

Sheboygan native is state's 'go-to' person in D.C.

Wendy Riemann is director of federal relations

By Michael LoCicero
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Wendy Riemann says her first stop when her father picks her up on trips back to Wisconsin is to Culver's. Her last stop is to Gibbsville Cheese for some cheese curds before she flies back to Washington, D.C.

Riemann, a Sheboygan na-

tive, has served as Wisconsin's director of federal relations in the nation's capital for almost two years and is Gov. Scott Walker's national representative. She also is responsible for informing Wisconsin's 10-person congressional delegation about what's happening in Madison and vice versa.

That makes her the "go-to person" for providing information to the governor and how it relates to issues at the federal level, she said.

"My focus is on federal affairs and how they relate to Wis-

consin," Riemann said. "We intend to educate, advocate and unite our delegation here in Washington."

Riemann's office is located in U.S. Capitol building in the Hall of States.

"Every day is different, there's always new topics and issues," Riemann said in a telephone interview.

Riemann graduated from South High School and went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she majored in



State Director of Federal Relations, and Sheboygan native, Wendy Riemann visited with Gov. Scott Walker on Monday at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce event in Washington, D.C., where Walker spoke. SUBMITTED PHOTO

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journalism. She admitted she "didn't keep up a ton on politics" until she interned at the White House her senior year.

"That was when I really started to get engaged and take more interests in understanding the political parties and issues," Riemann said.

She met Kevin Keane, fellow Wisconsinite and an adviser to then-Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, on the softball field while working for President George W. Bush.

"He just told me to keep them in mind when I graduated and it kind of went from there," Riemann said.

Keane subsequently hired her to work in public affairs for Thompson. She has also worked as a speech writer for then-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and as communications director for Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner before taking over her current position in June 2011.

Riemann also has a master's degree in health communications from Johns Hopkins.

Despite her varied experience, Riemann has kept her roots as a Sheboygan native. She comes back around Christmas time every year and rings bells for the Salvation Army at the south-side

Piggly Wiggly and tries to come back for the Fourth of July Parade every year.

"The fireworks and celebration in Washington are great," Riemann said. "But nothing beats eating a brat, relaxing and being at home for the fireworks. I think they're just as good as the ones here (in Washington)."

Riemann is particularly proud of some projects she has worked on in her current position. Those include helping get Congress to provide a waiver to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to replace the bridge over the St. Croix River that connects Wisconsin and Minnesota. She encouraged members of both states to understand the significance of the project and eventually got the support needed to build the new bridge.

Kris Andrews, assistant vice president for federal relations for the University of Wisconsin system, said Riemann has "tremendous interpersonal skills" and is "very easy to work with."

"Wendy is tremendously accessible and always has an open door," Andrews said. "She has that Midwestern friendliness and understands how government works."

Eric Schutt, Gov. Walker's chief of staff, said Riemann's ability to work with both federal and state officials has been a great benefit to the state.

"Wendy is a valuable member of the governor's

team," Schutt said. "Her extensive experience on the Hill and in D.C. coupled with her Wisconsin roots makes her a great fit for her current position. Her updates and input on federal issues have not only been helpful for the governor's team, but also for many of our state agencies."

Walker's tenure as governor in 2010 has come under well-documented scrutiny. He passed the controversial Act 10 in 2011, which eliminated most bargaining rights for public employee unions, and won a recall election against Tom Barrett last year that was launched because of it.

Riemann wasn't involved in those controversies, but she said she admired the governor's ability to keep his composure throughout the process.

"I think he has genuinely taken the whole experience to heart and that shows leadership," Riemann said. "This position that I'm in, in order to do it well, you have to be bipartisan and I've learned some of that from Gov. Walker."

She says she talks on the phone with Walker almost every day and frequently hosts the governor when he travels to Washington.

"One of the really rewarding parts of this job is the people I get to interact with on a daily basis," Riemann said. "I really do have the best job in Washington because of that."

—Roach Michael

The Sheboygan Press

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Friday, May 3, 2013

Story by: Michael LoCicero