

WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

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ALMA BARON

1923-2006

City: Madison

County: Dane

Alma Baron was a pioneer of early children's live television, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, and an advocate for women in business.

Alma Baron was born on July 26, 1923, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She attended the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned her bachelor's degree in psychology and speech and her master's degree in retail training. She also briefly studied drama at Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1944, she married Lee Baron. After college, she got a job at Kauffman's Department Store in Pittsburgh, where she was an advertising manager for 16 years before the family moved to Madison, Wisconsin.

In 1953, she developed her television show *Bouncy Bunny*, the first live children's television show in Madison and one of the first in the country. Baron dressed in a bunny costume and told stories to her audience of eager children. When her family returned to Pittsburgh, she took the show there. *Bouncy Bunny* became so popular that Baron was offered the chance to create and host another show. However, she was only able to film a few segments before her family moved to Mitchell, South Dakota.

Even with her television career on hold, Baron stayed busy. She led a mental health support organization and received her teaching certificate from Dakota Wesleyan University. In 1966, the Barons returned to Madison, this time to stay. In 1967, she became the director of the Wendy Ward Charm School. After her youngest child had graduated from high school, she decided to return to school. In 1974, at the age of 51, Baron earned her doctorate in adult education from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Shortly after, she became an instructor at the UW–Extension in the Department of Business and Management, now the UW School of Business.

Baron's early work focused on teaching women how to support their husbands' careers, but she gradually shifted focus to teaching women how to be leaders themselves. She encouraged women, especially older women, to join the workforce. She researched women executives and managers, publishing many articles in newspapers and academic journals. In 1981, she was promoted to professor. The business school put her in charge of all women's programming and made her co-coordinator of the Managerial Communications Program. Baron convinced the business school to create the first university program in the country for women in management. She also taught internationally, in India, Scandinavia, Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia. As she became known for her expertise on women at work, she was also invited to speak to business groups and major companies across the U.S.

Throughout her life, Baron was involved in many community service and philanthropic organizations, and sat on the board of many government and non-profit groups. Her involvement ranged from the Wisconsin Health Planning Board and the National Council of Jewish Women to the Madison Civic Opera. She also received many awards, including the UW Distinguished Alumni Award. In 2002, she created the Alma Baron Second Chance for Women Scholarship for women over 45 who wish to pursue further education at UW–Madison. Baron died on October 11, 2006, at the age of 83.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/alma-baron