

GRACE ELLEN (BRZEZINSKI) MERKES

GRADUATED FROM EDGAR HIGH SCHOOL IN 1956

Grace graduated from Edgar High School, married in April of that year, and moved with her new husband over 3,500 away to Alaska. It was only the second time she had ever been out of the state of Wisconsin and was quite an adventure for a seventeen year old girl! Once settled into her new home state of Alaska, Grace immediately began to make significant contributions to her Community.

In addition to volunteering at her children's school and for their sports activities, Grace was a member of the Sterling Homemakers; a group that assisted young women to increase their knowledge of home management and the general skills necessary for a life on the frontier. She served as a committee member for the Red Cross, handling fundraising and event planning. Grace was elected to the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly in 1991 and re-elected seven times, serving over 17 years as a member, vice president and president. Grace was a candidate for the Alaska House of Representatives twice and was also a recipient of the state's Volunteer of the Year Award. In 2002, she lobbied for funding and was able to start the "Sterling Head Start" program which serves over forty underprivileged children each year. Grace, a member of the Sterling Community Club since 1992, also spearheaded the fundraising for a 14,000 sq. ft. community center. Completed in 2013, the center offers a variety of programs to the local community.

Grace has served on the Drug and Alcohol Board for the Central Peninsula Hospital and she was an AmeriCorps volunteer, serving in a leadership position. Grace has been a member of the Cook Inlet Citizens Advisory Board for over 15 years. The board's main goal is to monitor the Cook Inlet oil industry to prevent oil spills. In 2003, the Governor of Alaska appointed Grace as a Commissioner to the State of Alaska Human Rights Commission. She is currently serving her third five-year term on this important commission.

Grace and her husband Leon have been married for 58 years. They have eight children, 26 grandchildren, and 25 great grandchildren. Grace and Leon make their home in Sterling, Alaska.