

Remembering Iconic League Member Bernie Beenhouwer

This following is a transcript of Jody Larson's tribute to her colleague at the inauguration of the Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial Fund at the Holiday Party last December (details on next page).



Bernie Beenhouwer

Bernie Beenhouwer was a truly remarkable woman. If you knew her, please let your memories come to the fore right now. If not, please know that what I have to say will give you only a slight vision of the person she was. But I'll try, using memories supplied by her family, as well as friends from the League and Santa Fe city government, and some of the many newspaper articles that chronicled her good works.

David Brooks talks about the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. Considering Bernie, one sees how a single human being can embody, indeed, set the standard, for both. She was very, very smart, and she worked hard. When she observed, she saw to the core. When she listened, she heard in an unfiltered manner. She was open-minded, with an excellent BS detector. You couldn't charm or fool her into supporting anything she didn't understand at a fundamental level. She was kind. She was generous.

She served on the board of the Santa Fe County League for many years, in many capacities, including as president. Tired of merely observing local governments, she was first appointed to the Santa Fe City Council, then ran for her seat, serving six years as only the second woman ever elected to the governing body. (The first, Dora Battle, was a League member, too.)

Both in private life and as a councilor, Bernie acted on her passionate commitment to the well-being of children and families. She supported public education, initiating the Santa Fe Education Summit in 1991.

She helped start an alternative high school. She was primarily responsible for establishing the city's Children and Youth Commission in 1989, beginning with a fund of \$25,000 in startup money and overseeing its growth to over a million dollars a year of city money from state shared gross receipts taxes, supporting over 20 programs for mostly low-income children annually.

She promoted what we would now call transparency in local governments with passion as well. Back then, we called it openness, inclusivity, ethics, and other terms, but we meant what the state requires in open meetings, access to government records, and codes of ethics. She helped draft the city's Code of Ethics as a League member.

She helped start Volunteer Involvement Services, to coordinate volunteer activities across public and nonprofit organizations. Among other visionary goals, she supported making an exit from I-25 onto Richards Avenue – at one time, hers was the only vote in favor. Later developments have proven her quite prescient, but the exit still exists only in our dreams.

But Bernie was more than a public servant. She was a talented seamstress and designer, and those of us who saw or even participated in her occasional fashion shows were in for a delightful treat. She made all of those beautiful creations from remnants! She was a very fine pianist, and stunned me when she told me she had really only begun to play in her thirties; she and Herb used to give concerts in their beautiful home, she on piano and he on cello. Again, a wonderful experience for those fortunate enough to attend. And she was a fabulous cook.

She supported Native American communities, particularly the Hopi, by giving sewing lessons (using fabrics she brought along) and collecting Native American arts. Her entire collection of Hopi art, valued at \$1.6 million, was returned to the Hopi Nation after her death.

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Her response to a diagnosis of breast cancer was emblematic of her character: After a mastectomy, Bernie helped other breast cancer survivors by becoming a certified trainer in the Reach to Recovery program.

Bernie had a delightfully dry and at times rather wicked sense of humor, but was never mean-spirited. She was the soul of civility, betraying displeasure in a very diplomatic and ladylike way. However, if you knew her, you might notice, for example, that at times when she was observing the Santa Fe Public Schools board behaving badly, the clicking of Bernie's knitting needles grew louder and louder.

Anne Fullerton, a friend, talks about what she learned from Bernie: "I learned that being a good Board member for a not-for-profit included the two of us making a donated space habitable by installing a ceiling and painting all of it. She did not hesitate to do whatever was necessary to accomplish an important goal.... I learned that commitment to the community was not a theoretical concept but an action item. I learned that hospitality was to be generously and graciously offered always to everyone.... There are a few people in one's life who leave an indelible impression and inspire one to be the best in all areas of life – Bernie was one of those rare people."

Glo Sawtell, a former League president and a very close friend of Bernie's, said that Bernie "was a woman who paid her dues and never turned down a request to volunteer her help. She was simply one of the most outstanding people I've ever met." I believe that statement could be made by anyone who ever had the privilege of knowing her. She remains an iconic person to all of us to this day.

—*Jody Larson*



The Beenhouwer family with League members Marcy Litzenberg (top right) and Jody Larson (bottom right).

The Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial Fund

The Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial Fund has been established to honor Bernie's many accomplishments – as a member of the League of Women Voters of Santa Fe County, as a City Councilor, as a visionary community leader, as an inspiring mentor, and as a life-long advocate for good government. The Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial Fund will be used to promote civil discourse and collaborative problem-solving in Santa Fe County.

Tax-deductible donations can be made to the Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial Fund online or by mail:

www.lwvsfc.org (write Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial in note box) or mail a check to LWVSFC, P.O. Box 31547, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87594-1547 (write Bernie Beenhouwer Memorial on note line).

Thank you to the people who have donated to the fund to date:

The Beenhouwer Family
Valerie Brookner
Anne Fullerton
Jody Larson
Marcy Litzenberg