


# Community, Kids Fund will miss Joyce Erdman

By Dave Zweifel



**Zweifel**

The irony was inescapable. I had just returned to the office Tuesday afternoon from an executive committee meeting of our Kids Fund where we had voted on a number of grant proposals for programs aimed at helping troubled kids around the county.

Joyce Erdman, who had been our president for the past 13 years, wasn't there. That was unusual, but she was in Arizona, someone said, vacationing with her husband Marshall.

Then the phone rang. It was Fred Miller, our publisher, who had just received a call at his home. Did I know that Joyce Erdman was dead, he asked. She had died about an hour earlier in a Scottsdale hospital, where she was taken after a freak accident on her bicycle.

After Fred's news sank in, it occurred to me that Joyce had died while the Kids Fund board, to which she had devoted countless hours for so many years, was meeting to carry on the work she had started.

The Kids Fund was just one of so many causes and projects to which this grand woman had contributed her time, her mind and her money over the years.

To us at The Capital Times she represented in flesh and blood what we so often have tried to put in words. Whether it was acting as a pioneer for women's equality or finding a way to make her beloved University of Wisconsin a little better, she dedicated every last ounce of her energy to those causes.

And she did it all with class and dignity.

Her trailblazing for the women's movement didn't come about through shrill threats or ultimatums. It came about because she showed everyone beyond any doubt that a woman was just as capable, just as intelligent, just as able to lead as any man.


• • •

So as early as 1946 she became the first woman student elected president of the Wisconsin Student Association. Later she became the first woman elected president of the village of Shorewood Hills and in 1980 she became the first woman president of the UW's Board of Regents.

To her those accomplishments were never a big deal. It

was just something that she knew was right and she went out and showed the world how it could be done.

But what always struck me much more about Joyce Erdman was her unrelenting concern for the unfortunate and her belief that both government and the business world needed to pitch in to make life better.



**Erdman**

It is no secret that Joyce and her inventive husband, Marshall, were far from poor. Marshall Erdman has been one of the area's most successful businessmen. Joyce could have lived one of those storied carefree lives away from the distractions of everyday life.

But she would have nothing of that. "No one is rich unless they're rich in doing," she once told me.

That's why she worked to establish an overseas study program at the UW or why she was a volunteer on the Madison Arts Board or why she worked with Wisconsin Indians on a project for Gov. Gaylord Nelson or why she accepted appointments to the Rustic Roads Board and the Scenic Highways Commission or why she became a trustee on the UW Hospitals Board or why she worked endlessly to convince people to contribute to the UW Foundation to improve everything from its business school to its music program.

She had an uncanny knack of getting people to say yes to taking on projects that they really wanted to get out of doing. Those of us who served with her on the Kids Fund board knew that all too well. Joyce was convinced, though, that everyone needed to do a little bit more to pay their dues to society. She used to scold me, for example, if she felt the staff and I weren't doing enough for the Kids Fund.

Throughout the years she always had a special kinship with all of us at the newspaper. She and Marshall were close friends with everyone from Publisher Fred and his wife Vi Miller to the late Miles and Elsie McMillin.

They all shared a common interest in progressive government, in the environment, in the need to act, not just talk about problems.

We all will miss her deeply.

Dave Zweifel is the editor of The Capital Times.

The views in this space are provided by The Capital Times, Dane County's afternoon newspaper.