

LA ROCHE UNIVERSITY
2020 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI CIRCLE AWARD RECIPIENT



Alene Valkanas '68 M.A.
Founding Executive Director (Retired)
Illinois Arts Alliance

Alene Valkanas '68 is a national leader in the arts advocacy and arts education movement. She retired as founding executive director of the Illinois Arts Alliance (IAA), where she served for 20 years. During that time Ms. Valkanas was an active and vocal champion of Illinois' vibrant cultural community, defending the freedom of artists, developing innovative programs and research projects, and tirelessly advocating on behalf of the organizations that bring the arts to all of us.

Over the years she quadrupled IAA's membership, training a statewide network to support the arts. A national campaign to promote reauthorization of the National Endowment of the Arts, produced under her direction, received the 1990 Award of Excellence in Government Relations from the American Society of Association Executives. She also received their Certificate of Excellence for IAA's Speakers Bureau program, using innovative technology in 1999.

In 1993 Ms. Valkanas oversaw the campaign that reinstated funding for the CityArts program of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. In June of 1994, she was awarded the Double Emmy Arts Award by Mostly Music in recognition of her contribution to the cultural life of Chicago. She also was recognized by the Performing Arts Society of Western Illinois University and Lawyers for the Creative Arts.

Ms. Valkanas was a founding member of the Washington-based Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (now defunct), a founding member of the State Arts Action Network serving two terms as president, a former officer of the Donors Forum of Chicago, and was an important leader of the State Arts Advocacy League of America. Her extraordinary contributions to national arts advocacy have been recognized with the initiation of The Alene Valkanas State Arts Advocacy Award by Americans for the Arts, the national arts advocacy organization. She received the first annual award at the event where the Illinois Arts Alliance honored her for her service.

Ms. Valkanas' work in arts advocacy was preceded by 14 years in public relations, program development and cultural affairs. While director of public relations and programming for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, she produced more than 500 multidisciplinary cultural events, culminating in a major citywide music festival.

Before becoming an arts administrator, Ms. Valkanas was an educator in the field of English and art at the secondary-school level. She holds a master's degree in art education from the University of Chicago and a Bachelor of Arts in English from La Roche University.