

Eleanor Charwat, Woman of the Year 2005



Making the world a better place has been a theme throughout Ellie Charwat's life in her many roles as educator and community activist.

As a teacher of English to young people in Brazil, Thailand, Italy, Greece, and to adult immigrants in Poughkeepsie, Ellie taught far more than the language; she introduced her students to American culture, democracy, and customs.

In her American Government classes at Marist College, she encouraged her students to get involved in their local communities by showing them the practical side of politics as well as the theory knowledge she gained at the Federal level in her job with President Kennedy's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, and on the local level in her two elected terms as a councilwoman on the Poughkeepsie Town Board.

Ellie received her bachelor's degree in government at Cornell University and a master's degree in public administration at Marist College. But she is a lifetime learner, taking courses, reading, leading discussion groups and traveling widely.

As executive director of the Marist College School of Adult Education, where she worked for 13 years, Ellie advised hundreds of adult students on how to achieve their dreams of new careers or job advancement through education. To meet the needs of adult students, she initiated several new certificate programs, introduced weekend programs, oversaw college extension centers, and designed non-credit courses and training programs for business, labor, government agencies and the public.

Upon her return to her native Poughkeepsie in 1975, Ellie plunged into community involvement. She joined the League of Women Voters of Dutchess County and became its president. She also took a part-time job as a reporter for the Poughkeepsie Journal, where her articles on the raucous meetings of the Wappingers School Board garnered front-page coverage.

Long an admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt, Ellie joined the board of ERVK, rising to become its president from 1981-83. She has also coordinated Elderhostel programs on Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt at ERVK for people from all over the country.

Ellie served for eight years as a trustee of the Oakwood Friends School in Poughkeepsie, from which daughter Rebecca graduated and where Ellie chaired the search for a new Headmaster.

Ellie is currently a trustee and past president of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District Board, where she is leading efforts to expand library facilities to meet the needs of the 21st century. She also leads a mystery book discussion group at the library.

She is Vice President of the Arlington Rotary Club, a member of the United Way Impact Council, and a tutor for Literacy Connections.

Ellie recently celebrated 38 years of marriage to Poughkeepsie attorney and financial planner Martin Charwat. They met in the mountains of Puerto Rico while working for an Agency for International Development project to train youth leaders from developing countries. They have two married children, Ben and Rebecca, and one beautiful granddaughter, Grace Katherine