

Barbara Zeckhausen

Barbara Zeckhausen has no sharp edges. She is, actually, nice. When combined with a basic enthusiasm, political savvy and concern for the underdog, niceness becomes an effective tool.

Whatever you call it, the fact is when Zeckhausen sets her mind to something, it generally happens. As a teenager studying art history at Mt. Holyoke, for example, she went off to Edinburgh for, presumably, her junior year “abroad” studies. But she went largely because a young man named William Zeckhausen was studying theology there. And when Mt. Holyoke wouldn’t accept course credits from Edinburgh, she quit school and married the guy. That was 1956.

Barbara was typical of girls in those days: “I planned to get married and live happily ever after,” she said. “I hadn’t thought of a career path.”

So she married, raised two children, and moved (in 1968) to Laconia with her husband, a United Church of Christ minister then chaplain at the State School for the mentally handicapped. He is now a licensed pastoral psychotherapist.

But something akin to a career that could tap into her enormous energy beckoned Barbara Zeckhausen. As her children grew into young adults, she went back to college – at the University of New Hampshire where her son was a fellow student. She graduated in political science, and that propelled her into the state legislature where she served three terms and became an expert on tax policy.

If Zeckhausen needed a role model all those years, she had one at her fingertips, her mother, Jane “Sally” Tarbell. “My Mom was a mover and shaker in her sphere,” Zeckhausen said. “She tended to rise like cream to the top of whatever organization she got into.” Those organizations dealt with such issues as migrant workers, an Experiment in International Living, and the church in their hometown of Manhasset on Long Island.

Zeckhausen grew up in comfortable surroundings, and the family developed a history of modest philanthropy, she said, though not in the world of “big bucks”. Her father, G. Schuyler Tarbell, who could trace his roots to Roger Conant, 17th century founder of Salem, MA, was a lawyer in New York City and served on the Queens County Bank Board.

In Laconia, Zeckhausen turned to non-profits. She served on a number of state and local boards, including the League of Women Voters, the Lakes Region United Way, Lakes Region Mental Health Center, Tilton School, Spaulding Youth Center where she helped create the Spaulding Fund, and the NH Charitable Foundation, where she became a founder of its local community fund, the Lakes Region Charitable Foundation. It was no surprise to friends that she won the Governor’s Volunteer Award in 1991. She has been a member of the Women’s Policy Institute since 2003.

But her crowning achievement came after a 1995 trip to the United Nation’s Women’s Conference in Beijing where she was inspired by stories of triumph and hardship from women around the world. Back home, she vowed to convert that new awareness into something for New Hampshire -- to unite women of achievement and to benefit women in need. With Molly Scheu of Hanover and supporters throughout the state, the Women’s Fund of New Hampshire was created.

As the Women’s Fund celebrates its 10th anniversary, Zeckhausen sees much more to be done. The endowment must increase. Grants must increase. Donations must

increase. All this must happen in an economy challenged financially from all sides. She's ready.