

Pat Beeman Induction
Michigan Women's Hall of Fame
October 21, 1999

The induction of Patricia L. Beeman into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame is a time to reflect upon a strong, insightful, intelligent and effective woman with a passion for justice. It also is a time to lift up a period in our recent history when Pat Beeman played a significant role in challenging the apartheid system in Southern Africa.

Pat Beeman's life is a model of what it means to "think globally, act locally." She and her husband, Frank, were activists in the racial justice movement in the United States, here at home and in Mississippi where they participated in voter education and registration and civil rights demonstrations. She learned from her brother's reports from Namibia regarding what was going on in Africa. Pat became the coordinator of the Southern Africa Liberation Committee, a local organization in the East Lansing/MSU community, organized to educate people about apartheid and lead them to understand ways to challenge this injustice.

From her Spartan Street home, Pat worked with a handful of like-minded justice advocates to persuade the city council of East Lansing to become one of the first communities in this country to refuse to purchase goods or services from any business with economic investment in South Africa. They also targetted Michigan State University and regularly attended the Board of Trustees meetings to make the case for University divestment. And in 1978, the MSU Board of Trustees became the first in the nation to totally divest its portfolio of corporations operating in South Africa. And in 1979, 1982 and 1988 the State of Michigan voted three sanctions acts, more

comprehensive than any state in the United States, to prohibit the use of state funds to support companies operating in South Africa.

Pat's work was key in each of these actions. She translated a major foreign policy debate into human terms that could neither be ignored nor rejected by policy makers. While the Michigan State Treasurer was holding press conferences to explain his fiduciary responsibility to investors, pensioners and taxpayers to invest state in a manner to maximize their value, Pat was displaying pictures of families in South Africa who were the victims of the system of apartheid. Where did she put up those pictures, articles, show the films? In the rotunda of the Michigan capitol building. Her easels and folding table and posters were there for every legislator and state treasurer and governor to see as they came and went about their business. As a matter of fact, her attendance was better than that of some legislators.

I was in the legislature at the time and called upon Pat many times, in the context of legislative debates and public education, to provide the most compelling cases about what apartheid meant and how destructive it was.

Do you know the phenomenon of a person telling you about a problem and because you now understand it, it is, in part, your problem. You cannot ignore it anymore. That was the strength of this persistent, intelligent, seemingly tireless advocate for justice. She found the effective ways to tell the story that, once heard, required action. So, no matter how esoteric or convoluted the policy debates might be, she kept the compelling reality of apartheid foremost in the public mind and the minds of policy makers.

Pat Beeman would be quick to tell you it is important to build an inclusive organization of people to accomplish any achievements. I will be quick to tell you that such inclusive organization only occurs when there are some unusually generous, gifted and passionate individuals who are able to call us to become responsible.

Pat Beeman belongs in the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame because she was such a person. And she had so much confidence in the human ability to build a more just society that she made us believe it as well. And because we believed it, we were able to do it.