

Nomination
for the 2024 Jane Ochrymowyz Award for Advocacy
Jeff Bangsberg and Anita Boucher

This nomination highlights a couple whose decades of service emulate the passion, commitment, achievements, and respect that we celebrate in memory of Jane Ochrymowyz.

Jeff Bangsberg and Anita Boucher are a “power couple” in disability and aging advocacy, although they would modestly demur. For three decades, Jeff has offered moving testimony in St. Paul and Washington to fight devastating benefit cuts and pursue reform. Anita was essential to the creation and operation of the Minnesota Work Incentives Connection, which continues to help employed people with disabilities maintain public healthcare benefits. Together, they were leaders in the formation of the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, a coalition with thirty years’ history.

Jeff wrote, in his 2018 Trellis Board application, “As a person with a disability (spinal cord injury for 44 years) and aging into my 60’s, I believe I can add a unique perspective as an advocate for both people with disabilities and our senior community.”

Trellis CEO Dawn Simonson reflects, “As a member of Trellis’ board of directors, Jeff constantly reminds us that we all have multiple identities. He encourages us to view our decision making through an intersectional lens, which strengthens our advocacy efforts as well as all of our work to support older adults and caregivers. He and Anita are exceptional individuals, community leaders and volunteers, and role models.”

Their advocacy biographies would break the word limit ten times over. Former Trellis Board Member, Iris Freeman, recalls, “Working with them on even contentious issues was a pleasure. Their patience, good humor, and commitment won admiration from colleagues and opponents alike. There was never any hubris, any ‘look at me-ism’ that dots the landscape in St. Paul, just dogged pursuit and factual evidence.”

Anne Henry, eminent Disability Law Center attorney, calls Jeff and Anita “responsible, more than anyone else, for changing Minnesota law that required deep impoverishment to qualify for essential disability healthcare through Medicaid. Their visionary and tenacious efforts at the state and federal levels led to the passage of Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities, which has grown year over year since its inception in 1999.”

StarTribune (October 1999) articles featured Jeff and Anita’s years of work with late Congressman Jim Ramstad and their roles in Congressional hearings. That culminated in their joining Congressional leaders at President Clinton’s bill signing ceremony in December 1999. Minnesota’s two U.S. Senators (Wellstone and Grams) were co-sponsors of the legislation, a tribute to the knack Jeff and Anita have to bridge partisan gulfs.

Former legislative committee chair Kevin Goono writes, “Jeff has been an exceptional advocate for people with disabilities from long before the day I met him when I was a legislator and he was lobbying for the Minnesota HomeCare Association. He is knowledgeable and sincere in his advocacy which makes him extremely effective.”

Jeff and Anita (even their email address is “jeffanitabb”) embody Jane Ochrymowycz’ spirit and unquenchable pursuit of justice. They richly deserve recognition for their decades of advocacy to improve the lives of countless people.

Submitting this nomination:

Dawn Simonson, CEO, Trellis

Iris C. Freeman, former Trellis Board member



Jeff Bangsberg and Anita Boucher

(2021)



Assisted Living Bill Signing St. Paul 2006

Jeff is seated on the far left, and Jane O is wearing a pink blazer.