

We are happy to name Caroline Hartl Allen as the 63rd inductee in the Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Caroline Hartl Allen was nominated by the North Wood County Historical Society.

Caroline Hartl Allen spent a lifetime sharing time and talent with the community of Marshfield. As a member of the school board, she assured district school children of a quality education by meeting their needs, and those of the teachers, staff and community, as she liked to say, "without extravagance." Willing to "roll-up her sleeves," she earned a reputation for getting things done. And in business, long before women received recognition for their leadership skills, she was successfully managing the Hartl family businesses and real estate holdings.

Caroline was born Nov. 20, 1912, in Marshfield, the daughter of Louis A. and Theckla (Backus) Hartl. She attended local grade schools and graduated from McKinley High School in 1929 at the age of sixteen. She then attended Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, earning an associate degree in 1931. She went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison next, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1934.

Caroline went on to complete an administrative dietetic internship at the Women's Educational and Industrial Union at Boston, where she later served as dietitian for the C.F. Hovey Department Store. When she left Boston, she accepted a position as manager of the College Club of Chicago and later served as assistant director of residence halls for UW-Madison.

Returning to Marshfield in 1944 Caroline joined organizations such as the Parent-Teachers Association, the Marshfield Woman's Club, the Marshfield Business and Professional Woman's Club and the Marshfield Girl Scouts. Not one to stand quietly on the sideline, she was soon filling leadership positions in these organizations.

Feeling that her education, business experience and interest in children might benefit the school board, Caroline ran unsuccessfully in her first attempt for a seat on the Board of Education in 1953. Five years later she won not only her first three-year term but also the election itself as she outpaced the other six candidates. She successfully ran for her place on the school board ten more times before retiring in 1991.

During her 33-year tenure as a school board member, Caroline made sure district children received the best education possible. She supported the teaching staff and was open to new



innovative teaching strategies and equipment. She understood that students sometimes have family or social issues to contend with, so she spearheaded the hiring of the first social workers in the Marshfield School District. At the same time, she maintained her stance that all children be treated equal educationally, and that the district's expenses be kept on a budget.

As a member of the Board she saw the completion of a new Grant Elementary School at 605 W. Kalsched Street in 1963, a Madison Elementary School addition that same year, the new Marshfield Senior High School in 1968, additions to the former Lincoln and Washington elementary schools in 1968, remodeling and an addition to Junior High in 1969, the new Board Office building in 1970, and the new Grant School, at 425 W. Upham Street in 1992.

While the new high school was still under construction Caroline visited Al Bitzer's basement workshop to pick up a duck carving and mentioned to him that it would be nice if the high school had one of his works. When he told her that the Class of 1959 had given the school a carving as a class gift, she replied "I mean they should have a big one." And that's how the idea of Al's tiger originated. Al's tiger, the 16-foot carved Bengal tiger on the west wall of the high school commons area was dedicated in January 1970.

Caroline represented the Marshfield School District for the Cooperative Education Service Agency No. 7 for years and in 1964 was the first to head the agency's Board of Control. She continued as chairwoman for more than a decade. The district is now part of CESA No. 5. She also served for 12 years on the Wood County Human Services Board with a focus on the Department of Developmental Disabled.

Believing that it's never too early to think about a child's reading skills, the Right to Read Effort in the Marshfield Public Schools was established in the late 1970s. That program, with the cooperation of Caroline and a local bank, gave every newborn baby at St. Joseph's Hospital a colorful picture book, and encouraged parents to stress reading for instruction, entertainment, enrichment, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

Community involvement extended beyond Caroline's efforts on behalf of school children. About 1950 when conversations around town turned to the city's lack of a historical society, or any means of preserving some of the worthwhile relics of the pioneer days she took a stand. At a Woman's Club meeting in April 1952, Caroline cited Marshfield's need for a museum, and suggested that it could be made into a community project sponsored by the club.

Five months later a meeting to consider a historical society was held. Those attending voted unanimously to organize a society to be known as the "Marshfield Historical Society." Caroline was one of just five individuals signing the articles of incorporation officially forming the society in October 1952. At the society's organizational meeting a month later, she was elected a member of its first board of directors. The society's name changed to North Wood County Historical Society in 1956.

As the city prepared to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the 1887 Marshfield Fire in 1962 Caroline donated an antique horse-drawn hose cart to the Marshfield Fire Department in memory of her father. He had purchased the cart to preserve a piece of Marshfield history when the department bought its first gasoline-powered fire truck years earlier.

Likely remembered best as a dedicated community volunteer, Caroline should also be remembered as a successful businesswoman. She was the owner and manager of the Hartl Manor apartment buildings on North Central Avenue and the Marshfield Brewing Company. She had the distinction of owning the only Wood County brewery, the smallest brewery in the United States, and at one time was one of only two women in the nation operating breweries. Like her father, who had founded the former Citizens National Bank, Caroline was a founder of Tri-County State Bank (later M&I Bank and BMO).

Caroline Hartl Allen was a true community leader, consistently demonstrating a keen interest in the welfare of Marshfield people, both young and old. She helped make Marshfield a better place.



All reactions:

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