

## *Remembering Benni McMullen*

We are heartbroken to report that former YWCA MDI Executive Director, Benni McMullen, passed away Wednesday, March 25, after undergoing heart surgery.

Benni was YWCA MDI's indefatigable Executive Director for 39 years. She administered the housing program through which countless women benefitted from her 'foster mother' instincts.

Benni also created and coordinated the YW's well-known children's programs that are still held and enjoyed by hundreds of families each year.

During her tenure, Benni's advocacy for girls and women was front and center. She even established several girls' softball teams (enough so they could compete with one another) before girls were allowed to play on boys' teams.

She will be sorely missed by her many friends at YWCA MDI, Island Artists Association, Bar Harbor/MDI Rotary Club, and Hancock County SPCA.

Hundreds of local women, and some not-so-local, could testify how Benni helped them grow and thrive. One of them is Abby Robinson, who has been on the staff of YWCA MDI for 18 years.

"It is hard to put into words who or what Benni was to me and to so many people," said Abby. "Many knew her as the face of the YWCA for almost 40 years. If you were lucky enough to know her, you know that everything she did was for this organization and for the women we served.

"Benni believed that every woman deserved a chance, and that sometimes they just needed a hand up to be able to move forward.

"I met Benni 18 years ago and she adopted me, as she did so many women, and helped me to head in a better direction. I moved in with a laundry basket of clothes and worked nights while living in a room designed for seven women. I'd come home from work and get a few hours of sleep before watching my nephew, who was 4 months old. We'd nap curled up on a couch in the lobby and she'd keep an eye on us.

"As the season wound down, Benni offered me a job being a backup house mother. Her theory was that if I could sleep in the solarium or the lobby and still go on, I ought to be able to handle keeping an eye on the YWCA. It was the start of a wonderful friendship.

"Benni watched my niece and nephew grow up here and welcomed them just as warmly into her life. As the years passed and she prepared to retire, she continued to help any woman that she could. There are numerous ladies from this community that would not be where they are now if not for her.

"Four years ago after I got married, I was able to surprise Benni yet again: she was going to be a Grammie! Grammie Benni was loved dearly by my daughter, and the visits to play with her pups and sit on the porch are going to be missed. But as my daughter told me, she still lives in us.

"I hope you all will take a moment and remember what a strong, wonderful, giving woman Benni McMullen was."



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*May the Goddess be with you, Benni!*