

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



“It is possible to see something
good and to work for it and
even dare to achieve it.
Don't be a spectator.
You are needed in every
corner of the community.”

—ELSIE HILLMAN



THE LEGACY OF ELSIE HILLMAN

a tribute



Elsie treated everyone with respect and dignity and valued every person's opinion.



It is with great sadness that the Institute of Politics notes the passing of one of Pittsburgh's finest, Elsie Hilliard Hillman, on August 4, 2015. Because of Elsie's numerous connections to the Institute, and because of the legacy she is leaving for our region, we at the Institute would like to take this opportunity to share how our relationship with Elsie developed and what she has meant and continues to mean to us personally and in terms of our work going forward.

A SHARED VISION

What connects the Institute of Politics to Elsie Hillman, one of the most powerful and well-respected community and political leaders in Pennsylvania's history? It is a shared vision and shared commitment to bringing people together to promote the betterment of the region.

Like Elsie, the Institute counts among its friends Republicans and Democrats alike and helps to provide a neutral space for honest dialogue where partisan rhetoric can be put aside. Elsie treated everyone with respect and valued every person's opinion. The Institute models itself on the philosophy that all stakeholders need to be included and that everyone's voice is important.

Elsie's efforts at inclusion of all kinds were marked throughout her political career and community work. She was primarily responsible for the involvement of African Americans in the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, and she encouraged and supported women candidates to run for office no matter what their party affiliation. The Institute also is committed to diversity sliced in a variety of ways—by race, gender, geography, age, and political affiliation, to name a few.

At the Institute, we explore all opportunities to expand the breadth and depth of our academic offerings to constituents and students alike. Recognizing the availability of rich archival collections of national and local dignitaries at the University of Pittsburgh, we undertook the development of case studies that provide an in-depth historical analysis of federal, state, and local public policies as related to today's policy environment.

Over the years, we have developed case studies out of the archival collections of former Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh (focusing on the state's response to the Three Mile Island Nuclear Accident), and former U.S. Senator H. John Heinz III (where we examined market-based incentives in environmental policy and a second study on Heinz's bipartisan work on behalf of senior citizens). These case studies are being used in colleges, universities, and policy centers throughout the United States.

Knowing that Elsie had extensive archives and that her leadership style and civic engagement principles mirrored that of the Institute, the leaders of the Institute approached her in the early 2000s about serving as a subject of a case study. Unlike the earlier case studies that focused on a specific pivotal event or public policy, this case study would illustrate Elsie's belief that despite one's political, social, or economic means, individuals of all stripes can be productive agents for positive change.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELSIE HILLMAN CASE STUDY

In 2009, after some persuasion, Elsie finally agreed to the case study. In crafting the publication, titled *Never a Spectator: The Political Life of Elsie Hillman*, the Institute and author, Kathy McCauley, conducted dozens of interviews with Hillman's longtime friends and colleagues and were able to rely on Elsie's extensive archives, composed of letters, photographs, newspaper clippings, and other mementos from her just-as-extensive career in the Republican Party and as a member of the Pittsburgh philanthropic community. Following the completion of the case study, Hillman graciously entrusted the care of her papers to the University of Pittsburgh Library System Archives Service Center, where students, faculty, and other researchers can learn lessons in leadership from her political, philanthropic, and humanitarian deeds.

More specifically, readers of the case study can expect to learn how Elsie's political career exemplifies the style of a "skilled social actor," a term coined by sociologist Neil Fligstein, and defined in the case study as "inspired entrepreneurs who know how to seize opportunities and lead others in a direction that they believe is good for the institution." Fligstein is later quoted saying of skilled social actors, "Their own sense of efficacy comes, not from some narrow conception of self-interest, but from the act of inducing cooperation and helping others attain ends."

The following quotes from the case study illustrate perfectly Elsie's work as a skilled social actor for the Republican Party and others:

- "She leads people to want to be part of that group, organization, or movement because she helps them to realize their goal and to make it work on the ground." —Martin Hamberger
- "She helps people to realize that "it's important to be able to work together on different issues and walk away, if not agreeing, at least not mad at each other." —Kevin Talley
- "She never wanted to be center stage. It was never about Elsie. She just worked behind the curtain." —Steve Dunkle
- "You know, she wasn't a fist pounder or a demander. She had a quiet, persuasive, but powerful manner in which to move people to consensus." —LeRoy Zimmerman

Never a Spectator primarily details the political aspects of Elsie's life over the course of 50 years. Those who know her will recognize that, as significant as her contributions were in that arena, they were at the very least matched and some might say outstripped by her efforts in the community. To speak of her work as philanthropy somewhat mischaracterizes it; she did not operate as a benefactor but became entrenched and involved at all levels of the causes to which she dedicated herself. The following story of her involvement in the creation of the Hillman Cancer Center is a perfect example.

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ELSIE HILLMAN AND THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH COMMUNITY: THE HILLMAN CANCER CENTER

Elsie's determination and personal conviction were showcased not only in politics but in the health care arena as well. Throughout the '80s and '90s, she served as a key member of the Regional Advisory Council for the Pittsburgh Cancer Institute. The council was charged with creating an environment in this region that would offer first-rate cancer treatment as well as much-needed research. In 1999, Elsie went one step further to realize these goals. Through the generous donations of the Henry L. Hillman and the Hillman foundations, the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute was expanded to create the Hillman Cancer Center. Since 2005, the Hillman Foundation has continued to donate to the center in support of an innovative scholars program, allowing the University of Pittsburgh to recruit top research talent from around the world. Since its opening in 2002, the Hillman Cancer Center has been regarded as the region's top-rated cancer research institute.

While health care and cancer treatment were of utmost importance to Elsie, her priority was always the patient. In order to ensure that world-class cancer care could be found in Pittsburgh, she championed the creation of an aggressive and cutting-edge cancer research program when establishing the Hillman Cancer Center. With her unwavering and passionate support, her wishes keep being met as the best and brightest researchers, scientists, and doctors have been and continue to be recruited to our region.



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ELSIE HILLIARD HILLMAN LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE

On May 17, 2012, the Institute celebrated the release of the *Mewer a Spectator* case study with an event that brought together the key players in the case study—Doris Carson Williams, Tom Ridge, Dick Thornburgh, Ron Kaufman, and Barbara Hafer—for a panel discussion. The evening was designed to bring to life Elsie's work on behalf of the five panelists and the countless others whose careers and lives she touched throughout her 50 years in politics.

The panel discussion covered topics that were explored in the case study, including Elsie's tireless efforts on behalf of candidates in whom and causes in which she believed. If she had an idea, she ran with it, and her ideas usually brought positive results. The panel also touched on an interesting topic that had not surfaced in the case study: that of compromise and consensus building. The panelists were at first in disagreement at the use of the word compromise to describe what Elsie did because of the word's negative connotation when paired with words like values. The group, with the assistance of moderator Max King, eventually came to the conclusion that what she did was build consensus, which, as Ridge eloquently stated, "...is the ultimate goal of a Republican government."

While the evening served as a wonderful tribute to Elsie and her work, leaders at the Institute and others felt that it would be inappropriate for the recognition to end there. And so that evening, Elsie received the inaugural Elsie Hilliard Hillman Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Public Service. She was gracious in her acceptance speech, acknowledging all of the individuals who had made such an impact on her life, just as she had touched theirs.

The uniqueness of this award is demonstrated by Elsie's lifetime of commitment and dedication to humanitarian causes. Because of this, the Institute sought only to gift this award from time to time to individuals who, through a combination of personal qualities, exceptional ability, and superior leadership and demonstrated courage, wisdom, and compassion as exemplified by Hillman, have made important contributions in public service to our region, the Commonwealth, and the nation.

For this reason, it may have come as a shock when, just two years later, an opportunity arose to recognize a pair of leaders whose collaborative leadership of two landmark Pittsburgh institutions resulted in unprecedented levels of economic development and growth in the region. On April 8, 2014, University of Pittsburgh then Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg and Carnegie Mellon University President Emeritus Jared Cohon jointly received the Elsie Hilliard Hillman Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Public Service in recognition of their service to their respective institutions and, more importantly, to Southwestern Pennsylvania, in honor of the occasion, Elsie stated that "no two men have impacted this region more than Mark Nordenberg and Jerry Cohon. Their unprecedented collaboration not only brought two universities together, but it led to new and exciting endeavors that grew the region's economy and competitiveness for generations to come."

The term "collaborative leadership" defined the efforts of Cohon and Nordenberg and also describes the character of Elsie Hillman present in their work. Institute director Terry Miller noted (continued on page 6)

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in her remarks that their cooperation should be termed “Leadership Squared,” because when two leaders work together the way they did, the results are exponentially beneficial for both. The panelists who discussed their work and its impact on the community—Ridge, Edie Shapiro, and Dennis Yablonsky—all agreed that Cohen and Nordberg had a choice when they ascended to their respective positions: They could choose to continue to compete for students, faculty, and resources, or they could share their respective assets, building on their comparative advantages. In the spirit of Esie Hillman, they both chose the latter path, and the results for the region are self-evident. And, as was the case with Esie, everything comes down to friendship. Eva Tansky Blum, Pitt Trustee and president of the PNC Foundation, commented regarding their collaboration, “It’s more than just a business relationship; they have a personal relationship. They like each other; their families like each other. And that, I think, has sparked even more collaboration.”

THE ELSIE HILLMAN CIVIC FORUM

The early chapters of *Never a Spectator* shed some light about the people who inspired Esie to be a leader. Republican U.S. Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania was one such influential person early in her career. As the case study notes, Scott “showed her how to apply her natural gifts in politics” and “encouraged her to take on ever-higher leadership roles in the party.” She in turn served as a mentor to a long list of political and community leaders in the Pittsburgh area and beyond.

In 2014, as a further step in sharing her experiences with the next generation of leaders, Henry Hillman, Esie’s loving husband and partner for 70 years, generously awarded the Institute an endowment to establish the Esie Hillman Civic Forum. The “Esie Forum,” as we have come to call it, is designed to engage students in activities that will prepare them to lead lives as engaged and contributing citizens. Among other things and reflecting the pattern of her own life, the Esie Forum will bring community leaders and young people together for educational programs, research projects, and mentoring opportunities designed to foster student interest and involvement in fueling civic progress in the Pittsburgh region.

The Forum’s advisory board, composed of national political figures including former Pennsylvania first lady Marjorie Rendell and Ron Kaufman, former special advisor to President George H.W. Bush, in addition to local leaders, will meet in fall 2015 to set parameters for the student programming, which is scheduled to begin in 2016.



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MOVING FORWARD: ELSIE’S LEGACY

As servant leaders, the Institute’s board members and staff recognize and honor the humility with which Esie carried out her work, using her rank and influence not ever for her own benefit but solely to benefit those causes in which and those people in whom she believed.

It also is important to note that, throughout these years of working together, Institute staff members began to think of Esie as a friend more than a colleague or a benefactor. It is in that respect that she will be missed most. As President George H.W. Bush wrote in a letter that was shared at the 2012 event, what he and most people appreciated about Esie were her joy, her laughter, and her friendship. Esie remained committed to and involved in the work of the Institute, making decisions on design concepts and programming ideas for the Esie Hillman Civic Forum just weeks before her death. Her caring involvement in this project, and all others before it, will serve as her legacy and an inspiration to others.

As Miller states in the foreword to Esie’s case study, “The Institute of Politics at the University of Pittsburgh has a long and rich history of creating opportunities to help regional leaders and the general public to see and understand our shared responsibility for improving the quality of the lives of those in our home region.” The Institute takes that mission seriously, as do many others, and Esie’s legacy will continue as long as there are those in this region who follow her example of caring more about the welfare and well-being of others than they do about wealth, power, or personal ambition.



Esie carried out her work, using her rank and influence not ever for her own benefit but solely to benefit those causes in which and those people in whom she believed.





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