

BERYL “BROWNIE” MCGRAW

Known to one and all as Brownie, Beryl McGraw dedicated her professional life to bettering education in Fort Collins. From the time she came to Fort Collins until she was sidelined by a stroke in her mid-eighties, she advocated for children and youth, taught in classrooms and served as a school principal, and after retiring from the field of education working as a juvenile specialist for the Larimer County district attorney. Even after full retirement she continued volunteer work on behalf of child welfare.

EARLY LIFE

Born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Brownie attended 14 different schools as a military-family child, graduating from East High School in Denver, Colorado. Following high school graduation she enrolled at what was then Colorado A&M College (now Colorado State University [CSU]), majoring in social science. At CSU she met Thurman “Fum” McGraw, who would become athletic director at the university in later years. They married in 1950 and returned to Fort Collins not long after Fum’s professional football career ended. She received her Bachelor of Science degree, along with teacher certification, in 1965 and a master’s degree in education in 1972. The McGraws had three children, Dave, Mike and Debbie. They were honored as Citizens of the West by the National Western Stock Show, which each year recognizes individuals who exemplify the pioneer spirit in modern times.

CAREER IN EDUCATION

Brownie soon took on leadership roles, becoming the first woman principal in secondary education in the Poudre School District as assistant principal, then principal at Rocky Mountain High School. She also served as dean of students at Blevins Junior High School, dean of women and dean of students at Rocky Mountain High School, and principal of Lincoln Junior High School. McGraw Elementary School, which opened in 1992, bears her name in honor of her many contributions to the Poudre School District. She often visited classrooms at the school to read to, listen to, and encourage the students there.

POST-EDUCATION CAREER

Following retirement from the school district, Brownie took a position with the district attorney's office as a juvenile specialist, working with youth through agencies that dealt with health, drug use, and after-school activities, as well as advocating for restorative justice, which allows victims to articulate the effect the crime had on them to the perpetrator and the perpetrator to write a restoration contract, thus avoiding more severe punishment. She helped with development of a youth activities center in the south part of town.

VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENTS

Brownie retired from the DA's office in 2011 and became involved with several nonprofit organizations, serving on the boards of the Griffin Foundation Scholarship Committee, the Poudre Valley Hospital Foundation, the Multiple Sclerosis Meridian Society and the Healthier Communities Coalition. She was also active with Girl Scouts. Perhaps her most notable effort was Inspiration Park, an accessible playground in Spring Canyon Park, for which she was a strong influence to create the park.

A LIFE OF GENEROSITY AND ADVOCACY

Beryl "Brownie" McGraw exemplified the best of human characteristics through her kindness, her generosity, her advocacy for children, including those who are less able, and her lifelong commitment to fairness and justice.

AWARDS

UC Health Foundation annual award
Northern Colorado Business Report Woman of Distinction
CSU College of Health and Human Sciences Honor Alumna
CSU Alumni Association Charles A. Lory Service Award

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What motivated Brownie McGraw to advocate for children?

2. Why was she so effective?
3. What is the value of a place like Inspiration Park?

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GLOSSARY

Advocate—to speak on behalf of another person or an organization

Articulate—speak aloud

Juvenile—referring to children and teens

Motivation—the reason to take action

Perpetrator—one who commits a crime

Restorative—repairing

TIMELINE

1930—born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

LATE 1940s—enrollment at Colorado A&M College

1950—marriage to Thurman "Fum" McGraw

1965—Bachelor of Science degree at Colorado State University

1972—Master of education from CSU

1970s to 2003—educator

2003-2011—juvenile justice advocate with district attorney's office

2020—death

HER LEGACY

Brownie dedicated her professional life, taking leadership roles that impacted educational programs and policy. She was the first female secondary school principal and an outstanding mentor.