

Rhode Island Commission on Women

We are delighted to announce that Karen Stein, Director, Women's Studies Program has been chosen by the Rhode Island Commission on Women as one of three Women of the Year for 2007.

The award dinner will be held on October 3, 2007, at the Airport Radisson in Warwick. If you would like to attend, please contact Shanna Wells, at the Rhode Island Commission on Women, (401) 222-6105 or swells@RICW.ri.gov

Here is the Nomination
Nomination for Karen F. Stein

Often the best of our leaders work in quiet ways to change the face and core of institutions and thereby the world. Karen F. Stein is one such leader who has changed the world by helping to found and develop a Women's Studies Program at URI. This program, which began in 1972 as an interdisciplinary introductory course that attracted 200 students and was team-taught by 10 faculty, has now grown to a program that involves over 1,000 students a year in 25 courses, courses that teach theory and praxis about local, national, and global women's issues, preparing women and men to face the world as strong contributors committed to justice and equality. Such work to make the world a better place begins in the ways we teach and mentor students and demonstrate our leadership. Karen is exemplary in all these roles.

Starting in 1970, the same year The Rhode Island Commission on Women (RICW) was established "to support women in achieving full equality in all areas of life, through the promotion of rights and opportunities for all women," Karen began to make her impact at URI and beyond. With expertise in modern North American women writers— especially Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, and Toni Morrison—in the Gothic, and in Women and Science, she began teaching as a part-time lecturer in the English Department. She was a model to many students and faculty as she juggled teaching, pursuing a Ph.D. in English, and raising children. During this time, she also headed various committees to improve working conditions for part-time faculty, who are chiefly women. Under her leadership, faculty who taught half time or more—all of them women at the time—were integrated into the faculty union, and the rules were spelled out in Appendix F, "Limited Full-Time Faculty."

As her C.V. reveals, Karen's commitment to giving women recognition and rights extends from her teaching to her leadership roles. In 1977, she was selected as the Official URI Delegate to National Women's Studies Association Founding Conference. Since then, as a member of executive and steering committees, as Chair of the English and Women's Studies Departments, as a liaison, editor, Director of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, negotiator, co-

author of the proposal for a B.A. in Women's Studies, writer of a proposal for a post-B.A. certificate in Women's Studies, and ongoing developer of many cutting edge and important courses, Karen has stood out as a visionary leader. In the English Department, she has developed more than 12 new courses on Women Writers and American Authors and developed the Internship course. In Women's Studies, besides developing the introductory course in Women's Studies, she has helped develop the senior seminar, which helps launch Women's Studies majors into their professional and future lives. She has helped create a Women and the Natural Sciences course, which she has taught since 1998, and added a highly sought after on-line course on Women and Aging. In designing and leading the Women's Studies internship course, she has mentored over 30 students working in domestic violence resource centers, Planned Parenthood, and many other women-centered organizations, including Hera Art Gallery. She has mentored students working in the academic enhancement center at URI, helping them to train tutors about diversity issues.

Before Karen helped start and formalize the Women's Studies Program at URI, people could go through four years of college without knowing about women scientists, politicians, artists, historians, reformers, writers, and so on. She developed the high caliber of the Women's Studies faculty and courses to guarantee that Women's Studies would make women visible, and give young women and men tools of analysis to understand what's happening in their personal lives and in the world around them. Women's Studies has blossomed into a program with 14 graduating seniors this year, several Presidential Award winners in other departments, and increasing numbers of majors and minors. Just this spring, under Karen's leadership, Women's Studies initiated an additional 25 URI women students into the National Women's Honor Society, *lota, lota, lota*, an affiliation that gives a total of 35 URI women national recognition and standing. We know from our students that taking Women's Studies courses and being a Women's Studies major or minor gives students strength, a voice, and an understanding of the real world that allows them to go on to be leaders, too. URI has Karen to thank for giving a face to Women's Studies, a program that in its interdisciplinary approach and scholarships offers opportunities for women and men in all disciplines and walks of life.

In 1993, the URI women's group, the Association of Professional and Academic Women, elected Karen Woman of the Year. She was given this honor because of her outstanding leadership skills and service. Not only has she served on the Executive Board of the AAUP, the URI faculty Union, working to guarantee women's equal rights, benefits, and pay, but she was also the co-chair of the URI President's Commission on the Status of Women. On this committee, she co-authored the new parental leave policy at URI and is currently working to develop new strategies to address sexual harassment at URI, and address other issues of importance to women at URI. What distinguishes Karen's leadership style is her democratic way of proceeding, her commitment to working toward consensus, and her dedication to collaboration. The admiration for her leadership

is clear from every single person who works with her. When she steps down in a year from being Director of the Women's Studies Program, URI will be looking at a model and record of leadership that will be hard to match.

As a volunteer, Karen has also revealed her commitment to a world in which women gets equal chances and preparation. As an ESL tutor for two years, she prepared students to take the TOEFL test so that they could enter college to be trained, and so they could be certified for professional jobs similar to the ones they held in their home countries (as teachers, engineers, nurses, and dentists). The students in her class were all women, spouses of URI faculty, graduate students, or their spouses. The women were from Iran, China, Korea, and Brazil. For two years, she was also co-trainer in the program that prepared volunteers to become ESL tutors. In the spring of 2006, she presented a workshop on teaching ESL students how to analyze texts. These are the official volunteer hours for Karen, but for me, who sees the stream of students coming in and out of her office, it is important to say that her encouragement of women of all ages from all backgrounds and with all interests goes on in everything she offers at URI and beyond. One could say that her volunteer work for the National Fish & Wildlife Service is yet another way she brings her vision of peace and collaboration to the world. Her singing with the Raging Grannies of Westerly and her bringing them and several outstanding women activists to URI to talk with students shows students how active and vibrant their lives can be, and how one can work for women's rights in many different ways.

All the formal entries on Karen's C.V. speak to her long and outstanding service and commitment to women's rights and equal participation in the world. But this list does not capture the light in Karen's eyes or the endless hours of her service or her generous and far-reaching wisdom as she continues to make URI a place where women count. The model of leadership she presents, encouraging input from her colleagues, addressing difficult issues without fear, and inspiring reconciliation, collaboration, and innovation—these traits distinguish her as a leader and a contributor. Recently, she has also begun extending URI's Women's Studies reach into the larger RI community, in hopes of creating networks that can connect the talented business and professional women of Rhode Island with students and faculty at URI. The enormous and significant contributions Karen has made, without which women faculty, staff, and students would not have the rights and recognition they currently have, make her an ideal and deserving candidate for the Woman of the Year honor. If one considers the thousands of students and the many adults and faculty members Karen's work has touched and encouraged, one can see how her quiet, persistent, generous, and visionary leadership and service have contributed in unheralded ways to serving and enhancing the quality of life for women in our state and beyond.

Al Lott, Professor Emeritus of WMS and Psychology, won the Rhode Island Psychological Association 2007 Musiker-Merenda award for outstanding service to psychology.

