

Meet the International Owl Center Board of Directors and Join Project Hoot Capital Campaign Committee



Carol Abrahamzon

Carol is the Executive Director at Mississippi Valley Conservancy, a land trust in southwest Wisconsin that focuses on protecting wildlife habitat and farmland. She has over 20 years of experience with non-profit management and donor relationship cultivation. She and her husband Bill, own a sustainable farm in southeast Minnesota where they grow beef, pork, chicken, and most of their own fruits and vegetables. They employ conservation practices on their farm including wildlife enhancement projects, invasive species removal, and a forest stand improvement program. In her free time Carol enjoys running in nature, competing in triathlons, gardening, nature photography, and spending time with her family including her five grandchildren.

Marilyn Frauenkron Bayer

Marilyn is a graduate of Minnesota's Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Academy for Advancing Community, Marilyn took to heart the role individuals have in making "community" - in the largest sense of the word - the best it can be. Serving on the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation Board of Trustees - whose goal is economic development and community enhancement in a twenty county area in south central and southeastern Minnesota - embedded a broad perspective for her work in community which shaped her work as President of the Houston Chamber of Commerce. Her work on the Southeastern (Minnesota) Libraries Cooperating Board of Directors (serving eleven counties) for nine years, the last three as President, was in recognition of education as a key component of community wellness. After serving on the Mayo Health Systems Community Board, she currently serves on the Gundersen Health Systems Patient Advisory Council, Apollo Music Festival Board of Directors and the International Owl Center Board of Directors. She taught for five years at Winona State University - part of the Minnesota State University system - after which she ran a successful small business. Subsequently she was Director of Community Educational Services for two decades at Houston Public Schools, holding national certification from the National Community Education Association, during which time she was named Community Educator of the Year for the State of Minnesota. Marilyn, now retired, is a lifelong resident of the Houston area, where she enjoys living in the country, landscape gardening, interior design, reading, knitting, hiking, yoga, singing, gourmet cooking, bread baking, birding, spending time with family and traveling.

Scott W Bingham CKA® , BFA™ , CAP® , CFP® , ChFC® , CLTC® , CLU® , FIC , RHU® , RICP®

Scott served Spring Grove, Minnesota and the surrounding communities as a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) and Certified Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP) for 38 years, before retiring in 2024. A life long learner, he earned many professional degrees to better serve his clients. His financial service practice consistently ranked in the top 1% in the United States, managing over \$200 million in assets for his 1,800 clients. Scott was inducted into the Thrivent Hall of Fame in 2009 and in 2022 he received Thrivent's highest honor - Hall of Fame Legends. He credits his love of nature to his experiences as an Eagle Scout and an adult advisor to BSA troops and Venture crews. For 8 years he has been a member of the International Owl Center Board, currently serving as Board Chair and on the Capital Campaign Committee. He and his wife Karen live in rural Spring Grove where they help manage a thousand acre farm and enjoy many small town volunteer opportunities. In Scott's free time, he is a Confirmation mentor to junior high students, an avid bicyclist, and amateur astronomer.

Hein Bloem

Hein is a Dutchman who spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, worked in the merchant navy sailing around the world, and retired from his career as an insurance adjuster. He was one of the founders of the Dutch Little Owl Working Group and served on the organizing committees for the 2007 World Owl Conference in The Netherlands and the 2023 World Owl Conference in La Crosse, WI. He volunteers on several local boards and committees.

Karla A. Bloem

Karla grew up in Spring Grove, MN, graduated with a B.A. in Biology from Luther College and has lived in Houston, MN for 30 years. She led the creation of the Houston Nature Center and served as the Director/Naturalist for about 15 years, developed the International Festival of Owls and World Owl Hall of Fame, and started the International Owl Center. She was a primary organizer of the World Owl Conference in La Crosse, WI in 2023. She has conducted vocal research on owls since 2004 and has given presentations about her studies around the world. Authors and media of all kind regularly seek consultation with her for owl books, articles and videos.

Jim Nissen

Jim worked 39 years for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, retiring as the La Crosse District Manager of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. He is a recipient of the U.S. Department of Interior's Meritorious Service Award. In retirement, Jim volunteers with several organizations and enjoys kayaking and hunting prairie grouse and pheasants.

Dale Scobie

Dale is retired from 20 years as a licensed land title abstractor. Names and records research supported real property transactions including title transfers and mortgages for commercial, agricultural and residential property. Regular clients were attorneys, banks and realtors. He is also retired from 28 years as a certified flight instructor. His interest in owls and the International Owl Center was sparked when asked to take Alice, the Great Horned Owl, in a plane on her one and only time flying. Dale lives in rural Spring Grove, MN, and enjoys woodworking, kayaking, and hiking the hills and valleys of the geologically unique Driftless Area the IOC is located in.

Kathy Solum

Kathy served as Vice President and Trust Officer with WNB Financial before retiring. Ms. Solum dedicated her time and talents to assisting clients achieve their goals with personal trust accounts, investment agency accounts, retirement accounts and Foundation accounts. She has over 40 years working in Public Accounting and in the Trust and Investment Services Industries. Kathy has a long record of community involvement in the communities she serves. She and her husband live outside of Houston, MN. She enjoys gardening, reading, yoga, camping, canoeing and kayaking.

Colleen Tracy

Colleen Tracy lives with her husband, cat, and dog in an expanded 1850s log cabin powered by solar electricity since the 1990s and by Acentek's high-speed fiber-optic cable since 2022. She believes in positive thinking and the power of one, believing each of us can make a difference and that together, we achieve more. She holds a BA in Political Science, an AAS in Accounting, and in 2021 completed her MBA with a strategic audit of the International Owl Center. She works for a regional healthcare organization where her roles have included Accounting and for over 11 years, supporting state, federal, and private foundation grants. She serves as clerk for her local township and has been a Minnesota election judge for 25 years. In her previous role as Deputy Clerk/Projects Coordinator for the City of Houston, Colleen along with 100 brave volunteers and almost as many participants founded the Root River Triathlon in 1998. Around that same time, she met Karla Bloem and Alice the Great Horned Owl, who later founded the International Owl Center (IOC). Believing in the exponential impact of one person plus one together, Colleen sees the new Owl Center as the logical next step for IOC's science-based focus on making the world a better place for owls and other living things.

Rob Wittner

Rob is the senior technologist and co-owner of a custom software development company based in central North Carolina. The software projects he has been a part of for 25 years have been used in places ranging from remote locations in South America to low earth orbit, running on things from phones to supercomputers. His wife's love of owls led him to discover the International Owl Center via their online presentations, which subsequently ignited his own passion to use his technology skills to help the IOC make the world a better place for owls. He has recently joined the IOC board of directors. In his free time, he enjoys traveling, cooking, playing the piano, woodworking, and astrophotography. He and his wife have plans to make the Houston area a more permanent part of their lives.