May 23, 2019

Dear Women of Influence Selection Committee:

The impact of the Iowa State University Lectures Program reflects who Pat Miller is as a person. The same personal qualities and skills — the ability to find synergies, make personal connections, mentor, and always approach life with laughter and diplomatic humor — surface in virtually everything she has done outside of her career at Iowa State University.

Pat is a “behind the scenes” force of nature when she serves on boards and takes on projects. Over the years, she served on various state and local boards, including the Story County and Iowa Women’s Political Caucus, ACCESS (Assault Care Center Extending Shelter & Support) and the YWCA Ames-ISU. She has consistently dedicated herself to projects and activities that reflect her belief in women’s equality, increasing women’s involvement in politics, and in progressive goals.

During Pat’s more than 37 years at Iowa State, she was also the energetic connector in her personal and community life, memorably instigating networking in innovative ways. As Liz Beck, former director of the Iowa State University Honors Program and long-time colleague and friend of Pat’s, put it: “She can get anyone to agree to anything, and do it willingly.” For instance:

* Pat and Liz initiated the All-Women’s Deli Potluck, which drew hundreds of Iowa State University and community female “influencers” together to drink, eat and network twice each year. The “original Styrofoam celebration” kept expanding as invitees were asked to bring a friend. It became the place for Iowa State and community women of influence to enjoy wine, relax and network for close to 30 years. One colleague and friend commented: “I do know of women who have left ISU and the Ames community who say that they have never found the kind of support system that they had in Ames, and I think this is directly because of Pat’s efforts to bring women together.”
* Pat served as retired state Senator Johnie Hammond’s campaign chair for 18 of the 20 years she represented Ames in the Iowa House and Senate. Pat also instigated a project, Women Supporting Women, to empower Ames women to organize fundraising events for progressive female candidates. For several years, these well-attended events were significant fundraisers for female candidates. More important, the events helped women connect with each other to make a difference.
* Later, Pat spearheaded the Political Women United Against Fat (PWUAF) group. The group was a tradition at Ames’ Stomping Grounds restaurant for Friday lunches. Nominally about weight loss, PWUAF was really about friendship and women connecting and networking . . . and debating the political issues of the day.

Pat nurtured connections and friendships throughout her work career and continues to do so in her retirement. This includes former speakers and many of the students she mentored through the Lectures Program. For Pat, students were always front and center. She hooked speakers by emphasizing how important it is for the students at Iowa State to have the opportunity to see, hear and be able to exchange dialogue with their diverse and informed voices. And, even as these students have spread throughout the world in many different geographic and professional directions, they recall the impact of their time working with Pat and the Lectures Program. Following are three of the tributes former students sent to Pat as part of the ISU Lectures 60th Anniversary Celebration held in 2017:

* “I can’t believe it has been 27 years since I graduated from Iowa State and finished my involvement with the World Affairs and National Affairs committees! I’m now a professor at Boise State University, teaching sport history and cultural studies of sport. As I have told countless other friends, colleagues at Boise State and my students, my most memorable experiences as a student at Iowa State were those associated with ISU Lectures. The fact that students were given a voice in who was invited to campus, what topics would be covered, and what roles we would play was simply priceless AND a huge part of my college experience and education. Most important, though, as I reflect back, you provided a ‘home’ for many of us who were involved in various ways. I never felt like a ‘lowly’ student. I felt like I mattered and that really gave me a level of confidence that I carried into my coursework.” — Shelley Lucas, bachelor’s degree in political science, 1990
* “How can I ever thank you for all you did to change my life in a million wonderful ways? When I was a terrified, homesick freshman, you swooped me onto the Lectures Committee and into your magical orbit. You brought the world to Ames and made believe I could go from Ames to anywhere in that world I wanted. You went out on a limb for me dozens of time and I will forever be in gratitude and awe of you. I am only one of hundreds (thousands?) of students whose lives were changed — and, no exaggeration — saved by you.” — Carrie Seim, bachelor’s degree in journalism and mass communication, 2000
* “I owe much of my success after ISU to Pat. I first met Pat during my senior year when Energy Secretary Steven Chu came to visit ISU. At the time, I was the chapter president of Iowa State’s National Society of Black Engineers, and Pat invited all engineering student org presidents to his talk. I was the only chapter president to actually show up to his lecture — which was amazing — and Pat made sure that I had the chance to meet him and be in a photo with him. Two summers later, I was interning at the Department of Energy’s headquarters in Washington DC. Serving on the lectures committee during grad school provided me with many opportunities to help craft our lectures program for that year, engage with a variety of speakers who came to ISU, and also explore another side of Iowa State that I did not know existed before that chance meeting with Pat several years before. I believe that my interactions with and advice gleaned from guests such as Mary Robinson, Wes Moore and Jessica Williams helped strengthen my application for the White House, which was the opportunity of a lifetime.” — Chloe McPherson, bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering, 2014, and master’s degree in human computer interaction/mechanical engineering, 2018

Pat’s career and personal life exemplify what a woman of influence is and does. As one woman put it: “So much of who I am today is because of Pat, and I know there are so many other women who would say the same thing.” We cannot overemphasize Pat’s qualifications for this honor and thank you for the opportunity to nominate her!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Baird, retired, Iowa Department of Transportation, Policy and Legislative Services

Dr. Dianne Bystrom, director emerita, Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics, Iowa State University

Elizabeth Beck, former director, Honors Program, Iowa State University

Victoria Szopinski, former city council member, City of Ames