

Dr. Carol McCart Brennan

This week we are happy to name Dr. Carol McCart Brennan as the 123rd inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Carol McCart Brennan was nominated by Jane Kennedy.

Carol McCart Brennan lives her values of social justice and equality. Her influences, many and varied, include her interactions with significant people - teachers, professors, family members, friends and colleagues.

Carol moved to Marshfield in 1991 to assume the position of Dean and CEO of what was then the University of Wisconsin Marshfield/Wood County Campus. Her story begins in 1943 when she was born in Ottumwa, Iowa, a community of approximately 30,000 residents at the time, to middle-class parents.

The following is an event that happened when she was a junior in high school. It was an experience that awakened in her an awareness of inequality and discrimination. Her high school Spanish Club, which she and a few fellow students started, hosted a group of Venezuelan community college students for an afternoon tea. Carol listened speechless as they described various incidents of being treated unwelcomingly. "I was amazed that anyone could treat these charming, beautiful and intelligent young women with anything less than kindness and was nearly in tears as I listened as they told of other such encounters." This incident had a lasting impact on her values and future.

Carol's years in undergraduate school deepened her awareness of unfair and unjust treatment, especially for people of color and women. She joined the International Club and learned a great deal from various foreign students. And she had a profound experience as a sorority president who nominated a Black woman for membership in the sorority. This young woman, the daughter of two physicians in New York City, was smart, talented, and lovely. And in her innocence, Carol thought she would be an excellent member. It did not occur to her that this person would be found unacceptable solely because of her race. Within a week, the head of the National Sorority flew to Carol's campus and ordered her to immediately withdraw the nomination. In response, Carol resigned from her position and from the sorority as she refused to make the withdrawal. The naivete of a small-town girl raised in the 50s ended abruptly and she developed an awareness that would continue to shape her values and beliefs throughout her life.

Following her undergraduate education, Dr. McCart taught social studies in a St. Louis suburban high school for four years. Her goals in the classroom were to instill in her



students the ability for critical thinking and an awareness of social issues such as racism, the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, and the lives of those in our country that were less fortunate. "I encouraged my students to question what they were being taught and to learn how to find reliable information (research)." She realized that she wanted to continue her education.

As she began her graduate work in sociology, she continued to read the literature available about social injustice and inequality and became involved in both the women's and civil rights movements. With fellow students, she worked with the Black Egyptians of East St. Louis (the local version of the Black Panthers) and a group of Catholic nuns on projects to support young Black children, create community support systems and to organize protests and demonstrations.

Also, during her master's studies, Carol engaged in a research project comparing the District Attorney's and the Public Defender's Offices in the city of St. Louis. That experience demonstrated dramatically the inequality of policing and defense for Black men and women.

Carol's academic field of sociology also led her to continue the study of literature on women's issues and inequality. When she became a university faculty member at a St. Louis college, she began adding classes such as "Sex Roles and the Socialization Process" to her teaching load, and eventually assumed the administration of a program in Women's Studies which she grew into a master's level degree program. In addition, she worked in the campus admissions office to extend the recruitment of the university in inner-city schools. She also worked with another suburban school district (Ferguson-Florissant) to establish a safe place and support center for Black students being bused into the white district. She obtained her PhD from Pennsylvania State University in 1991 in higher education and sociology.

As her administrative career continued, Dr. McCart stressed the development of programs that were accessible to students of color and adult women wishing to reenter college. While dean and acting Vice President of a small college in suburban Chicago, she initiated such opportunities as weekend and evening degree programs and the establishment of credit for life experiences. One of her joys was handing out graduation diplomas to women she had encouraged to re-enter college, often after their doing so with many demands and challenges in their lives.

As the Dean of the UW-Marshfield/Wood County, Dr. McCart also was pleased to participate in the hiring of women and diverse faculty and staff members and to watch their careers develop. One of the many reasons why she accepted that position was the tradition of the University of Wisconsin to provide opportunities for accessible higher education. Carol holds a strong value for public education as she was fortunate to progress through higher education because of high quality public universities. Carol's family could not have afforded for her to attend private institutions.

Dr. McCart collaborated with faculty to revise and update campus governance documents, and with faculty and administrators at UW- Stevens Point to develop on-line programs and

to develop a degree completion program. She oversaw two remodeling and expansion projects on the campus. This entailed working with city, county and state governmental agencies to garner approval and funding. She established a relationship between the campus and Mid-State Technical College. Furthermore, she collaborated with Andrea Harkins and Mike Brennan to develop Food for Thought, a campus-community fundraising event and oversaw all campus fundraising projects. She worked to improve the relationship and increase awareness of the values of the campus in the community.

Carol says that recent developments “have made it apparent that our society continues to suffer from the same issues of social justice- inequality, poverty, discrimination, systemic racism and sexism- of which I first became aware in the 1950s and 60s. Yes, there have been improvements, but the struggles are far from over. May we all accept the challenge to keep up the good fight.”