

Rita Mae Weems
Kansas City, Ks. - Wy-Jon
Kansas State USBC Hall of Fame
Service - 2018

I was born in West Point, Nebraska in January of 1950. I grew up on a dairy farm, the oldest of 4 children, 2 boys and 2 girls. Being from a small community, sports activities for girls was almost non-existent at that time. My parents made sure that despite what was happening on the farm, school was top on the list.

My first real bowling experience was in Denver, where I was in school. I joined a school league there and bowled in the league once a week. I was not really good at it at that point but was having a lot of fun with it. I found out early on, that was a good way to meet people.

An opportunity presented itself in the late fall of 1969 to move to Kansas City. I started working full-time for a company called Law Enforcement Equipment Co. in January of 1970. Several of the ladies working there bowled in a league at Sunset Bowl on Wednesday night. I would tag along and would have the opportunity to substitute in the league. Come that fall, I joined the league as a full-time member. Yes, I was hooked on the sport. A few years later, I joined a second league on Saturday night, which is where I met my husband of 36 years, Larry. Larry taught me the game of bowling. I went from being a backup bowler averaging about 115 to a good bowler at one time bowling in the upper 180 average range. Wish I could do that now. Age and shoulder issues have caught up with me on that.

In the fall of 1977, the Johannes family opened Ranch West Bowl. I moved from the late Wednesday Sunset league to an early Wednesday league at Ranch West. I was asked to do the Secretary/Treasurer job for that league. Soon after that I was doing the secretarial work for a couple of other leagues at Ranch West. During the summer of 1984, I was asked if I would be interested in taking over the youth program at Ranch West. Being a shy/quiet person by nature, I told Bob and Ben that if they could convince Larry to assist me, I would do it, never thinking my husband would say yes. Very surprisingly, he did say yes. In the fall of 1985, I started working full-time for Bob and Ben at Ranch West.

A few years later, I was asked to fill a vacant board position on the Kansas State Youth Board. I have now completed 34 years of Saturday youth leagues and am working on my 33rd year of full-time employment at the center. I have served on the State Youth Board for 20 plus years and now the new Kansas USBC Board.

Grandkids of high schoolers that were bowling when Larry and I started coaching kids on Saturday are now bowling in my Saturday youth leagues. I have no idea as to the number of young people that have come through the center as well as all the adults. Larry and I took kids all over the state to tournaments. Going to the weekly travel league was always fun. Watching them bowl their best scores ever was exciting for both of us. Even more thrilling was watching them bowl the first honor score of their young careers. One of the proudest moments for me was watching my "supposed" hard core husband have tears rolling down his face as Nikki Johannes bowled a 299 with a wobbly five pin standing. He was truly a "Teddy Bear" at heart.

The number of friends I have made through youth and adult leagues is enormous. The people that bowl at the center are the greatest in the world. Bowling is truly a family sport. The fact was very evident the night of the "Celebration of Life" for my husband in December of 2016. I stood for over an hour in one spot never moving with people standing 7 to 8 deep around me offering their condolences and support. Best estimate was over 500 people who came to support me that night. Best feeling in the world to see how many people over the years our lives had touched. My only regret is for Larry not to be here to see me receive this great honor. As I have said when I learned I was being nominated for this award, *"I was hired to do a job and take care of the bowlers at Ranch West and now KC Bowl." "That is what I have hoped to have accomplished over the course of many years." "I also hope that I have influenced or touched everyone's lives in some way as much as you have touched mine." "I sincerely appreciate being nominated for meritorious service and accept this award with honor, pride and gratitude."*