

Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year Award

The West Barnstable Civic Association enthusiastically nominates Marion (Mimi) McConnell to be the 2020 Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year. Mimi exemplifies leadership and she has made significant contributions to the community, especially embracing conservation efforts to preserve the health of our planet.



Mimi grew up on a farm in western Pennsylvania, the oldest continuously operating farm in the region, known for its peaches. At an early age Mimi developed a keen interest in the environment and devoted much of her life to the preservation of our planet. Her efforts are far reaching. In 1965 Mimi was recognized at the White House for her work in helping to create the Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland. She then worked with *Save the Bay* projects in San Francisco and Rhode Island.

Fortunately for Cape Codders, Mimi moved to Cotuit in 1982. She became involved with the New Alchemy Institute in Falmouth. The community of New Alchemy was dedicated to the sustainability of all life on earth. A few years later, Mimi served as a Board member of the Cotuit-Santuit Civic Association and led the grass-roots village effort to preserve a 35-acre parcel of land, Crocker Neck. The Town finally purchased this wooded, waterfront jewel in 1986. With energy to spare, Mimi went on to serve as an elected official. She was a Cotuit Water Commissioner and then Cotuit's first representative on the new Town Council in 1989, serving as President in 1990, where she advocated for many conservation land purchases by the Town in the 1990s.

Mimi was a co-founder of the Coalition for Buzzards Bay, serving as its first Executive Director from 1988 to 1995. The Buzzards Bay Coalition now boasts nearly 10,000 members and continues to monitor the health of the Buzzards Bay ecosystem through education, conservation, and research. Mimi joined the Barnstable Land Trust and served as a Board member. In 2018 she received the BLT Founders' Award.

The Massachusetts Military Reservation, just north and west of her coastal village of Cotuit, was another critical area of Mimi's focus. The military installation had been dumping excess fuel and other hazardous materials into the ground in the 1950s and 1960s, threatening the region's water supply. A Community Working Group was created by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to address environmental concerns at the base which is now called Joint Base Cape Cod. Mimi was appointed Chair of the Community Working Group that developed a master plan which is now a national model for military-civilian relations. She serves today on the Community Advisory Council that advises the Commonwealth's Environmental Management Commission which oversees activities at the Base's northern 15,000 acres and the Military-Civilian Community Council of Joint Base Cape Cod. Camp Edwards is now a designated water preserve. Without the guidance and commitment of Mimi McConnell, this vital protection of the water that we drink would likely never have come into being.

Mimi's dedication, savvy and tireless efforts have not only contributed, but in most cases, led the way to bringing about positive changes for the betterment of our community and beyond. She truly exemplifies the qualities held by Mercy Otis Warren that we honor.

The Barnstable Patriot

Mimi McConnell of Cotuit earns Cape Cod Woman of the Year

Posted Jul 9, 2020 at 6:19 AM Updated Jul 9, 2020 at 6:24 AM

The Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year Selection Committee in partnership with the Barnstable County Commissioners is proud to announce that the winner of the 19th annual Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year Award is Marion "Mimi" McConnell of Cotuit.

McConnell's name was placed into nomination by the Barnstable County Commissioners and was approved by that Body on Wednesday, July 8.

She was originally nominated by Nancy Meagher as president of the West Barnstable Civic Association; by Nancy Shoemaker, 2018 Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year, and by Mimi's daughter Lauren Elizabeth Wolk.

Despite COVID-19, the Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year Selection Committee was privileged to receive many outstanding nominations this year. Mimi rose to the top in this turbulent year as a modern-day Mercy Otis Warren, who, in the words of her daughter, has served the people of Cape Cod "without fanfare."

Soft-spoken as is her tenacity, McConnell delivers a powerful punch when it comes to the preservation of the environment. Before moving to the Cape in 1982, she helped create the Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland and worked with Save the Bay projects in San Francisco and Rhode Island.

On the Cape, she quickly became involved, serving as a Board member of the Cotuit-Santuit Civic Association, with whom she led a grass roots village effort to preserve a 35-acre parcel of land to protect the water quality of Popponesset Bay. This parcel is known as part of the Crocker Neck Conservation area, purchased by the Town of Barnstable in the early 1980s.

McConnell was co-founder of the Coalition for Buzzards Bay, serving as its first Executive Director from 1988-1995. During this time, she also was a Cotuit Water Commissioner, a Barnstable Town Meeting member, and elected to the first Barnstable Town Council (serving as its first woman

president). As an activist in the Cotuit Fire District, she created the Citizen Handbook, which explains the workings of local government.

In 1997, then Gov. Jane Swift created a Community Working Group to address concerns arising out of hazardous waste materials plumes emanating from the Massachusetts Military Reservation (now Joint Base Cape Cod). McConnell was appointed Chair of the group and guided the legislative process to create the Master Plan codified in Chapter 47 of the Massachusetts Acts of 2002. This Master Plan is now a national model for military-civilian relations. Today, she serves as the Chair of its offshoot, the Environmental Management Commission Community Advisory Council, which oversees activities at the Base's 15,000 acres and on the Military-Civilian Council of Joint Base Cape Cod. Camp Edwards is now a designated water preserve. In the words of Nancy Meagher, "without the guidance and commitment of Mimi McConnell, this vital protection of water that we drink would likely never have come into being."

McConnell has served on the Board of the Cape Cod Foundation, created the annual Jane Eshbaugh Community Service Award, served on a Capewide Special Commission on County Governance (2012) and was an active Board member of Barnstable Land Trust (winning the Barnstable Land Trust

Founders Award in 2018.). Currently, she is active in movements to replace the canal bridges and to decommission the Plymouth Nuclear Facility.

In nominating McConnell, 2018 Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year recipient Nancy Shoemaker said: “Over 250 years ago, Mercy Otis Warren ...discovered in her life of service that government and the voice of the people were essential ingredients in getting things done. Mimi, too, has used the public forum...She shares many of the passions and interests of Mercy Otis Warren (who)...would have approved of Mimi’s tenacity and willingness to work for what is right”.

About Mercy Otis Warren

Mercy Otis Warren, born in West Barnstable in 1728, was a playwright, a historian, a pioneer in women’s causes, a champion of liberty, an advocate of the Bill of Rights and a patriot. In an era where it was unusual for woman to be educated, much less to emerge as a leader, her advocacy for the cause of patriotism and a central role in the Revolution was remarkable.

About the award

The Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year Award was established in 2002 to annually recognize a woman who exemplifies the traits of leadership in the community and has made significant contribution to the arts, education, business, community involvement and/or volunteerism while embracing the ideals of patriotism. Past recipients include: Marion Vuilleumier (2002), Jean Gardner (2003), Eugenia Fortes (2004), Felicia Penn (2005), Bonnie Snow (2006), Lynne Poyant (2007), Josephine Ives (2008), Mary LeClair (2009), Gloria Rudman (2010), Susan French (2011), Judy Walden Scarafile (2012), Dorothy Savarese (2013), Mary Lou Petitt (2014), Michelle DeSilva (2015), Ann Williams (2016), Dolores DaLuz (2017), Nancy Viall Shoemaker (2018) and Juliet Bernstein (2019).

About the celebration

Due to the uncertainties of COVID-19, plans for the 2020 celebration are on hold. Organizers hope to host the event in the fall. They will also be honoring Mariah Pillsbury, of Wareham, the winner of the 2020 Mercy Otis Warren Freedom of Expression Award.

The committee thanks sponsors Cape Cod 5, Barnstable County, Tales of Cape Cod, Barnstable Village Association, West Barnstable Civic Association, Cape Cod Media Group and the Cape Cod Writers Guild.