

ILCA Board profile

Christa Orum-Keller

Just a few months before Christa Orum-Keller and her husband were scheduled to go to Taiwan to adopt their second child, ILCA Executive Director Scott Grams called with an invitation to join the ILCA Board of Directors.

Needless to say, there was some discussion in the Orum-Keller household. In the end, however, she decided that she could take on both new roles: ILCA Board member and mother of two. She now sits on the board and serves as a liaison for both the sustainability and awards committees.

That she agreed to take on this added responsibility is no surprise. Orum-Keller comes from a long tradition of active, involved people. Her parents, Peter and Irma Orum, and their company, Midwest Groundcovers, have been ILCA members since 1972.

She also was heavily influenced by Ralph and Lucille Little, as well as Peter Grathoff during a stint working at Thornapple Landscapes, Inc. after college. Ralph Little is a past ILCA president and his wife was involved in the administrative side of the organization. Grathoff was ILCA president and on the Mid-Am board during the time Orum-Keller was there, and Thornapple has been an ILCA member since 1960.

Orum-Keller, herself, has been no slouch. Despite her duties at Midwest Groundcovers, where she is a vice president in charge of the sales and marketing division, as well as her family commitments, she has served on the ILCA Design Seminar, College Liaison and Education committees and is a founding member of the Women's Networking Group.

Growing up she watched her parents and knew about ILCA, as well as other organizations. While earning a degree in landscape architecture from the University of Illinois, she attended two ILCA design seminars as a student.

Later, as a Thornapple employee she went to Winter Seminar and casually mentioned that she'd like to become active. Before she knew it, she was on the Design Seminar Committee. "It's a great way to learn about the industry, gain new skills and get to know people," she says.

But, as the pitchmen say, that's not all. She served on and chaired the Illinois Green Industry Association's Apprenticeship/INA HOPE Committee; served on the Illinois chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architect's Strategic Planning Committee; is a founding member of the Second Generation Green Industry Women and was a member of the women's business group, Executive Connections.

"If I'm going to comment on something, I have to be ready to take action," she says. "That's probably why I'm always doing something at church or with my music." Oh, yes, she plays flute with the Fox Valley Concert Band, as well as for her church and for pleasure. She also gardens, knits, reads and cares for her children.

She's hoping that all of that experience with varied organizations and those connections will prove useful on the ILCA board. "I am a proponent of collaborating between organizations, firms and individuals," she says.

Orum-Keller is looking forward to her responsibilities as board liaison to the sustainability and awards committees, especially the latter. "It brings me back to my roots in landscape architecture," she says. "It's a treat when I can think about design and aesthetics."

Midwest Groundcovers has been focusing on sustainability and Orum-Keller sees her work on the ILCA sustainability committee as fitting right into that.

From her experience serving on several ILCA committees, she hopes her board role will allow her to marry the theoretical with the practical. Given her proclivity for collaboration, that's a good thing. "There's an array of talent and different views on the board and that's exciting," she says.