

Brenda Katherine Braun Meder '74 was born in Hays, Kansas on November 4, 1956, the daughter of **Albert '53** and Stella (Huser) **Braun**. Her siblings are **Linda Beilman '75**, **Doreen Koerner '79**, and **Doug Braun '80**. Her father passed away in 2015 but her mother is still living in Hays. She attended school in Victoria, a student in the first class **Marge Rome '58** ever taught. Her most influential teachers were those who fostered her connections with the performing arts: former VAA Hall of Fame recipients Gene Dreiling and Benny Schulte and this year's recipients, Norma Keenan and Vernon Giebler. Her favorite memories of high school were participating in forensics and music contests.

Brenda attended Fort Hays State University majoring in communications with an emphasis in theater. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1980 and completed a master's degree in 1986. Theater has always been her preferred, personal form of artistic expression, performing in over 50 productions as well as directing productions for FHSU, Hays High and TMP.

Brenda's first full-time job was working for the Hays Chamber of Commerce. She ultimately made a transition to the Hays Arts Council and has now been its Executive Director for the past 34 years. She has been a promoter of the arts in all forms be it theater, music, sculpture, painting, photography, composition, poetry, and the list goes on. She expanded HAC programs from a few Hays schools to now include 12 elementary schools in three counties, in a range of performing, literary, and visual art forms. Her passion is not necessarily that young people become artists, but rather to instill in them a lasting appreciation for the arts. Returning to Victoria Elementary to present a program is, for her, a highlight of the HAC's annual school programming.

In 2017, when politics and budgets were forcing profound decreases in funding for the arts, Brenda was featured in a New York Times article praising her innovation and dedication to carry on spite of the hurdles. Her highlighted quote in that article: "When what you're about is important to you, you will find a way."

Brenda served as the host and associate producer of Smoky Hills Public Television series "Kansas Arts Today" for 110 episodes over a 13-year period, interviewing over 150 visual, performing, and literary Kansas artists. The series received multiple Kansas Association of Broadcasters awards.

As director of the Hays Arts Council, Brenda has curated, organized, and mounted hundreds of exhibitions by local, regional, and national artists. She organizes summer youth art classes as well as four seasonal Art Walks in multiple locations throughout downtown Hays, drawing up to 1,000 attendees. Some of the performances on the Fort Hays State University Encore Series are arranged for student matinee shows. Through the outreach noted above, Brenda coordinates with the 12 schools so that every child in grades K-5 attends a professional performing arts event in the Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center each year. She is the pronouncer for the annual Ellis County Spelling Bee, and this is her 26th year as the reader of names for FHSU graduation ceremonies.

Even with all this, Brenda considers her greatest accomplishment as being mother to her sons, Nate and Heath. Nate and his wife, Sara, have two children, Canon and Harlo. Heath and his wife Kelli also have two children, Olivia and Wren. Fortunately, they all live in Hays as well.

When asked what bit of wisdom she would pass onto the younger generations she says "Everyone has something they can contribute to their community. Just get out and do it."