

# Margaret R. Blackshere

JULY 6, 2019

Margaret R. Blackshere (nee Flenniken). Loving mother of Michael (Catherine) and Thomas (Zoe); devoted grandmother of Michael, Alex, Quinn and Raquel Blackshere; fond sister of Patricia (the late Leroy) Smith.

Margaret was raised in North Venice, IL by her Mother Frances and Aunt Margie. She began her career in education as a kindergarten teacher in Madison, IL after obtaining her master's degree in education at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. While attending SIUE she served as a student trustee and after completing her studies she served as a trustee after being appointed by the governor. She immediately saw the need for Madison teachers to have union representation during their contract negotiations and instigated an organizing drive that led to the Madison teachers joining the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT).

Margaret has served at all levels of the labor movement from president of her local union(763) to statewide vice president of the IFT. In 1993 she was elected secretary-treasurer of the Illinois AFL-CIO- the million-member umbrella organization for all labor unions in the state. She was later elected as president, serving two terms. She was the first woman to hold that position. Margaret retired as president in February of 2007 and was given president emeritus .

Margaret's work to elect worker-friendly legislators and state-wide officials has given Labor a strong voice in Springfield and Washington. Her efforts on key state legislation like raising minimum wage, expanding health care, enacting card check for public employees, revamping unemployment insurance, and revising workers' compensation laws, have been invaluable.

But Margaret's greatest contribution to Illinois' Labor movement may be her capacity to unify diverse groups and build coalitions, both with the Labor movement and between Labor, small business and community and faith-based groups. Margaret has forged critical alliances with the Illinois Manufacturers Association to create and save manufacturing jobs in our state and with The Transportation for Illinois Coalition- a group of labor and business groups working to secure state and federal funds for Illinois' infrastructure. Within the Labor movement, Margaret worked tirelessly to keep Illinois affiliates united and working together in political and legislative efforts when several international unions left the AFL-CIO.

Away from her duties at the State Federation, Margaret has been involved in many organizations fighting for equality and social justice. She served on IWIL and a variety of boards, councils and coalitions including United Way of Illinois, American Red Cross in Illinois, Chicago Council of Foreign Relations, Unemployment Insurance Advisory Board, the Alliance of Retired Americans Executive Board, the Industrial Commission's Self Insurer's Advisory Board, the Chicago Metropolis 2020 Board, the Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership, the Transportation for Illinois Coalition, the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Advisory Council and the Board of Trustees of the Global Solidarity Center in Washington, D.C.

She has received awards such as the Labor Leader Award in 2000 from the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, the Israel Peace Medal in 2000 from the State of Israel, and the Protector of Working People Award in 2002 from the Illinois State Crime Commission: She was the Guest of Honor in 2003 for Chicago's St Patrick's Day Parade and in 1998 she was inducted into the Illinois Labor History Society's Union Hall of Honor.

She has been a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, served as director of the Illinois Democratic Coordinated Campaign in 1990 and 1992, and was a member of the Democratic National Committee..