



# GRINDSTONE AWARD



**2019**

## **Georgianna Rohde**

As their children, Monica and Ron, entered the Berea Schools, Georgie joined PTA. She was PTA Council Ecology Chair, organizing a paper drive for the district before recycling was commonplace. She later served as Parknoll Elementary School PTA President and PTA Council President. She also worked on school levy campaigns and other school issues.

For three years, she worked for the Berea City School District planning adult education programs. She also co-owned Tabor's Thyme – a small café on Park Street that specialized in healthy menus. She was a member of Berea Business & Professional Women.

For more than 40 years, she was a board member of Southwest Meals on Wheels, which operated out of St. Paul Lutheran Church. She became involved with Berea Arts Fest in 1992 as treasurer and served as president from 2009-2012 and again in 2018 to the present. She was also treasurer of the Southwest Arts Council, a consortium of interested arts-oriented groups from Berea, Brook Park, Middleburg Heights, Strongsville and Columbia Station, from its inception in 2001 until it ended in 2005.

Georgie helped develop the payroll system for the North End Foundation and Berea Youth Works and has been treasurer of St. Paul Early Education Center since 2002.

She was a member of the Charter Review Commission under Mayor John Whipple and again for Mayor Cyril Kleem. She also has worked on many political campaigns – local, state and national – for the past 58 years.

Husband Ralph has adjusted well to her busy schedule, she said. “He learned that I’m happiest when I’m doing a lot,” she said. Ralph, who retired from the GM plant in Parma 12 years ago, volunteers with her at the Berea Arts Fest.

Daughter Monica and son Ron are both graduates of Berea High. Monica has followed in her mother’s footsteps. A graduate of Kent State, she has been active with environmental causes. She lives in Virginia and has two children, Emma and Colin. Ron graduated from Berklee School of Music in Boston and lives in Berea.

The hardest part of so much up-front public involvement was learning to speak up, she said. “PTA helped with that. With PTA Council, you’re involved with everything that’s going on,” she said.

The most joy comes from meeting people, she added. “Most people don’t realize that the greatest part of being a volunteer is you meet so many wonderful people. It enhances your life.”

Concerns about the environment and her children’s safety spurred Georgianna “Georgie” Rohde to join protests against the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Plant in 1970.

As a young mother with two small children, Rohde said she was motivated by the late community activist Mary Ashbrook, who later became Berea City Council President, to get involved with SAGE (Southwest Action Group on Environment). The group presented a legal petition to protest the power plant. It also worked for the Clean Water Act to remove phosphate from lakes, rivers and streams.

Ashbrook, who died in 2013, “was an amazing woman,” Rohde said. “She was very honest and said what she felt needed to be heard.”

“That was my first experience in Berea,” Rohde said. That led to volunteerism with Berea PTA, Meals on Wheels, St. Paul Lutheran Church and the Berea Arts Fest. And to the Berea Chamber of Commerce’s Grindstone Award as an outstanding citizen.

Rohde received 13 nominations for the prestigious award.

“The pride we have in Berea today is a direct result of the past efforts of Georgie – and others like her – who share a common drive – What can I do to help?” one nominator wrote.

Rohde is proud of her busy volunteer life but said she was “in total disbelief” when told she would receive the Grindstone. “I never planned all this,” she said. “Things would just happen.”

As a youngster, Georgie and her family lived in what was called “the projects,” – post World War II temporary housing near the airport. She graduated from Berea High School in 1955 and moved briefly to Cleveland. After her marriage to Ralph Rohde in 1959, the couple moved to Berea and bought their first house.

**Presented April 18, 2019**

**Crowne Plaza Hotel, Middleburg Heights, Ohio**