

Meet **Deborah Merrill** from Lenexa KABC Board Treasure and board member since 2018



I was born and raised in SW Missouri and now live in Lenexa Kansas. I have one daughter, Amanda, and two grandchildren: a granddaughter, Ella, now a sophomore at University of Nebraska and a grandson, Oz, now a freshman at University of Nebraska. When I graduated from Missouri State University (then called Southwest Missouri State) with a BS degree in Sociology and English, I had no plans to finish my work life in Aging.

For a few years I worked for the City of Topeka doing Urban Development. Then I began my own business in residential/office design for 16 years. The work was flexible and allowed me time while raising my daughter.

In the early 1990's I was introduced to the aging systems. I attempted to help my grandmother with her SS benefits and trying to get a blind pension from the State of Missouri. I thought it was a ridiculously difficult system to navigate. But I had no experience with the long-term care system at that point.

In 1996, I became a Volunteer Long-Term Care Ombudsman. After training, I visited my assigned nursing homes and talked to residents. My job was to help the residents get resolution to whatever their problem might be. I loved this job. After a year I moved into a full-time position as an Ombudsman. The State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Office is unique in State government. The agency's only job is to advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. I see the same advocacy at KABC. I spent 10 years in the Ombudsman Office visiting most of nursing homes in Kansas.

After leaving the Ombudsman Program, I worked for some time at the Kansas Department of Aging (now KDADS), then a couple of years at the Kansas Medicaid Agency. I retired from Kansas government in 2009. In the Fall of 2009, I moved to Washington DC where I took a job with the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (now Advancing States). This was the membership organization for the state departments of Aging and Disabilities. My primary job was to be the liaison between the state directors and the state ombudsmen, interpreting rules and regulations, and advocating for the aging population in states. I was with NASUAD for 7 years. During those years I also planned the HCBS Conference, developed an online learning program, managed the printing of all publications, and managed several grants. It was an amazing opportunity to see what states were doing to help their aging populations.

I retired again in September 2016 and joined the Board of KABC in Spring 2018. I knew about KABC from my Ombudsman days so was familiar with the Advocacy mission. It has been a natural fit for me.

Even with all my experience in Aging services, I found it difficult to find the help my mother needed as she aged. At 90 years old she needed some help in her home - very difficult to find in small-town Missouri. At 94, she needed nursing home care. Again, I struggled to find a place I thought would be ok. Not great, just ok. What do people do who have no information or experience? **I hope you'll call KABC!**

Neither the Ombudsman nor KABC are household names in Kansas. All states have Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs but only a few states have Advocacy organizations like KABC. I hope that while I am on the board, we can see a raising of awareness in Advocacy for Older Adults in Kansas and specifically a wider awareness of KABC in the state.