

In Memoriam: LLLI Cofounder Betty Wagner Spandikow

Written by [Laurel Haring](#) Sunday, November 02 2008 10:24



The world has lost a remarkable woman: Betty Wagner Spandikow, one of the founders of La Leche League International. In 1956, she and six others founded a breastfeeding support organization that grew from one town in Illinois to now circle the globe.

In the mid-1950s, breastfeeding was very much out of vogue: only 20 percent of women were breastfeeding. However, in Franklin Park, Illinois, a group of seven women gathered together to share information about how to breastfeed successfully.

One of those women, Betty Wagner, was pregnant with her fifth child. When the informal group organized, Betty was keen to join. (Just think about that: mother of four, pregnant with her fifth, and eager to be part of a group dedicated to a practice that society no longer supported. How many of us would have the energy and fire to do the same under similar conditions?)

The women named their group “La Leche League,” taking the word “leche” (milk) from a shrine to Nuestra Senora de la Leche y Buen Parto (Our Lady of Happy Delivery and Plentiful Milk) that was dedicated in 1598 by early Spanish settlers in America

From its humble beginnings in 1956, La Leche League International has grown to have groups in each of the 50 states and in 64 countries around the world. Its most well-known publication, *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, has over 2 million copies in print and has been translated into eight languages and Braille.

In the workplace, Betty’s ideas were decades ahead of the rest of the world. She...

- ...introduced flexible work hours.
- ...helped create a family-friendly workplace.
- ...set LLLI office hours so that staff members could be home with their children after school.
- ...introduced the concepts of work teams and home offices.

If you weren’t alive in the 1960s, I can tell you that it was exceptionally rare to find women working outside the home. Finding a woman who raised seven children while helping create a workplace founded on these radical ideas, all in support of breastfeeding, is truly a one in a million discovery. Betty also served on the Board of Directors and served as Treasurer, Business Manager, and as Executive Director, the last of which for 19 years, until her retirement.

A celebration of Betty’s life is being planned. For more information or to make a donation in her name, visit LLLI’s home page, [here](#).

*Laurel Haring is a writer and lives with her family in Wilmington, Delaware (her blog is here).
Laurel remembers that when her mother began working part time during the 1970s, it created
something of a stir; she is in awe of all that Betty accomplished in her life.*

Photo of Betty Wagner Spandikow from La Leche League International Web site.

<http://www.typeamom.net/in-memori-am:-l-li-cofounder-betty-wagner-spandikow.html>