

Macomb Feminist Network's 2024 Writing Women into History Honorees

The Macomb Feminist Network has selected Cathy Early, Sheila Nollen, Susan Shoemaker, and Lin Stults as recipients of its 2024 Writing Women into History Awards.

Cathy Early is being honored for her leadership in the Macomb, McDonough County, and Western Illinois University communities. As an entrepreneur she has been a role model, serving her clients with competence and compassion and serving the community by weaving the skills she developed in business into her interest in the safety and success of the people of west central Illinois. An educator and avid sports fan, Cathy has served as a moderator in the Macomb High Scholastic Bowl and a guest speaker in many classrooms and WIU residence halls, as a courtside commentator for WIU volleyball and basketball and a color commentator for WKAI. Her commitment to civic and cultural life is evident in her support of organizations from the Macomb Public Library and TriStates Public Radio to Rotary, United Way, and McDonough County EMTS/911. Her value to the people in this region is reflected in her appointment to multiple boards, among them the Macomb Area Economic Development Corp, the local Chamber of Commerce, the McDonough Hospital Foundation, and WIU's Board of Trustees and Foundation Board. Cathy has proven to be an engaged, competent, responsive, and generous leader, willing to give time and attention to each of her roles in the community. As a business woman, specifically as an insurance agent, her ability to comfort, console, and support innumerable people, old and young, was apparent repeatedly as she served her clients when they were facing one crisis or another.

Sheila Nollen is being celebrated for her many contributions to community organizations and initiatives. Propelled by a deep commitment to social justice and equity, for decades she has been a constant and conscientious supporter of a host of coalitions that directly support these values and address issues of food and water insecurity, homelessness, poverty, illiteracy, and discrimination. She also serves as a voice for inclusion and diversity in institutions whose missions are less directly identified with these concerns. Known as a quiet and generous advocate who often works behind the scenes, Sheila can and does assume leadership more visibly when appropriate. An example is her fifty years of active membership in the First Presbyterian Church of Macomb where she has served as Deacon and Elder, and has chaired many committees, including the Service and Justice Committee that, under her watch, helped launch the One Human Family to address issues of discrimination locally. She also helped establish the Interfaith Alliance of Macomb to bring the faith community together. On a more personal, but no less important scale, Sheila regularly reaches out to the homebound through her homemade cards and letters, helping more isolated members of the community stay connected. As an environmentalist she goes wider and further into the future than this ministry or even her community activism. She pursues a long term healthy –and just--planet by adopting sustainable land and animal preservation practices.

Susan Shoemaker is being lauded for her twenty-plus years as the heart and hands of the McDonough Choral Society (MCS). With her husband John (now deceased) she founded the MCS and has been the cornerstone of its development. Susan's background as a talented professional vocalist and director has given her the knowledge and skill needed to lead a choral group successfully. Beyond her musical talent and experience, however, Susan's success, and that of the MCS participants, has depended on her complete dedication to the Society and her willingness to take care of the time-consuming behind-the-scenes work of the organization. It performs two classical music concerts every year. This means recognizing the strengths of the women and men in each year's MCS chorus and selecting music that will best reflect those strengths. Susan's familiarity with choral music and with performance makes this possible. Her knowledge of the music industry and strong organizational skills help her accomplish other logistical tasks, including contracting accompanists for rehearsals and the soloists and instrumentalists for performances, publicizing the concerts, planning the receptions, and raising the funds that make it possible for the MCS to offer their concerts without cost to either choral members or audiences. Susan does this in addition to conducting months of weekly rehearsals that have resulted in a legacy of stellar performances and a unique contribution to the community.

Lin Stults is being feted as a model entrepreneur and a generous, lifelong civic-minded Macomb resident. Since 1979 she has served the community through Engraving by Lin, a Historic Downtown Legacy Business Enterprise that has prospered because of her creativity, skill, and attention to customer needs, as well as her "pro-bono" work for schools and not-for-profits. She has been a reliable promoter of her business but also of Macomb, consistently nurturing ideas to increase the number and variety of community events that engage residents and attract visitors. A member of the first Heritage Days Steering Committee in 1982, she continued to be an active member for many years and in 2023 agreed to another appointment to the committee. To heighten the fun of the winter holiday season, Lin helped initiate and implement the annual Dickens on the Square celebration, entering into the spirit of the festivities as a Victorian lady and appearing in some of the weekend's events. She is an avid volunteer and supporter of the Macomb Downtown Development Association and the Macomb Chamber of Commerce, and Flags of Love, and is active in Macomb's Rotary clubs. She has also served on the Board of Trustees for the Macomb Public Library District, the Altrusa Club, the Salvation Army, Volunteer NOW, and the McDonough County Genealogical Society. For decades, Lin has plied her trade and worked tirelessly to reinforce and celebrate Macomb's strengths. She has done so with a calm and gentle demeanor.