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Amy Calder

'Fighter for women honored'

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WATERVILLE -- Karen Heck -- community activist, volunteer and champion for women's rights -- has been issued the Maine American Association of University Women's highest award for extraordinary community involvement in women's issues.

Heck, 53, of Waterville, was given the 2006 Achievement Citation Award Saturday at the Association's annual state convention, held at Colby College.

The Association, which was founded in 1881 and has more than 100,000 members, seeks to promote education and equity for women.

Heck is a founder of Hardy Girls, Healthy Women, an organization that seeks to help girls become strong and independent women. She helped form Rape Crisis Assistance, was the second woman president of the Waterville Rotary Club and has served as president of the Maine Women's Lobby, Maine Choice Coalition and Family Planning Service Providers.



Waterville activist and volunteer Karen Heck gets a standing ovation while walking to the podium to accept the Achievement Citation at the state convention of the Maine American Association of University Women at Colby College in Waterville on Saturday.

She also helped organize the Maine Turn Beauty Inside Out Campaign, which seeks to dispel media images of beauty and encourages girls and women to have a healthy body image.

"Karen's wheels are constantly turning," said Cathy Bevier, who is co-president of the Waterville Chapter of University Women along with Laura Meader. "She loves a good debate and a good cause. She demonstrates a commitment to community betterment and serves as a model of civic engagement."

Waterville association chapter member Joan Sanzenbacher spearheaded Heck's nomination for the award. Calling her a one-person change-agent, Sanzenbacher said Heck has been at the heart of a variety of projects that support women and girls, both locally and statewide: She worked with the late Marti Stevens of Cornville to develop programs for at-risk youth and volunteered to help Mainely Girls, a Camden program.

She also has worked for the Maine Mentoring Partnership, Maine Family Literacy Collaborative and was a founding member of the Maine Center for Economic Policy. She currently serves on the board of

directors for the Waterville Main Street Program and is a supporter of the Maine International Film Festival.

Heck, speaking Saturday to about 50 Association members from all over the state at the new Schair-Swnenson-Watson Alumni Center, said she was honored to receive the award.

"When she (Sanzenbacher) told me it was for me it didn't seem right because the kinds of things I do are fun," Heck said. "I don't do them considering they are work."

She thanked the association, as well as her partner, Bruce Olson, who was only one of two men present Saturday. The other was Seth Chase, a public policy staff member with the national association.

"I feel like I should share this (award) with all of you, and I truly appreciate your support," Heck said.

Heck has a bachelor's degree in government from Colby, a master's in human development from University of Maine, and a certificate in group facilitation, conflict management and mediation from University of Southern Maine.

For 17 years she worked at Kennebec Valley Community Action Program where she developed a \$2 million energy assistance program, administered several programs and helped build KVCAP to a \$13 million agency with 35 programs. She currently is a program officer with the Bingham Project, a charitable endowment promoting health and advanced medicine in Maine.

State association President Pat Rathbun said the theme of the convention, held Friday and Saturday, was "education as the gateway for economic security for women." A dinner was held Friday night, at which Laura Fortman, commissioner of the state Department of Labor, spoke about wage equity. Workshops were held Saturday and Sanzenbacher was given a surprise award for outstanding service to the Waterville chapter. This is the second year in a row that a Waterville chapter member has won the state award for achievement. Last year, Regina Oliver was the recipient.

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