

From the **Wichita Business Journal**

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## **Heroines: six women who changed Wichita and Kansas**

# **Linda Weir-Enegren**

**Weir-Enegren has been honored with a Pathway Paver. It is located in section A0 in the Plaza of Heroines.**

**Premium content from Wichita Business Journal by Levi Wolters**

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Somehow, Linda Weir-Enegren always found the time.

Recently she has spent most of her time in her office or on the manufacturing floor at LS Industries, where she is CEO.

In the past, at night, she would return home and make dinner for her seven children, some of whom have physical and mental disabilities.

In between, she watched over three organizations and programs she has founded — **Rainbows United, Inc.**, Roots and Wings, Inc. and Pathways.

There have been many challenges, but she says she would do it all over again.

The drive to improve children's lives started when she was Girl Scout. She worked with a family that included disabled children.

"I went to their house every Saturday to entertain the kids and just give their mom some relief. It just kind of grew from there," she says.

Weir-Enegren knew she was making a difference in those children's lives, but she also knew the there were more children out there she could help.

### **Creating a Path**

After graduating from the University of Kansas she conducted research for one of her professors at the Kansas Neurological Institute, for children with severe disabilities. She met a child there who reinforced her thought that she could help change children's lives.

The parents of a young boy wanted to keep him at home but didn't have the resources to take care of their child.

"It seemed to me that if the family really wanted to take care of the child at home, then maybe we could find a way to help the family do that," she says.

With no money and no qualifications she went to her church. The staff gave her their full support. On Sept. 5, 1972, Rainbows United started in the church's basement with five children, from infants to 11 years old, all needing the simplest training, from toilet training to drinking out of a cup. A handful of volunteers were there to help.

"It was an unbelievable effort on Linda's part," says Darlene Knorr, who was one of the volunteers. "She showed so much courage."

Today, there are seven Rainbows United centers in Wichita with full-time staffs and more than 1,000 children served each year.

"I don't think there is a segment of the community that hasn't been involved in supporting Rainbows, and in return, Rainbows has worked very hard in supporting families," she says.

Roots and Wings was born after observing children at Rainbows United who would never know a home. It became the Sedgwick County Court Appointed Special Advocate program.

And Weir-Enegren formed Pathways, used by the **Boys & Girls Clubs of America** to help children from drug and alcohol and abusive homes.

## **Still Going Strong**

Weir-Enegren and her husband, Phil, adopted five children and had two of their own. All the children are now grown and living outside the home.

"I'm very, very proud of my family and my children," she says. "I believe that each one of them, at this point and time, is doing better than anybody predicted."

Anita Jones says Weir-Enegren is so warm and genuine people are attracted to her.

"It's probably one of the reasons she was so successful in founding the organizations that she did," Jones says.

Weir-Enegren has no plans to slow down.

"My role now is to kind of enjoy the heck out of all it, while still supporting the organizations, my children and my spouse," she says.

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