

The 2017 Distinguished Woman

Mary Ann McLeod, is a woman who presents groundbreaking ideas with an impact of following through and dedication to education at all ages. Many nomination letters called her a role model. She has spent over 50 years committed to improving the lives of others through education and with gifts of sharing time, talent, and intellect. She is committed to excellence.

As owner/director of Mulberry Tree Preschool in Moraga from 1982 to 2011, Mary Ann created an environment allowing each child to develop according to his/her own unique pattern of growth, while building her staff professionally and personally. She also found it rewarding after teaching pre-school toddlers to later get reacquainted with some of the same girls when they attended the Sister-to-Sister program as middle school students.

Mary Ann is an active participant who loves to learn. She has made a notable difference in all areas of her volunteer work with AAUW. She has hosted meetings, served on hospitality, been an Interest Group leader for Evening Books, a volunteer at Burckhalter library, enjoyed Museum Mavens, and was a member of the original Sister-to-Sister committee as well as Treasurer and Co-Chair. She continues now by chairing the Scholarship Committee. She says, "AAUW was a place where I could grow as a person." Her commitment to the mission of this organization can be seen with loyalty to all that AAUW inspires in its members. Mary Ann is a leader. She has achieved new levels of involvement.

Mary Ann attended Holy Names School for girls and attributes a Catholic education by Christian Brothers and Sisters – a traditional education which helped her family, who emigrated from Italy, to become part of American society. She says, "Education was a top priority in our family." She learned a value structure with respect for education, and for right and wrong. Always a good student, she says simply, "I loved school!" She developed a work ethic influenced by her working mother. She graduated from California State University, Fresno with a degree in American History in 1965, and later completed a M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education at Saint Mary's College.

Bill and Mary Ann met while he was a student at St. Mary's College and were married in the college chapel. As parents they are very proud of their two children, Monica and Matt (and Jamie), now adults themselves, and four wonderful grandchildren.

In 1999 Mary Ann received the esteemed OML Gender Equity Award presented by the Educational Equity Committee to an outstanding community educator. This award recognized her leadership for an innovative "team approach" with staff promoting early childhood gender fairness in education. She has long been one of the pillars of the Orinda Moraga Lafayette Branch of the American Association of University Women. The "foundations for life" that she advocates are repeatedly seen in her own volunteer work. She listens, she builds, and she takes charge! While gardening is her hobby, she helps others grow and blossom.