



Esther K. Shapiro

(1917- 2016)

Inducted: 2015 Locale: Detroit Era: Contemporary Group: Jewish
Area(s) of Achievement: Civil Rights, Consumer Protection, Government, Politics

Esther K. Shapiro has led a life of effective contributions to civil rights, voting rights and consumer rights, all of which have had significant positive local, state and national impact.

She was the first director of Detroit's Consumer Affairs Department, appointed by Mayor Coleman Young in 1974, and held this position until her retirement in 1998. Starting in 1966, she broadcast a regular consumer report on radio station WWJ and wrote a weekly column for the Detroit Free Press until the newspaper unions went on strike. She continues to be called on by researchers, journalists, and former colleagues, both locally and nationally.

After participating in President Johnson's War on Poverty Volunteering Training Program at Detroit Public Schools, Shapiro became a consumer education specialist at the Michigan Credit Union League, a statewide organization serving more than one million credit union families. Since her retirement, Shapiro has continued to lecture on consumer affairs and protections to community organizations and public institutions.

Shapiro, along with her husband, labor union organizer Harold Shapiro, was at the forefront of getting support for voting rights and civil rights, and helping get African Americans elected to local and national offices. She worked in the campaign offices of Congressman John Conyers and Congressman George Crockett, and was an early supporter of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. through the Michigan Friends of the South—an informal Detroit women's group that raised funds for the civil rights activities of Dr. King and the Freedom Marchers. Dr. King acknowledged the importance of these efforts in a meeting with Shapiro and the other members of this group when he came to Detroit in the 1960s.

These successful and important activities have been recognized by colleagues and organizations through her election to a variety of national consumer protection boards, including president of the Consumer Federation of America. She was the first non-lawyer to achieve the State Bar of Michigan's Frank Kelly Consumer Award. The Detroit Urban League recognized the civil rights advocacy of Shapiro and her husband with a Distinguished Warrior Award. The Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals in Business named its annual award after Shapiro, now given to those who share her visionary leadership and ethical standards in consumer affairs.