



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Neil D. Breslin

Mary Jane Smith

NEIL D. BRESLIN May 13, 2013



Women of
DISTINCTION
HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

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Award: HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Year: 2013

Mary Jane Smith's life has always revolved around service. A quintessential humanitarian, Ms. Smith was born in Saratoga Springs, New York in 1928 and received a Bachelor's Degree in Education, a Masters Degree in History from The College of Saint Rose and served as a Sister of St. Joseph, teaching in the Catholic school system for 22 years.

When Ms. Smith and her fellow co-founders opened the doors of Unity House in a dilapidated building on Eight Street in Troy, they "tried to be everything" to everyone who walked through the front door. During those exciting first years, Ms. Smith and her colleagues, Rejis Obijisiki and Peter Callahan, responded to whatever need presented itself, from collecting and distributing food, to providing shelter for victims of domestic violence. Over the years, the structure of Ms. Smith's work, Unity House, has matured and the programs broadened and expanded. However, the root of her conviction has never faltered.

From that first day, through the next 20 years as the Executive Director, Ms. Smith developed programs for people living in poverty, adults living with mental illness, victims of domestic violence, children with development disabilities, and men and women living with HIV/AIDS.

Along with her achievements as Executive Director of Unity House, Ms. Smith has devoted her time and talents to many boards, which benefited not only the disadvantaged people of the Capital District but also the community at large and the mental health population of the entire State of New York. She has served on the first AIDS Council of Albany, the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York and Hospice of Rensselaer County.

It is difficult to put in writing all Ms. Smith has achieved, but all who know her realize the compassion, humility, and unselfish dedication she exhibits in everything she has done and continues to do for the disenfranchised members of our community.