

2006 MLK Spirit Award Recipient

Margaret Dagen

The late Margaret Dagen, was a diligent follower of Dr. Martin Luther King's philosophy of non-violence. She was considered a civil rights pioneer. In an effort to end segregation in St. Louis, in 1947, Dagen and her husband helped to co-found CORE – the Committee of Racial Equality. Through negotiations, sit-ins and appeals, CORE was instrumental in desegregating St. Louis' downtown lunch counters and city pools. Dagen's efforts with the group also resulted in the St. Louis Board of Alderman passing a public accommodations ordinance.

For 15 years, Dagen worked as a counselor at Clayton High School. In 1953, upon learning that the Brooklyn Dodgers were in town, she called Jackie Robinson at his hotel and asked if she could bring her class down to meet him. The students then invited him to speak at the school. Afterwards Robinson reportedly told her that she was the first person in St. Louis to treat him nicely.

As an admissions counselor for Washington University, she worked diligently to recruit minority students from across the nation to attend the school. After retiring from the university, Dagen co-wrote "Victory Without Violence: The First 10 Years of the St. Louis Committee of Racial Equality, 1947-1957."

Prior to her death in 2002, Dagen worked with the Holocaust Museum and Learning Center of St. Louis.

Betty L. Thompson

Betty L. Thompson has spent most of her life working as a community and social activist. In 1997 she was elected to the Missouri State House of Representatives, serving eight years as a legislator until the state's term limits law forced her to retire in 2005. While a member of the House, Thompson sponsored legislation that dealt with health care, education, public utilities and housing. Additionally she served as the body's Majority Whip and was Vice Chairman of the state's Ethics Commission.

Thompson began her political career as a University City Council-woman, serving for 18 years as the first African American woman elected to the post. Her commitment to community service has netted Thompson numerous awards, including other Martin Luther King honors. She also holds membership in a number of organizations such as the NAACP, Better Family Life and Women in Municipal Government.

Thompson and her husband Jack Thompson reside in University City. They have four children and seven grandchildren.