

*The League of Women Voters of Dane County, Inc.*  
**2008 CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT AWARD RECIPIENT**

 **Carol Kiemel** 

When Carrie Chapman Catt formed the League of Women Voters in 1919, the early suffragists were determined that with women voting they would be able to right all the things that were wrong with our U.S. society. They reasoned that “with how much was accomplished without the vote – how much more would be accomplished with the vote.” They thought this might take five years! As an example of how wrong they were, the original Leaguers worked on Child Welfare Reform in NY State for 18 years. And today in Dane County we are still working on that very issue.

This evening we are pleased to celebrate Carol Kiemel’s long commitment to children and their families, voter service, and community involvement. Carrie Chapman Catt would be pleased to see us honoring Carol, a quiet leader who exemplifies the values and leadership that motivated Catt to create the League of Women Voters.

Carol’s link to the LWV began in 1963. She had grown up in Chicago, attended Beloit College and then married Ren Kiemel and moved to Harrisburg, PA. After a few years they relocated to Madison with their 2-year old son. Soon Carol was dealing with a new house, a 2-year old and then another baby. She called her sister Beryl in California for comfort and advice. Beryl and family had previously lived in Madison and she was a good friend of Fran Bicknell. Beryl called Fran; Fran called Carol and invited her to a League meeting and as the saying goes, “The rest is history.”

When her children were older, Carol went on to obtain her Master’s Degree in Behavioral Disabilities and began her career as an Early Childhood Education Teacher in the Verona School District. Her support for children and their families is legendary as well as consistent and this led to her primary focus as a League member when she joined the Children and Families at Risk committee in 1992. Though she took a short hiatus from serving as chair to serve as LWVDC president from 2004 – 2006, she has chaired this committee and the League State Legislative Committee for about 14 years.

Some highlights of Carol’s activities regarding children and families include: support of the establishment of the Madison Housing Trust Fund, the Inclusionary Zone ordinance, the county’s pilot project to provide support to families of newborns and preschoolers, the proposed City of Madison Sick Leave Ordinance, and continued work on the establishment of 4-year old kindergartens in the Madison Metropolitan School District.

We must not forget Carol’s dedication to voter services. In 2004 Carol chaired the Go Vote Coalition whose main goal was to register persons who do not traditionally vote and to help them become better informed. She led about 100 people representing more than 20 organizations in reaching out to lower income voters. Together with other like-minded groups

in the community, the Go Vote Coalition increased voter participation in Dane County from 74% in 2000 to over 80% in 2004.

In another area of voter service, Carol joined Kay Ahern in launching a project in Spring 2006 to enhance inclusion of all in the democratic voting process by coordinating with LaFollette Bilingual Resource Specialists the translation of LWVDC's voters' guide *Candidates' Answers* into Spanish. Carol has continued to chair this significant project of community outreach to create a more informed electorate, a project that now not only includes student speakers of Spanish from LaFollette High School but also from West High School, MATC, and the UW Madison. Notably she has been able to secure partial funding for this project from the Evjue Foundation. Finally, Carol recently initiated an LWVDC voter registration project at the Saint Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and established a group of League members to assist in reaching this important goal.

In addition to her League work Carol has made remarkable contributions through her further involvement in the community. She has served on the Board of the Madison Urban Ministry; as President and Board Member of Transitional Housing, Inc.; as a Board Member of the Friends of the Waisman Center, UW Madison; as Chair of the Public Affairs Committee of the Madison Civics Club; as member of the United Way Disabilities panel; and as office manager for the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice. Lastly, though I am sure we have neglected some other of Carol's outstanding work, Carol and her husband, Ren, have been mentors for a Tibetan family who moved here in 1993.

Carol Kiemel is a model for women in the community for her perseverance, her dedication and her quiet "behind the scenes" work. In addition to raising three children and assisting her mother for many years, Carol has made time for organizations that would better the lives of others. In all of these endeavors, Carol has never sought recognition or status. She has just wanted to make our community a better place for everyone to live, especially for those of lower economic status. She has accomplished this feat for more than 40 years. When Carol retired in 1991, she immediately plunged back into volunteer service and is still going strong. We are proud to count her among our League of Women Voters' members and we are most pleased to present her with the Carrie Chapman Catt Award.