

Obituary: Joy E. Geng

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

July 27, 1944 – June 21, 2020

Joy Geng, one of the first out employees at Ford and a longtime supporter and board member of Equality Michigan — and its predecessor the Triangle Foundation — died Sunday, June 21. She was 75.

Geng, who lived in Dearborn Heights, grew up in Plymouth. She graduated from Plymouth High School before attending Wayne State University where she would eventually go on to earn an MBA. She began in a starting level position at Ford in 1967 and moved up as quickly as a woman could at that time. Geng grew used to keeping her sexual orientation a secret on the job.

In 1991 and at the behest of her next-door neighbor Henry Messer, Geng joined the board of the Lesbian and Gay Foundation of Michigan, which, only a short time later, changed its name to the Triangle Foundation.

“Henry kind of bugged me until I gave in,” Geng recalled in a 2018 interview with *Between The Lines*. “I had a more than a full-time job at that time and I didn’t have a lot of extra time. I had a partner and a family. But he got me.”

Geng was an active board member and worked especially hard in the area of finance, her specialty. Still afraid to come out on the job, it wouldn’t be until 1997, shortly before her retirement, that she outed herself in a story for the Ford worldwide employee newspaper. At the time, as manager of Ford’s retirement and savings plans, Geng was the highest salary grade, active management employee to come out.

“That was the time that I knew I was ready to risk my job, my life, everything for the cause and for the young people,” Geng told *BTL* in 2005. “I really did it for the young people. I had calls and comments and letters from people from all over the world. I had about 100 people working for me at that time, and I can’t think of one person who didn’t acknowledge that.”

After retiring from Ford, Geng



worked even harder for Triangle, and found other organizations to help out as well devoting countless hours to LGBTQ and animal rights groups.

“I won’t do it for money,” she said. “I do it for the cause.”

When not working for nonprofits, Geng was an avid golfer. She also enjoyed gardening and being by the water at her condo in Oscoda. Though they never decided to marry, Geng and Maria Winiarski lived as partners for 38 years.

“She was hot and had beautiful blue eyes,” Winiarski said when she recalled what first attracted her to Geng. “She was such a dynamic person and I adored how she could take control and do anything.”

Kevin McAlpine served as director of development with Triangle and worked at the agency for 10 years.

“Joy had a practical, no-nonsense approach to life that I appreciated,” he said. “I learned a lot from her. She was a great mentor to many and did so much for the community.”

Paula Merideth served on the Triangle board with Geng for several years. The two became fast friends.

“The thing I will remember about Joy the most, and it’s kind of universal in her life, is whatever she cared about and invested herself in she was steadfast. She stayed with it her entire life,” Merideth said.

Visitation for Geng took place Friday, June 26, at the Dearborn Chapel of Voran Funeral Home.