

Anna Buchholz, Woman of the Year 2002



Anna Buchholz was a woman of grace who earned everyone's respect for her strong personal ethic, her integrity, her intelligence and perseverance to achieve that in which she believed. She left her indelible mark on Dutchess County and Town of Poughkeepsie politics and on our State.

She had a deep commitment to grass roots public service, once stating, "It's our rent in life for living on earth."

Anna was a trailblazer. After three unsuccessful campaigns for County Legislature she persevered to win her fourth in 1971. In 1975 she campaigned for "honest & open" government to become Supervisor of the Town of Poughkeepsie. This was a time when few women were considered electable by the major political parties. She had been dubbed "No Ordinary Woman", won the election and served for seven terms until her retirement in 1989.

Anna was born in Williamstown, Kentucky. As a child she worked along with the laborers on the family farm milking cows, feeding chickens and helping to can and cook in the kitchen. Reflecting on the feminist movement one time she stated, "I didn't have to be liberated; I was never occupied; I was like everyone else."

She was imbued early with a work ethic: as a child tackling farm chores, as a student in a one-room schoolhouse under the scrutiny of the teacher who was her mother, as a teen who graduated high school at fifteen to be told six years later after she had earned a Masters degree, "Child, you are too young to get your PhD; you will have to wait a year."

In 1944, at the University of Illinois, she received her degree in German Literature and Language. Her dissertation on the religious renaissance of the German novel and her interest in religion attracted her to Quakerism. She taught at the university a few years, then in 1949 volunteered with the American Friends Service Committee where she helped restore stability to the people of Ludwigshafen, Germany, a bombed-out industrial city. She learned to drive a dump truck to lead a work group to clear rubble; directed a neighborhood Center housing a daycare facility, a library, a shoe repair shop; and conducted group sessions on the topic of reconciliation. She returned to the States in 1950 to become a German instructor at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie.

She also met Werner Buchholz (an IBM pioneer in early computer science and credited with having coined the word "byte"). They married in 1952. The '50s found Anna not only a wife and mother of two sons but also a teacher of folk dance to inner-city children; a Friend; board member of the League of Women Voters, then president; and board member of the NYS League, then president. She regularly attended Town of Poughkeepsie board meetings; joined the Grinnell Library board and Brandeis; became Director of Women in Community Service; and was a member of the county's Economic Opportunity Committee to help the homeless.

By the late '60s Anna had become a County Democratic Committeeperson. She ran unsuccessfully three times for County Legislature at a time when Dutchess County was heavily Republican; Democrats didn't get elected; and women didn't run for office. But Anna's persistence on a fourth try landed her a seat as a County Legislator in 1971. She is credited with having paved the way for other Democratic women to seek office. Although she was subsequently defeated in the following election because her sense of what was right led her to champion a popular redistricting in which her opponent unseated her, she persevered to "serve the public" and turned her sights to local government.

In 1975, soon after she had kicked off her campaign to run for Supervisor of the Town of Poughkeepsie, the Buchholz' eldest son was killed in a tragic accident. Anna found the inner strength to continue her campaign. And she won. Again and again. Seven times. She had restored the people's faith in "open & honest" government. Her leadership was non-partisan, fortified by consensus, peaceful resolution and based on the soundness of her personal ethic and integrity.

In 1976 Governor Mario Cuomo appointed her to his Community Affairs Advisory Board, to its successor, to his Task Force on Mandates and to the Greenway Council. Additionally, she was a member of the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council, the American Association of University Women and its past president, the Business & Professional Women's Club, Dutchess County Girl Scouts and on the board of directors of the Mid-Hudson Civic Center.

In 2002 Anna received two honors: the Town Democratic Committee's first Citizen of the Year Award and Poughkeepsie Branch of the AAUW's Woman of the Year Award. In 2008 Anna was posthumously honored by the Town Democratic Committee renaming its now-annual award as The Anna Buchholz Citizen of the Year Award.

Throughout her retirement until she suffered a stroke and died in November 2007, "Ann" - as she was known to many - a woman with an unwillingness to give up in politics and on life, continued in Democratic politics, avidly attending Town Board meetings, working on committee issues and on candidates' campaigns.

By: Barbara Mindel, Anna's Administrative Assistant