

2013 Torchbearer Recipient

Mary Roberta Heiman

As a journalist and community activist Mary Roberta Heiman has tackled tough issues that affect Indiana's women and families. Roberta's passion for exposing and reforming social injustices in the Hoosier state has made her a trusted and revered woman throughout our communities.

Roberta began her career as a reporter in Knedallville, Indiana during a time when female journalists were limited to covering light stories and "women's issues." With no previous experience, she quickly learned the ins and outs of her trade and began focusing on serious issues facing families in Indiana. Her interests led her to investigative reporting and she became one of the first reporters in the country to use database technologies to do her work.

With her understanding that people in disadvantaged social classes face issues that the general public would never see, Roberta decided to use her position to shine a light on those matters. She reported on numerous public issues: child abuse victims, the old/disabled in nursing homes, the chronic mentally/physically ill, low-income workers, troubled youth, the incarcerated etc.

Reporting on these community issues brought a new level of public awareness to them and often prompted reforms, benefitting the less fortunate. For example, Vanderburgh County's sitting juvenile judge credits Roberta's reporting on the juvenile justice system with directly leading to subsequent systemic improvements. Her reports on the local infant mortality rate inspired a CEO of an Evansville hospital to establish a center for low-income pregnant women.

Roberta was responsible for restarting the local chapter of the League of Women Voters and currently serves as President. This organization is instrumental in voter education efforts, including the presentation of debates and the Meet Your Legislators program. She also founded and won a substantial grant for the Evansville Trails Coalition in order to gain support for walking and biking trails, allowing community members to engage in affordable healthy activities.

Her commitment to helping create a better community has yielded great results. As a 42 year reporter and a community leader she has bettered the lives of many underprivileged individuals and families. Mary Roberta Heiman's dedication to pushing for equal rights to those without a voice has made her a worthy *Torchbearer Award* recipient.

