



Barbara Bennett Blum

January 18, 1930 - October 6, 2012

Blum, Barbara Bennett. RENSSELAERVILLE. Barbara Bennett Blum died on Saturday, October 6, of natural causes at 82 years of age. She was born on January 18th, 1930 in Beaver, Pennsylvania, to the late Virgil and Ethel Bennett.

Barbara is survived by her devoted husband of 61 years, Robert M. Blum, their four children -- Stephen, Jonathan, Thomas and Jennifer -- and their five grandchildren: Rebecca, Max, Bennett, Graham and Melissa Blum.

Barbara attended public school in Beaver, PA, high school at Winchester Thurston School in Pittsburgh, PA, and ultimately graduated from Vassar College '51 with a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics. Her professional accomplishments as a life-long advocate for the expansion of community-based social services programs are numerous and enduring.

As the mother of a child with profound autism and mental retardation, in 1960 she co-founded the Association for Mentally Ill Children in New York City. Her first government office was Deputy Commissioner for Mental Hygiene and Mental Retardation Services between 1968 and 1970.

Barbara advanced in 1970 to the position of Assistant Administrator and Commissioner, Special Services for Children in New York City. In 1974, she

was appointed Director of the Metropolitan Office of the New York State Board of Social Welfare and given regulatory responsibility over all public and private child care agencies and group homes for adults in a 14-county region including the entirety of New York City. One of her proudest moments was a special assignment: to implement the Willowbrook consent decree. The consent decree represented a watershed moment in the history of public care for children and adults with the most profound mental disabilities. Working with local social service agencies and government authorities, Barbara led the effort to create a new network of services on a smaller scale, centered around low-residency group residential homes and day programs.

The culmination of Barbara's government service came in 1977-1982 with her appointment by Governor Hugh Carey to Commissioner of New York State's Department of Social Services. While in office, she promoted and gained passage of the Child Welfare Reform Act, managed a rapid expansion of the food stamp program, ultimately serving more than 1.8 million New Yorkers per year, and initiated a new program providing financial assistance to needy families lacking resources to pay home heating costs.

Subsequent to her government service, Barbara continued to advocate for public-private initiatives and policies that placed family preservation foremost among social service priorities. In this vein, she served as president of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation from 1982 to 1986, then president of the Foundation for Child Development from 1986 to 1996, followed by a Senior Fellow appointment at the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University's Mailman School for Public Health.

She took great pride in serving on the Boards of: the Academy for Educational Development, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Houses, The March of Dimes, the Mental Health Project, the Victims Services Agency and Vassar College.

For the past seven years, Barbara continued to consult with policy professionals on state and national welfare initiatives from her family home in The Village of Rensselaerville, New York, and took a leading role in community affairs ranging from stewardship of the Presbyterian church to planning for the recent founding of the Carey Center for Global Good.

A memorial service is planned at the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church on Methodist Hill Road, in Rensselaerville, NY, on Wednesday, October 10th at 2 P.M., followed by a reception. In lieu of flowers, we ask that donations be made in Barbara's honor to any of the following organizations:

The Center for Family Life (cflsp.org)

The March of Dimes (marchofdimes.com)

The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve (huyckpreserve.org)

The Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church

Her family and friends deeply regret her passing.

Previous Events

Service

OCT **10**. 2:00 PM (ET)

Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church
Methodist Hill Road
Rensselaerville, NY

Tribute Wall



“ *Barbara Bennett Blum*

October 08, 2023 at 09:24 PM