



Perkins



Mendoza

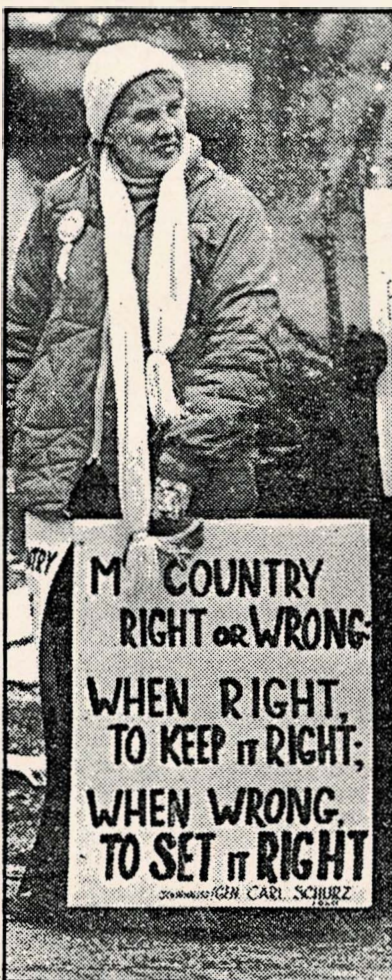


Skinner



Colon

6 women honored in YWCA tribute



Press Photo by MARVIN LANINGA
Corrine Carey's retirement project is "peace."



Press Photo by CHRIS CLARK
Students haven't forgotten the dedication of Nelle Curry.

By Pat McCaughan

The Grand Rapids Press

The fruit of Nelle Curry's life surrounds her.

The 91-year-old retired creative writing teacher thumbed through an "anniversary" yearbook compiled in 1985 by former students who graduated from Central High School in 1960.

One student enclosed a photograph of his family, pointing out a daughter named Nelle.

"It's no coincidence," he wrote beside his daughter's name.

A portrait of Curry and other original artwork — some by former students and by artists she befriended while a volunteer at local museums — line her walls. Other students still write her regularly.

"Not bad?" chuckled Curry, who said she has had "a very lucky life" and is among six local women to be honored at the fifth biennial YWCA Tribute! Awards today at 7 p.m. at the St. Cecilia Auditorium.

Curry and long-time volunteer Lucille Skinner will be honored as distinguished life contributors, said Emily Fuerste, YWCA executive director.

Those presented the life award have made outstanding contributions to the community throughout their lives but may not be presently active, Fuerste said.

Local women to be honored for current contributions are: retired Henry Elementary School principal Shirley Perkins; retired Coit Elementary School fourth grade teacher Corinne Carey; and Joyce Colon, Westinghouse Electric Corp. manager of strategic marketing projects.

A fourth, Maria Mendoza, will be honored posthumously. Mendoza, a long-time advocate of migrant farm workers, died Nov. 15 of complications from leukemia.

The awards have been presented every other year since 1979. Fuerste said a 12-member committee selected the winners from about 5,000 applications.

Winners will receive sterling silver pin/pendants inlaid with an

amethyst for life-time recipients and a garnet for current awardees, Fuerste said.

"They are wonderful role models for women in the community and they have contributed so much to our quality of life. We need to recognize the people who make life in Grand Rapids as special as it is," Fuerste said of the six.

Lucille Skinner said that "down through the years I tried to do volunteer work with practically everything."

"Practically everything" included the United Way, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and the public schools. But she is most proud of her fund-raising activities for the YWCA's child sexual abuse center, she said.

"I tried to do my very, very best job and I raised money, which I enjoyed very much. I was on the phone daily calling people. And I did collect over \$1,500. I'm very proud of the fact that people responded so well," she said.

A long-time member of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, she received the Bishop's Cross in recognition of her church service.

She also worked at the Senior Community Employment Service, placing seniors in jobs, has been active in NAACP membership drives, and was a long-time volunteer at Child Haven, said attorney Ann Cooper, who nominated Skinner for the award.

When Corinne Carey retired from the Grand Rapids Public Schools in 1983, she decided it "was time for me to take on a new project." Peace has become that project, said Carey.

"I'm one of the last of a generation that have had that luxury of growing up in pre-nuclear times. I feel my generation has a real mandate to do better with nuclear issues than we are," she said.

Carey said joining a number of peace organizations and participating in the great peace march in Indiana earlier this year with her 17-year-old grandson was "a marvelous experience."

Every Wednesday she and other peace activists hold a silent vigil in

downtown Grand Rapids to protest U.S. policies in Central America, she said.

Retired educator Shirley Perkins, expected to return from Rio de Janeiro today, "cares about the quality of life in our community and that leads her to a lot of different things," said Cooper, an attorney who also nominated Perkins.

Principal of Henry School before her retirement this year, Perkins is a "person who breaks new ground, is creative. She's not hesitant to be the first to accomplish something new or try something new," Cooper said.

A delegate to the United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1984, Perkins serves on various boards and committees for United Way, the Kent County Council for prevention of child abuse and neglect, and the Grand Rapids Art Museum, among others.

Joyce Colon's involvement in community activities made her a natural for the award, said Gertha Perkins, a member of the committee that nominated Colon.

Perkins and Colon are members of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority.

"She's a very professional yet gentle kind of woman. She's easy to know. No matter what you talk to her about, be it business or personal, she's always encouraging," she said.

Colon, who is in Australia and New Zealand and will not be present at the awards ceremony, divides her time among a variety of community activities including serving on the board of the Baxter Community Center, where she is active in raising funds for the center's summer youth program.

She also serves on the board of directors for: the Grand Rapids Opera, the Bethune Memorial Mu-

seum, Mich Con, and is a member of the small business council of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce. She has taught business subjects at Grand Valley State College and counsels minority business people.

Maria Mendoza always gave to those in need, said Nilda Anaya Caceres, an attorney with the UAW-GM Legal Services Plan, who nominated her for the award and will present it to her daughter, Pearl Ortiz.

Mendoza knew before she died that she had been selected a Tribute! award winner, Caceres said.

"I talked to her about what I should say in the presentation. She was hoping I would focus on things becoming better for the farm worker community," said Caceres.

"I don't think she ever did anything with the intention of getting recognition. The reason she did these things was because it made her happy."