

The League of Women Voters of Dane County, Inc.
2006 CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT AWARD RECIPIENT

🌿 Mary Bean 🌿

An evening such as this is the perfect occasion to celebrate the important role League of Women Voters plays in our community. Everyone applauds the study and action for which we are known, but even our own members have difficulty explaining how we do it. We do it through a method I call connectivity. Mary Bean is a great example of connectivity and tonight we honor her as the 2006 recipient of the Carrie Chapman Catt award. This award is given to one of our League members who exemplifies the values and leadership of our founding mother.

Mary is connected to Wisconsin Public Radio as supervisor, phone answerer during pledge drives. She is an active leader in the work of Madison Urban Ministry, a land steward with Aldo Leopold Nature Center, keeps block captains organized and supervises delivery of neighborhood newsletter and event flyers for the Glendale Neighborhood Association, plays hand bell and sings in the choir of First United Methodist Church, and belongs to two prayer chain groups. With LWVDC she moderates live forums and participates in live TV interviews of candidates, consults and proof reads for CA, registers voters at farmer's markets, organizes LWV historical data for the state office, and is on call as consultant to board members on most any topic that involves our organization. This is a partial list. Mary is a great believer in conservation of resources, using her bicycle to get to meetings in the warm months and taking the bus in winter.

Before Mary comes forward, I want to offer two stories about Carrie Catt. She was born in 1859 in Ripon WI. and moved to Iowa with her family 7 years later. When she was 13, she asked why her mother was not getting dressed up to go to town to vote like her father and their hired man. Her sincere question was met with laughter and the explanation, "voting is too important a civic duty to leave to women." That was one turning point in Carrie's life. Another turning point came in high school when she was introduced to Darwin's Origin of the Species. Carrie saw evolutionary science as offering the idea of a constantly evolving and improving world, moving toward a free and peaceful society. Her idealism helped her to find opportunities to realize those early thoughts.

Mary grew up in northern Illinois, the daughter of a physician and a "stay at home mom" who served as a Girl Scout leader in their community. They were active members of the United Methodist Church and her grandfather was a minister. Mary is a graduate of Beloit College where she met her future husband Bob, the son of a United Methodist minister. They married in 1957, one week after graduation. As with many women who grew to adulthood during the 50's, Mary imagined her greatest contributions would be as a homemaker. She was a church organist as well. Mary enjoyed listening to public radio and that's where she heard about the League of Women Voters. We had a 15-minute program each week that spoke to current state legislative issues and was non-partisan. Intrigued by what she heard she decided to join in 1962. Her children were born in 1963 and 1966.

Our country was being reborn in many ways and League had a full agenda supporting anti-discrimination and the Economic Opportunity Amendments of President Johnson's Great Society initiative. Mary was elected to the LWVDC Board of Directors in 1970. During the next 9 years, she served as Treasurer, then Vice President, then President of LWVDC from 1974-78. Our records show a membership of 518 with 19 units scattered over Dane County. We had a strong observer corps watching government meetings at every level. Study committees published highly respected papers on a vast array of public issues. Most of us associate Mary with our very successful *Candidates' Answers*, which started as a mimeographed flyer distributed by members to grocery stores, and other public meeting places. She (and others) devised a system for developing the process we have today. She was a member of the State League Legislative committee in the 1980s.

She has been one of our most respected moderators of Candidate Forums and she continues to provide guidance and encouragement to those of us willing to take on that role in local political contests. When our membership and visibility began to flag during the 1990's, Mary organized an annual bus tour of local municipalities. The tours were usually conducted by the mayor or town chair and provided great exposure on both sides.

Of all the things Mary loves about this organization, at the top of the list is the unit meeting. This is the place where citizen participation enriches our understanding of issues and dialogue can occur without fear of censorship. Our voices really do become a force for change. She has recently served as mentor for our newest unit in northeast Madison. Mary truly believes that she can help make the world a better place for her children, and grandchildren, in fact for generations to come. She shares the philosophy that many in this room believe and live each day. In the words of Carrie Catt, "What should be done, can be done. What can be done let us do."