

## **2008 Maine Women's Hall of Fame Nomination for Karen Heck**

Since 1979, Karen Heck has dedicated her professional career to bettering the lives of women and girls throughout the State of Maine. Through her tireless efforts and far-sighted vision, she has advanced a broad spectrum of women's issues, including reproductive rights, economic security, literacy, safety and health. There is not one area that falls within the realm of women's issues that has not been touched in a beneficial way by Karen's work. To put it quite simply, the hallmark of her life has been to make life better for all women and girls in whatever way she can.

Karen has an endless supply of energy for working to promote women's issues in Maine. She has worked both locally and statewide for a variety of causes and countless programs have benefited from her attention over the past twenty-five years. Her efforts most recently have resulted in the widely acclaimed Hardy Girls Healthy Women, Inc., which she co-founded in 2000 with Lyn Mikel Brown and Lynn Cole as an outgrowth of their annual girls' conference, "Girls Unlimited." Hardy Girls programs offer diverse learning experiences ranging from media literacy, self-esteem, adventure and career opportunities, in all of which Karen has been a guiding light. Through Hardy Girls efforts, The Ugly Duckling Community Action Kit, designed to end bias-based harassment and promote tolerance, was made available to every school district in the State of Maine. Hardy Girls provides programs throughout Maine, including the Native American reservations, Aroostook County, southern Maine and the western Maine mountain areas.

In addition to Karen's work with Hardy Girls, she has been a principal for more than 10 years in The Avalon Group, a consulting company focused on women and girls' health issues. She also is a Program Officer for The Bingham Program, a charitable endowment that promotes health and advances in medicine in Maine. Prior to these endeavors, during her tenure with the Kennebec Valley Community

Action Program, Karen focused much of her attention on family planning and child development programs.

Karen has volunteered thousands of hours in her role as a community activist, fundraiser and champion for women's rights. It would be virtually impossible to list all of the wonderful causes to which Karen has applied her energy, iron-willed determination and unbridled enthusiasm. The highlights of those efforts include the following:

- Past Board President of the Maine Women's Lobby, the Maine Choice Coalition, Family Planning Service Providers and Waterville Rotary
- Past Board Member of the Maine Women's Fund, the Maine Health Access Foundation Community Advisory Committee, the Maine Women's Development Institute, the Maine Choice Coalition and the Waterville Area Boys & Girls Club
- Founding Board Member of Waterville Rape Crisis Assistance, the Women's Development Institute and SAFE, Inc.

Karen is committed to making Maine a great place. She is a Peace in Our Communities Task Force member, a member of the American Association of University Women and also has volunteered her time to help in various ways with the Maine Mentoring Partnership, the Maine Family Literacy Collaborative, Mainely Girls in Camden and for various Maine women political candidacies.

Although Karen doesn't look for acknowledgement of her accomplishments, she has received recognition and accolades in many forms. Most recently, she was awarded the Maine Statewide AAUW 2006 Achievement Citation Award, the highest award for extraordinary community involvement in women's issues. In 2002, Karen was awarded the Business and Professional Women's Women of the Year Award, together with Lyn Brown and Lynn Cole, for their work founding Hardy Girls Healthy Women.

Throughout her more than twenty-five years of working in Maine, Karen has brought wisdom, creativity and strength to the table for women and girls. In all her professional and volunteer work, Karen has made life in the state of Maine the way life should be for women and girls. She has been a mentor, a friend and an ally to tens of hundreds of women, young and old, helping in ways large and small. It is with great honor that Hardy Girls Healthy Women nominates Karen for the 2008 Maine Women's Hall of Fame.

**Karen Heck has had a tremendous impact on women and girls in Maine. The women and girls who have worked with her best highlight her accomplishments:**

Karen is a tremendous role model for me. She's a personal hero. Karen has a rare combination of passion, and ability to communicate across perspectives and differences. Her statewide and community connections speak volumes about the respect held for her. Maine is a better state because of her work over the years - whether with the Maine Women's Lobby, Hardy Girls, the Bingham Program, the 1991 NO on 1 campaign to defend access to reproductive privacy, and so much more.

-Sarah Standiford  
Executive Director, Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center

Karen embodies the feminist social change that we need to achieve gender equality. She appreciates and involves women and girls of all ages and backgrounds in creating healthy environments where women and girls can thrive; she is tireless in her fundraising, cheerleading, and advocating for women's total equality. If I had a million dollars, I would write my check today to Hardy Girls Healthy Women, her brainchild and the most effective social change agent for women and girls in Maine today!

-Karin Anderson  
Former Executive Director for the Maine Women's Fund

Karen Heck is a "force of nature" whose work has had a profound and lasting impact on the lives of Maine women and girls. What makes Karen stand head and shoulders above her peers is her fierce, unwavering, and uncompromising commitment to translate women's value into visible, tangible worth. That is, while many have chosen to work in the women's community as organizers or advocates, Karen chose to exercise her personal power and persuasion skills to raising money, often the most difficult, but clearly the most vital, task for success in the culture-changing work of the women's movement. Karen has not only contributed generously as an individual, she has relentlessly encouraged and cajoled hundreds of people into giving more, and giving more often, to an array of women's organizations in Maine. She understands better than anyone the adage, "No margin, no mission", successfully leading the Maine Women's Lobby as its Board President and most successful booster in the first years of hiring a fulltime executive director; founding

the SAFE Fund and ensuring its financial success to support low-income women's access to reproductive choice; establishing the Maine Women's Policy Center, understanding that, to advance a women's policy agenda, we must also invest resources in public education and research; and, last but not least, founding and supporting Hardy Girls Healthy Women, which invests directly and creatively in the movement's most precious resource, young women leaders.

-Joanne D'Arcangelo  
Principal, JD'A Consulting, Inc.

Karen Heck is one of the most influential women I've ever met. I've known Karen since the day I went trick-or-treating with friends and we stopped at her wonderful abode. I was 10 and I can remember thinking "this lady is wicked cool!" Then Hardy Girls Healthy Women came into my life. There Karen was open ears, heart, mind, so much knowledge when I didn't understand the message that was trying to get across to me, Karen would break it down for me, and she helped turn my light bulb on so-to-speak. She made me realize that being a girl is going to be way more empowering than I thought. I have this motherly respect for Karen, she's always made sure that my not-so-stable environment I was around wasn't effecting me in negative ways, and that I could talk to her about anything that was bothering me. When I started going to Hardy Girls Healthy Women (There's another thing, she helped create a place for girls to go and grow!) she and I would walk home together (later in life I became Karen's neighbor). Karen helped push my life into a better direction than it was going right at the right time in my life - she has very good timing! She's taught me to speak up and go for it - whatever "it" may be. Going on car rides with her, sharing music and just the bond of being a girl, that feeling will always be there when I think of Karen Heck- If everyone knew Karen Heck, I mean like the whole world there would be some type of statue of her somewhere, well maybe a beautiful garden or forests would be named in her name, she'd look just great up on that wall in the hall of fame.

-Kerrilee Knights  
Green Mountain College, Class of 2010 (she helped get me here too, mentally)

Karen Heck has to be the most connected woman in Maine! Best of all, she is wonderful at leveraging these human connections, and does it constantly, with great style and grace. Time and time again, to my amazement, whenever any one of Karen's friends (of which she has many) comes to her with something they need (be it funding, a job, a mentor, a resource, or an introduction), Karen smiles and quickly throws out a name, and follows up to make the connection. She has both the intellect and courage to be able to see the big picture and give a project wings, as well as the heart and the realism to help sort out all the little details to make a project fly. She is amazing!

-Kate O'Halloran  
Associate Director of Planned Giving, Colby College

Karen is a believer in ensuring long term viability for the services she has launched/helped to launch such as helping to secure \$100,000 in contributions to endow the SAFE Fund (a statewide program) at its start. She, through publicly stated principle and action, serves as an ally for change, a beacon to navigate inevitably rough waters on the way to the establishment of policies and practices that ensure equality and equity, and an effective bridge for those in all of our communities whose awareness about the barriers women and girls face has needed a boost.

-Martha Breunig

YWCA New England Regional Council Resource Consultant

In my life, I have yet to meet and work with a woman, as dedicated to creating positive change as Karen Heck. Karen's commitment to serving her community through not only Hardy Girls Healthy Women's mission, but any movement towards social change that makes life better for all women, is inspirational. Karen uses her leadership skills and passion to face off with any adversary to ensure human equality and justice, but always with humility and grace.

-Lauren Sterling  
Co-Chair, Greater Waterville Communities for Children and Youth  
& Governor's Children's Cabinet Staff

Karen Heck has been a powerful mentor for many Maine women who have had an opportunity to work with her, including me. As Deputy Director at KVCAP (Kennebec Valley Community Action Program) from 1984-1996 she was responsible for the Agency's Finance, IT and HR functions, as well as the Director of Family Planning, among other programs. She hired me as Human Resources Director in 1990 and taught me everything I know about HR and managing people. At KVCAP she was an inspiration and role model for many employees, but particularly for the women who worked there. She led the management team for all of her years there during which KVCAP championed Consumers for Affordable Health Care, Affordable Housing projects, Domestic Violence projects, and many other grass roots programs for low-income individuals. A colleague of mine at KVCAP says whenever she feels slighted by a sexist statement or action; she asks herself "What would Karen Heck say/do?"

Karen is tireless in her dedication to empowering the disenfranchised, especially women. She is extremely generous with her time and money. When she got a new, used car, she gave her own perfectly good old used car to the H.O.M.E.S. project in Orland, rather than trade it in. She sponsored Bring Your Daughter to Work Day at KVCAP. She was always willing to debate a sensitive issue -- does not run from conflict or controversy. With Rotary International's support, for at least 3 winters she spent 6 weeks in the Dominican Republic working with a convent sponsored orphanage to build a school.

-Sarah Seder  
Director of Human Resources, HealthReach

Karen Heck's commitment to girls and women is unprecedented. Her dedication and passionate approach to improving their lives and experiences has been and endless source of inspiration for me, a young woman developing my own path. With tireless dedication Karen has created a better place for girls and women in her community and in the state of Maine, while also leaving every person she meets with the impression that they, too, can create a better world for girls and women. I can think of no other woman with such a passionate curiosity and a willingness to see her vision through. Karen Heck makes things happen, and my experiences while working with her and learning from her are invaluable. She is truly an incredible woman.

-Jessica Morgan  
University of Cincinnati Graduate Student and Former AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer