

Karen Smith

Bellport High School Class Of 1970



Karen W. Smith graduated from BHS in 1970 during a tumultuous time and learned lessons that would serve her for her lifetime. She participated in athletics, school musicals and many other programs. She majored in Communications and Secondary Education at Curry College graduating in 1974. She was named Outstanding Female Student her junior year for her all around participation in student activities. Following graduation, Karen returned home to care for her mother and subbed and coached at BHS gaining another perspective of her alma mater and community.

Karen taught Special Education for two years prior to launching her own insurance business in 1983, KWS Associates in Great Barrington, MA. She successfully grew and managed this business until her retirement in 2011.

Karen has held many positions in Great Barrington both within the town government (Park and Recreation Committee Chair, Finance Committee Vice Chair, Library Trustee, Great Barrington Housing Authority Chair, and has been Chair and Vice Chair of the Community Preservation Committee. She currently serves as Coordinator of Great Barrington's Senior Transport Program. Karen started *The Southern Berkshire Youth Association* and the *KareBear Invitational* which raised over \$900,000 for youth-based activities in its 25-year run, and continues to mentor young people in the community. She chaired the committee that built the first kid-centered park which included a skate park, and in keeping with her commitment to PK-12 education, served as the Chair *Monument Matters*, the committee formed to renovate Monument Mountain

Regional High School. Karen was named Citizen of the Year in 2003 by the Great Barrington Rotary Club.

When she retired from her 30-year career in 2011, Karen spent a year in Kenya working as a volunteer. Upon returning home and as a result of this impactful experience, Karen founded *Sawa Sawa Foundation, Inc.*, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting the Angiya Community in Western Kenya including its primary school and the Medical Mission Sisters Maternity Clinic. *Sawa Sawa* has developed a clean water program started with a solar water pump and added eight acres of land so that the children of Angiya will have a lunch program as well as irrigation. *Sawa Sawa* also purchased a portable ultra sound that is used at the clinic to diagnose issues that can't be dealt with at the rural clinic. Karen travels to Kenya every year for three months to work in Angiya. While there, Karen and her fellow volunteers run art programs, conduct health awareness clinics, repair school facilities, provide table banking support, and continue the development of agricultural practices. *Sawa Sawa* also supports a local arts co-op venture – The Saint Francis Gallery in South Lee, MA – by contracting with Kenyan craftspeople and selling their products at the Gallery. Since returning home in March 2020, Karen has been instrumental in helping Angiya get access to materials, food, handwashing stations, hand sanitizer, and masks to address COVID-19 and its impact on their community.

Along with others from the Class of 1970, Karen spearheaded the 40th reunion and is hoping that the 50th reunion of the Class of 1970 can be held soon!