

Ann Spohnholz

April 18, 1950 – June 9, 2024

Ann Spohnholz, longtime community activist, educator, and political leader, passed away at the Thomas Center for Senior Leadership in Anchorage on June 9, 2024. Born Ann Marie Hawley in Northampton, Massachusetts, to Nora Mary Ann (Clogston) Hawley and Arthur Howard Hawley, Ann was the oldest of five children. Ann left home at 17, traveling in Europe and the Western US, eventually settling in Alaska in the early 1970s, where she built a family that included her four children, but also many other people seeking a home, if only for a short time.

Ann was a tireless advocate for children in need. As a foster parent, she cared for dozens of children and served as president of the Alaska Foster Parent Association. In 1982, she received a First Lady's Volunteer Award from First Lady Bella Hammond for her advocacy on behalf of Alaska's children. She later became Parent Training Coordinator at Anchorage Community Mental Health Center, director of Saakaaya Children's Center, and founder of Rockin' Wood Learning Center.

Her advocacy for children led to ever-increasing roles as an activist, political leader, and feminist organizer. In 1989, she was appointed to the Alaska State House by Governor Steve Cowper, representing Mountain View and East Anchorage. In 1990 and 1996, she ran for State House, narrowly losing by 25 and 11 votes, respectively, underscoring her commitment that every voter matters. Ann remained active in Alaska politics for many years, including serving as Alaska Democratic Party chair and managing many political campaigns. She was also a long-time member and president of the bipartisan Alaska Women's Political Caucus, supporting women running for office. She worked in Governor Tony Knowles' administration where she launched the Alaska Job Centers Network and was the founding director of the Alaska Process Industry Careers Consortium.

In 1990, Ann earned a BA in Human Resource Development and Labor Management Relations from Alaska Pacific University and, in 2013, a Masters in English from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She used her graduate training to become an instructor in developmental education at UAA and, later, a paraprofessional and substitute teacher for the Anchorage School District. As an educator, Ann saw it as her mission to support students facing challenges in the existing educational system.

Ann remained a tireless volunteer serving the interests of Anchorage, Alaska, and people in need throughout her life. In addition to her work with the Alaska Foster Parent Association, she served on the boards of the National Association of Foster Care

Educators; Abused Women's Aid in Crisis; Russian Jack Community Council; and ChildCare Connection.

In retirement, Ann became deeply involved in St. Mary's Episcopal Church, where she found a spiritual home and community. She served as chair of the Vestry and helped to build the Thomas Center for Senior Leadership, her home for the last six years. She loved the St. Mary's community and volunteered in many ministries, including FISH (Friends in Serving Humanity) and Christians for Equality.

Ann relished gardening and cooking. As a master gardener, she loved to share her gardening wisdom, and the food she grew, with others until her last days. She was also a voracious reader and lover of the New York Times crosswords. She valued spending time at the family's cabin north of Talkeetna, traveling the world, and learning from the cultures and peoples she encountered at home and abroad.

Ann cherished the family she built in Alaska. She was a doting grandmother to Iris (Cody Fretheim), Kim, Maddy, Maya, Olive, Lane, Simon, and Koen. She could be counted on to organize sleepovers at Grandma Ann's, holiday gatherings (including cookie decorating!), and other adventures. Ann is survived by her children, Ivy Spohnholz (Troy Bowler), Jesse Spohnholz (Sheri Six), Jake Spohnholz (Wendy Spohnholz), and Grace Spohnholz (Jason Lessard), and her beloved grandchildren.

A memorial will be held Sunday, June 16th at 1:00 p.m. at St. Mary's Episcopal Church at 2222 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, AK. All are welcome. In lieu of flowers, the family recommends donations in Ann's memory may be made to the Thomas Center for Senior Leadership's Housing Assistance Fund (care of 2190 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, AK, 99507) or Facing Foster Care in Alaska.