

SIXTY-FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING

Mary A. (Cruikshank) Grefe 1943 and Lester “Les” Menke 1940, both of Des Moines, Iowa, have been friends for 65 years. They attended Morningside together, along with their late spouses, **Rolland Grefe 1941** and **Kathlyn Menke 1940**.

“We were both in plays and interested in politics, education, and history,” said Grefe. “Our lives have had many parallels throughout the years.”

Both have served as a member of the Morningside College Board of Directors. Grefe has been a member of the board since 1995 and currently serves on the board’s Finance/Investment Committee, and Menke is a former board member.

Their lives exemplify the ways in which individuals can make a positive difference through community service. They have been active in education and politics and have been honored by their alma mater for their achievements. She received an honorary Doctor of Letters from Morningside in 1973, and he was the recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award in 1975.

SHE REPRESENTED HER COUNTRY AROUND THE WORLD

Grefe’s leadership skills have been evident throughout her long and distinguished career. She taught high school and on the junior college level. She served twelve years on the Des Moines school board, twice as its president, before she became involved in adult education. She founded LEAD Associates, Ltd. in Des Moines to provide instruction on improving the leadership abilities of individuals and organizations.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon appointed Grefe as his personal representative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Third World Conference on Adult Education held in Tokyo, Japan. Two years later, she was appointed by President Gerald Ford to serve on the National Advisory Council on Adult Education and was the first woman to chair the organization. From 1979 to 1981, Grefe served as national president of the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

She has been involved in the Republican Party at state and national levels and was president of the Metro Des Moines League of Women Voters. She represented the United States as a delegate to several international meetings on the women’s movement, including the United Nations Mid-Decade Conference for Women in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, the United Nations Decade Conference for Women in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985, and the Commission on the Status of Women in Vienna,



Mary Grefe 1943, a member of the Morningside College Board of Directors, and Lester Menke 1940, retired legislator in the Iowa House, are pictured together here at the board’s February meeting

Austria, in 1988. In 1986, she was a guest of the Chinese government at the All China Women’s Federation.

Grefe has been the recipient of many awards and honors and was inducted into the Iowa Women’s Hall of Fame in 1980. The Iowa Women’s Archives at the University of Iowa Libraries now houses a collection of her documents.

HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ESTABLISHING IOWA’S COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Menke attended law school after he graduated from Morningside. He farmed for 31 years and served on numerous local and state boards.

He served on Iowa’s State Board of Public Instruction, now known as the State Board of Education, for 9 years beginning in 1962. He served as its president for two years and led the Great Plains Study, which resulted in the reorganization of the state’s school districts.

During his tenure on the board, he was instrumental in developing the pilot project for establishing technical schools in the state. Fifteen community colleges were established and are still in existence today.

He was active in the Republican Party and was a legislator in the Iowa House for twelve years, from 1973 to 1985. During his house tenure, he served as chair of the Education Committee. Afterwards, he served as a liaison between former Gov. Terry Branstad’s office and the legislature for two years.

Among his other many accomplishments, Menke was a member of the board that established public television in Iowa, and he represented 9 Midwestern states on the National School Boards Association.

THEY LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Their enthusiasm for community service has not subsided. Most recently, Grefe helped raise enough money to fund construction of a new playground for the Children’s Garden daycare in Des Moines. Three years ago, she had been instrumental in relocating the facility to its current location at Wesley Acres Retirement Community. In honor of Grefe, Children’s Garden will host “Mary Grefe Day” on October 20, 2005.

The longtime friends share another trait: they are modest and don’t dwell long on their past accomplishments. Menke explained the philosophy they share. He said, “The important thing is the future. Things of the past are not that important. Mary and I look at what we can accomplish now, at the opportunities for the future.”