

Meet the 2nd Lady of South Dakota, Karen Michels

Many know Karen Michels as the wife of Lt. Governor Matt Michels. But who is the woman behind the man?

Karen Michels graduated from college with a nursing degree and for 16 years worked in the field. While she worked in various fields, she says her favorite time as a nurse was in the Labor/Delivery and Nursery — but who wouldn't with all those precious babies.

When their son Collin was in second grade Matt was elected to the State House, and Karen says she decided it was time to stay home.

"I was a stay at home mom for a number of years."

As Collin entered into high school, Karen says she was ready to re-enter the workforce.

"I had been away from nursing for several years. And honestly, I was a little spoiled from not having to do every other holiday or weekend rotations."

So Karen decided to sign up with the Yankton School District as a substitute. But since she didn't have an education degree, Karen said she would help out in the resource room or in pre-kindergarten — something other than teaching.

"I kinda fell into this job. I was called to sub as a paraprofessional — some schools call them educational assistants or TAs. Then a position came open at Beadle for a long term position."

That was four years ago. For the last three years, Karen has been a full-time paraprofessional at Beadle school.

"I absolutely love it."

Karen says she misses nursing but only to some extent. "I enjoy my job at Beadle. It is so fun working with the kids and being around the young people. (Nursing) was a great experience, and something I look back on with really good memories."

When she first began substituting and working as a paraprofessional, Karen says she thought "I should have done this years ago." Partly because the job mirrors the kids' schedule.

But then, Karen says, she looks back at the time spent at home when Collin was little, and "I have no regrets."

"It was wonderful and I feel very blessed and fortunate to have been able to do that for a few years."

It was also around this time that Matt was considering a run for the State Senate. They reflected back over the years at how time has flown by. When Matt was first elected, she said, Collin was in second grade. Here we were eight years later and Collin was in high school — those years went by so quickly.

"And while we don't feel like Matt missed out on a lot of Collin's growing up years, or his functions, we did step back and reflect on how fast that time went. We made the decision at that point not to switch over and run for the Senate. Collin still had a couple years of high school, and we both wanted to be around for all of that."



Photo By Heidi Henson

Being a wife, mother and friend are just some of the important roles Karen Michels plays. As for being the wife of the Lt. Governor, Karen says she hopes to be an advocate of South Dakota. (pictured right) Karen and Matt Michels at the inauguration in January 2011.

The Michels family entered another chapter last summer when then Gubernatorial candidate Dennis Dauggard asked Matt to be his running mate.

"I was thrilled when Dennis asked. I really feel like Dennis and Matt are a terrific team. They both have great qualities, strong leadership, and they compliment each other."

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