

Karen Ruth Boehning

[Chicago Tribune](#)

Karen Ruth Boehning, a trailblazer in business and champion of women's rights, left us on January 18, 2024, at 78. Born in Chicago, she spent her teen years at a boarding school in Glen Arbor, Michigan. While there, she played basketball, headed the women's athletics organization, participated in the student government, and spoke at graduation. In other words, her leadership skills were already on full display. Back in Chicago, Karen joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1969. This marked the start of her lifelong commitment to the women's movement. In 1970, she co-led the Women's Strike for Equality in Chicago. The next year, she became president of Chicago's NOW chapter and represented Illinois at the National Women's Political Caucus in Washington, D.C. After co-founding the NWPC Chicago chapter, Karen established a program to empower women to run for political office. She also played a pivotal role in the campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois and debated Phyllis Schlafly on national radio. Later, as chair of the Chicago NOW's Media Action Committee, she worked tirelessly to challenge and change the stereotypical portrayals of women in media. She also put together a significant collection of women's historical items, hoping to use it as an educational resource. In addition to her activism, Karen was a successful entrepreneur, founding Diversity Contract Services Inc. in 1986, a company dedicated to supporting women and minority-owned businesses.

Karen dedicated her life to achieving just and worthy goals. She was adored by her family, friends, and colleagues, who were drawn to her work ethic, generosity of spirit, and compassion. Her absence will be profoundly felt by all who knew and loved her. She is survived by her devoted husband, Thomas W. Sharpe, cousin Kathleen Falls of Evanston IL, cousin Susan Voight of Plainfield Indiana, and many beloved friends. She was predeceased by her mother Ruth McVitty Heile, stepfather Charles Dyer Heile, and grandmother Helen McVitty of Clarendon Hills, IL. Karen's remarkable life and contributions to the women's movement are immortalized in her oral history interviews with the Chicago Women's

History Center, The VFA Pioneer Histories Project, and Columbia College Chicago HNR: The Problem With No Name. Her legacy will live on through these narratives, continuing to educate and inspire. For those who wish to honor Karen's memory, please consider donating to Sarah's Circle, a nonprofit organization serving homeless women in Chicago, at 4838 N. Sheridan Rd., Chicago Il 60640 (sarahs-circle.org).
Info: donnellanfuneral.com or (847) 675-1990