

Mary Lou Heissenbuttel, Woman of the Year 1986

From The Branch, September, 1986

It is with great pride that the AAUW Woman of the Year Award is presented to Mary Lou Heissenbuttel.

Mary Lou is the first and continuing director of Grace Smith House, the first safe temporary shelter in the county for battered women and their children.

Mary Lou obtained her current job in part due to her extensive volunteer commitments and varied board experience. As Director, Mary Lou juggles many hats. A normal day is full of crises and emergencies. There is an ever-present need to ensure finances through fundraising and grant writing. She must advocate for women, children, and the poor. Legislation must be written and existing laws enforced. Perhaps the most stressful job is fighting bureaucracy. A crucial role is counseling women and listening with empathy. She explains options and helps them find solutions.

After graduating from college, Mary Lou married and had three children. She worked as a homemaker and did extensive volunteering. Some positions included first vice-president and legislative action chairman for the League of Women Voters, chairman of the Poughkeepsie Counseling Center, and an elected member of the consistory in her church.

When her husband had a serious heart attack, Mary Lou realized the need to seek a career. She began working part time on her Master's Degree in social work at Adelphi University. When her husband died, she became a full-time student. Her internship was in the Crime Victims Assistance Service at St. Francis Hospital, and she received her MSW in June, 1982.

Upon meeting Mary Lou, it is easy to see her energy and quiet, persistent strength. She has charm and faces tasks with devotion, a smile, and a bit of laughter. One of her most enduring qualities is the genuine love she has for people. Her eyes soften as she speaks about those for whom she cares, and they become bright as she talks about her continued commitment to her job and her family.

Poughkeepsie Branch, AAUW is pleased to salute Mary Lou Heissenbuttel May all of her hopes and dreams come true!