but didn't take enough time to when we were working. Randy walks a lot and I've grown to enjoy the Yoga class at the YMCA. *Reading:* We love meeting authors and finding new books at the Southern Festival of Books. And we take advantage of the electronic books we can download from the library onto our phone and listen while we walk. *Bible Study:* We're each members of a women's and a men's Bible study group, and we host a group at our home that meets for fellowship and Bible study on Sunday evenings. *CABLE:* Karen is a long-time member of CABLE, Tennessee's largest leadership and networking organization targeted to business women and men. I served as president and have been involved in almost all aspects of leadership on the board.

How did you first become aware of Humanities Tennessee?

As a result of some wonderful social studies and history teachers and a father who was interested in history and genealogy, I have always liked history. In fact, I started college as a history major, but didn't really want to be a teacher. So after my freshman year I decided to change my major to business and told myself that history would have to be my avocation instead of my vocation. When a CABLE friend who was a leader in the Tennessee Women's Economic Council sent a notice from the Governor's office seeking nominees for board appointments across the state that included a vacancy for Humanities Tennessee, I thought "now is the time to put my passion for history, my avocation, into use." I was appointed first by Governor Bredesen and reappointed by Governor Haslam to the HT board.

What is your favorite Humanities Tennessee program and why?

I love all the HT programs because they are local in nature and help students and adults with critical thinking, creating conversations and learning to celebrate our individual identities as people and as communities.

The first program I really became involved with was Letters About Literature. I have loved serving as a judge and reading the wonderful letters that students write to authors, describing how that author's book has impacted their life. I've been blown away by the depth of the letters, even by elementary and middle school students.

Two other programs of note: The Museum on Main Street program, which helps small communities promote the history of their individual locality in context with an exhibit created by the Smithsonian Institute. The Conversation Project: A conversation facilitated by a scholar on a topic of importance today, placed in historical context with earlier literature. I would love to see this program expanded to include dialogue on civility, with added YouTube and social media messages for youth and traditional delivery of messages to adult audiences.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

We knew each other only seven weeks when we decided to get married 38 years ago. God led Karen from Midland, Michigan, to college in Tennessee and to a job that eventually took her to Paris, Tennessee, where she met Randy. "We grew up in communities that were very different, but we knew that we were meant for each other very quickly."

**HUMANITIES TENNESSEE THANKS KAREN AND RANDY
FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT!**