

# WISCONSIN WOMAN

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and counting

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spreads her wings**





## Six continents and counting

# Diane Ballweg spreads her wings

By Georgia Beaverson

**S**he sounds like a quiet, unassuming woman. Her voice is low and level. Even when she speaks with intensity, her voice doesn't get loud or abrasive. It deepens and fills with satisfaction as she reflects on her life—and her future.

She is Diane Ballweg, a most singular Wisconsin woman.

### Life at work

Ballweg was born and raised in Waunakee to the Endres family. Her hard-working grandfather created the Endres Manufacturing Company, a structural steel construction business. Her dad expanded the family business and her mother took care of the secretarial side. Ballweg's home was just three doors away from the business office, and she ran errands for it after school.

"Work and home were one and the same," she says.

Diane married Ken Ballweg in 1974 and had two sons: Ben and Sam. Daughter Kate came along in the late '80s. But ever the workhorse, Ballweg went to Edgewood College and majored in special education, teaching in that field for two years after getting her degree.

But she didn't abandon the family biz, either. It was the era before a daughter would have been considered to take over an all-male construction business. So, since her only brother wasn't interested in working in the family business, a son-in-law, rather than a son, took over the reins. Ken Ballweg manages the day-to-day operations.

Son Sam's now the fourth generation to carry on the family business—something Ballweg takes pride in. Less than two percent of all family businesses make it to the fourth generation.

### Beyond construction

After teaching for two years, Ballweg decided to let her inner musician emerge. After scoring her degree in music from the UW, she opened her own music studio—the

Perfect Octave—and taught full time out of her home.

"I loved teaching music," she confides. "I've always been in some form of education and the arts. And I tried to make my job match where my kids were."

Over the years, she's gotten involved with many music groups, most of them faith-based, including a guitar ministry and for 20 years a group called "The Unkalung Choir." The unkalung is a Thai instrument. Since most of her group music experience has been with women, she's set herself a goal of joining a mixed-voice a cappella group.

"I'd like to sing some light jazz," she says wistfully. "Some Cole Porter, maybe some Gershwin."

### Goal-oriented

For Ballweg, goal-setting has become a habit—a very productive one. "As you get older, you realize you only have one life to live," she says. She believes goal-setting is one way to make sure she lives life fully.

One of her life goals is to visit all seven continents, and it's a goal she'll meet in December. She and daughter Kate will meet up with son Ben in Buenos Aires and travel on together to Antarctica by clipper. Not only will this meet one of Ballweg's goals, but this trip means that Kate will have been to all seven continents with her mother before she graduates from high school in the spring.

Some of their trips have involved other family members, too. They traveled to visit Ben in Japan while he was in the Navy and got the Japanese perspective on Hiroshima. While husband Ken "is not an adventurous soul," he did travel with the entire family to Australia and New Zealand eight years ago.

### Blessed is the peacemaker

Why travel? "There's so much variety in the world," Ballweg explains. "I love to see how other people live and work."

In many ways, she sees it as an extension of her faith—bringing friendship and peace around the world. When Ballweg makes friends on the road, she keeps in touch with

## Diane details

**Who is Ballweg's best friend?** Daughter and travel companion Kate, of course. "She's my best bud."

**What other life goal will Ballweg achieve in 2007?** "I'm finishing up my MA in education administration."

**What new title will Ballweg take on in the near future?** "Grandma." Son Sam and daughter-in-law Annie are expecting her first grandchild.

**What is Ballweg's secret vice?** She's an eager giver to charities, generously donating funds to projects and volunteering her time. The family business even has a foundation of which Ballweg is president.

**What is her philosophy of living?** "If you have a choice of *having* more or *being* more, always choose being more."





Photo by C & N Photography

them once she gets home. E-mail has made this easier. She also brings this friend-making concept into her home, frequently entertaining foreign visitors there. Last year the Ballweg family hosted a family from Romania.

"It's my way of making a more peaceful world with the connection of friendship," Ballweg says.

Her bent to friendly outreach led her to take part in another visit to Japan three years ago. This time, she served as head of a delegation of Wisconsin women ("Women of Wings") bringing gifts from the governor of Wisconsin to the governor of Wisconsin's Japanese sister state, Chiba.

### Taking wing

For a good part of her adult life, Ballweg focused on her home life. But 10 years ago, new doors opened to her when she pursued and earned her pilot's license. Today she owns her own plane. Entering this "man's world" gave her self-confidence and many new opportunities.

One of those opportunities occurred at Edgewood High School four years after she got her pilot's license. She suggested they teach aviation in the high school and the administration thought it was a great idea. Ballweg didn't expect they'd come back to her and ask her to take on the class, but they did. And six years later, she's still teaching teens about flying. In fact, some of her students have gone on to aviation careers.

And Ballweg hasn't limited her flying to the U.S. Oh no. She's flown on four continents, logged over 1,100 hours and landed at 208 different airports. A few years ago she and Kate took to the skies over Africa and did a self-fly safari, just the two of them.

What happened to that quiet Waunakee girl? She used to feel invisible at parties once she told people she taught for a living. "They'd just glaze over," she chuckles. "But I've changed a lot in the last 10 years. I'm like a new person.

"When I finally started developing my own talents and interests, it was like I started—at 40!—to discover who I really could be. My own person emerged!"

And that person took wing—literally and symbolically.



*Freelance writer Georgia Beaverson delighted in getting to know Diane Ballweg, a woman who isn't afraid to take risks and be who she wants to be. Beaverson only hopes her own life follows the same trend. Viva les goals!*