

# **Suzanne Dietrich to retire as MCHS Museum Director after November, leaves family legacy**

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**EDWARDSVILLE - Suzanne Dietrich**, who has served as **Director of the Madison County Historical Museum and Archival Library** for the past 17 years, will be retiring the end of November.

When Dietrich accepted the job in 1999, she came with memories of visits to the museum when it was located in the Madison County Court House prior to 1964. During her childhood, her grandfather, William L. Waters, served on the MCHS Board, including several terms as president. Her grandfather's active role in MCHS brought a lifelong connection to the organization for Dietrich as well. Waters left a worthy legacy with MCHS, and the same can be said of his granddaughter.

After college and career obligations, Dietrich became reacquainted with the Madison County Historical Museum and Library in 1990 when she began researching the sesquicentennial history of St. Mary's Catholic Church of Edwardsville. A few years later she served on the committee researching and gathering materials for a local book, *Edwardsville: An Illustrated History* (1997). The following year she was invited to serve on the MCHS Board.

After only a short time on the Board, Anna Symanski, the Museum Director, had to resign suddenly for personal reasons. Knowing Dietrich's qualifications and her experience as a communications consultant, Symanski asked if Dietrich would be interested in serving as director until a replacement could be found. In March, 1999, Dietrich began working at the "temporary" position that would become a 17 year run of achievement.

When asked the highlights of her tenure as director, Dietrich said it has to be management and maintenance of the facilities. She says, "Creativity has, by necessity, sometimes taken a back seat to preservation."

Early in her tenure, architects informed her that the 1836 Weir House could not continue to bear the weight of the books in the second floor library. With the help of the MCHS Board, grants were written and funds raised to build a separate facility for an archival library which opened in 2002.

After the books were removed, major repairs were needed to restore the front wall of the house which had suffered damage from the weight of the books and other artifacts over the years. Dietrich was instrumental in obtaining a \$200,000 grant to make this repair.

During her tenure, the MCHS property has grown from a single museum building to a complex that also includes a library, a collections center and a fourth building that will one day allow for expansion of the library.

Over the years, Dietrich has received numerous awards for her dedication to her job and community. Two of the most prestigious are the Athena Award from the Edwardsville Glen Carbon Chamber of Commerce for the "highest level of professional accomplishment" (2004), and last year's Lifetime Achievement Award from the Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS). In addition to her work in Madison County, she also

served on the ISHS Board, including several years on the Executive Board. She was also named a Paul Harris Fellow by the Rotary Club (2007) and awarded a Preservation Award by the Goshen Preservation Alliance (2008). In 2013 her biography was listed in *Who's Who in America*.

Dietrich is a native of Madison County. Her father, Charles Dietrich, a graduate of Cornell University, was hired out of college as an engineer for General Steel at Granite City. Her mother, Evelyn Waters, was born in Godfrey, Illinois and graduated from Washington University. She was teaching math and science at Granite City High School when she met Charles Dietrich at the high school track. They married in 1933.

Part of Dietrich's childhood was spent in Pennsylvania where her father was transferred for a few years before returning to Madison County in the late 1940s. The family relocated to Edwardsville where she graduated from Edwardsville High School. She left Madison County for a successful college career, but afterwards returned to her hometown. She has an undergraduate degree in Radio, Television and Film from Northwestern University in Evanston as well as a Master's Degree in Public Communications from Boston University.

Suzanne Dietrich's educational and professional experiences all became tremendous assets for the Museum and MCHS on that day in 1999 when she agreed to become director for "just a few months."