

On Tour *with Marion Milne*



PHOTO BY JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR

Marion Milne has made her mark on Vermont, serving three terms in the state legislature and running a family-owned travel business for nearly 35 years. But her true success story may stem from her ongoing passion for serving others.

BY JEFFERY LINDHOLM

GROWING UP IN A BIG FAMILY in New York City during the Depression and World War II, Marion Milne never expected to go to college, but she did, graduating from Goddard in 1974, at age 40. In fact, she remains the only one from her family of 13 to graduate from college. Goddard, she says, led her to a six-year stint in the Vermont Legislature. And since 1975, she has run Milne Travel, based in Barre.

In the early 1970s, Marion's spirit of community action and desire to help others led her to do outreach work for Central Vermont's Community Action Council. The group was set up under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight the War on Poverty. Its aim was and is to "help people to help themselves" and reach economic self-sufficiency.

"You called on people in their homes – low-income people – and tried to help them in whatever way you could," Marion explains. "I enjoyed that very much, and I still like being involved in those things."

At that point, several things fortuitously came together for her. "I think it was right before I worked in the Goddard admissions

department that I took the test for a high school diploma," she remembers. With her diploma and financial help from a program that offered college tuition assistance for Community Action workers, Marion was able to enroll in Goddard's Experimental Program in Furthering Education (GEPFE).

Her classmates were "a lot of adults...and there were some younger students, but it was mostly people who were interested in some sort of community service," she says. "I went to classes on Friday nights and all day Saturday, and my husband babysat."

As an adult student, Marion didn't feel out of place at Goddard, even being a good bit older than most of the other students.

"Certainly in the community, Goddard had a reputation of being a very hippie-type college," she says, but "I never thought that or experienced that myself." She says her time at Goddard was a good experience that helped her in many ways later on.

"I learned a lot and a different way of thinking," she says. "Being in the legislature and some of the other things [I did] were a direct result of some of the things I learned at Goddard."

In 1994, Marion's interest in helping people led her to run for the Vermont House of Representatives seat from >>continued on page 27



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Marion Milne *continued from page 20*

Orange County. At that point, she had been running Milne Travel for almost two decades, and she trusted a friend and coworker to cover the business if and when state duties took her away.

“To be perfectly honest, I didn’t think I’d win when I started to run,” she says. “In the Republican primary, there were five people running.”

Surprising herself, Marion did get elected – to three terms. She says she always tried to be available to those who needed help with the system, particularly social services, and she enjoyed helping people take care of problems that they couldn’t solve themselves.

“I think that all comes from the interest in serving,” she says, and “a good bit of it comes from the Goddard experience, for me.”

Marion voted in 2000 for Vermont’s civil union bill, which granted legal rights, if not the right to marry, to same-sex couples in Vermont – the first such law in the country. In doing so, she went against the Republican caucus, and the vote cost her the next election.

Reflecting on her legislative experience overall, though, she says she always cast her vote according to what she thought was right for the people.

“I had seven grandchildren then – I have eight now – and I had their picture on my

portrait of a monthly donor




A GODDARD REGULAR Organizing the college archives isn’t the only contribution Priscilla Backman has made to Goddard. She’s been donating a small gift, every month, for years.

PRISCILLA BACKMAN HAS BEEN AT GODDARD FOR 60 YEARS. She graduated in 1946 and worked as director of the Work Term during the roaring ’60s. Then she “found” the Goddard Archives, a work in progress created by scores of passionate volunteers who love Goddard’s history. Her brother, Forrest Davis, and her good friend, Evalyn Bates, came in every day for years, often with Priscilla. Thanks to these folks, the Goddard Archives are now full of labeled boxes and files, with a wealth of preserved history available to be catalogued.

Priscilla is a monthly donor: it makes sense to her. “I know that there are a lot of alums who can’t give a lot and are embarrassed to send in a \$10 check,” she says. “And yet, \$10 a month really adds

up. It’s such a good idea.”

Why does she give to Goddard this way? “I went to hear Jackson Kytle when he started as president. He mentioned that grant-making foundations ask what percentage of alumni give money to their college. They don’t even look at the total raised,” she says. “That tells them whether the college is worth giving a grant to. If large numbers of its graduates give something – however small – regularly. Ever since, I’ve given every month.”

This form of giving, as she says, “in dribs and drabs,” has accumulated to an impressive \$2,609. Thank you to Priscilla for your loyal support, on behalf of everyone who loves Goddard and wants to see it prosper. 

— BY SARAH JO HOOKER

desk the whole time,” she says. “Quite often, if there was some issue that was troubling me, I tried to think about what was best for these kids in the future, and that helped me a lot.”

Marion is still working, with her son and other family members, at Milne Travel,

and she hasn’t stopped helping others, either. She lobbies on senior citizen issues at the Statehouse, works with the Public Assets Institute, and serves on “nine or 10 boards at the moment.”

“I’ve been involved in a lot of issues,” she says, “that are still very important to me.” 