

## History of Marian A. Spencer Statue

It was Alice Schneider's idea. After finding out that the City of Cincinnati didn't have a single statue to honor a woman, she decided it was high time to change that. And when she considered what woman should be given that honor, she immediately thought of her fellow Woman's City Club member and tireless human rights activist -- Marian Spencer.

That was back in May of this year, just a few months before Spencer died on July 9, at the age of 99. Schneider asked their shared friend Dot Christenson if she would ask Spencer if she would want to have a statue to commemorate her life. When Spencer said "I would be honored to have a statue in my honor," and signed a statement to that effect, Schneider hit the ground running to get the Woman's City Club on board, start fundraising, find a sculptor and pin down a location.

"We needed to get started quickly because we want it to be finished and dedicated on June 28, 2020, on what would have been Marian's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday," said Schneider, past president of Woman's City Club. "While there were some other women we could have honored, they are long since gone. I thought, Marian Spencer would be the perfect person to break this barrier. Now is the time."

Spencer's many accomplishments include: spearheading the integration of Coney Island; fighting to open University of Cincinnati dormitories to Black students; suing to integrate Cincinnati Public Schools; and her election as the first African American woman on Cincinnati City Council. Spencer died July 9 at the age of 99.

Things moved quickly and now it's official – Marian Spencer will be honored with a statue in her honor, commissioned by the Woman's City Club. It will be located at Smale Park, at 166 W. Mehring Way downtown, in the southeast corner of the park, in the Women's Committee Garden.

The Woman's City Club kicked off a fundraising campaign to build the statue today. The Marian Spencer Statue Committee members are: Alice Schneider, Dot Christensen, Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney, Arzell Nelson, Susan Noonan, Brewster Rhoads, Aurelia Simmons and Mary Wells.

Christenson, who was a close friend of Spencer and who wrote a biography of her life "Keep On Fighting: The Life and Civil Rights Legacy of Marian A. Spencer," said she was thrilled to join the group responsible for making the statue a reality.

“In my book, her awards and board appointments alone filled two pages,” Christenson said. “She was such a unique person, and she never stopped. She stayed active up until she was 96 or 97. If anyone deserves to be the first woman in Cincinnati to be honored with a statue, it’s Marian.”

Cincinnati Herald Publisher Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney, who had known Spencer all of her life, said that Spencer was a tireless worker for every cause she became involved in. “She was a role model and shining example for every one of us.”

The next most important task, finding a sculptor, was facilitated by Susan Noonan, who created the Cincinnati Association’s “Donald and Marian Spencer Spirit of America Awards” and dinner. (The awards are given to nonprofits “who make conspicuous and enduring contribution to greater inclusion and diversity in the community,” according to the Cincinnati Association website.) She connected Tom Tsuchiya, best known for sculpting the figures outside Great American Ball Park, with the Marian Spencer Statue Committee.

As soon as Tsuchiya found out that the project he was being considered for would honor Spencer, he knew it was a perfect match. He had always admired her achievements, and they also shared that both are University of Cincinnati graduates, and both received awards as distinguished alumni.

Tsuchiya is creating the statue with his apprentice Gina Erardi, who is co-sculptor on this project. Erardi, a senior painting major at NKU, did most of the research on Spencer, reading Christenson’s biography to learn more of her life and personality.

After the research, he decided on the current design, a life sized 5 feet, 3 inch Spencer figure with two children figures. Spencer is holding the girl’s hand and the girl is holding the boy’s hand. It will be a golden brown color, made of bronze. The girl has African American features and the boy has Chinese features.

“I decided against a single figure. That kind of statue is usually mounted high and it’s meant to be imposing, looking down on everyone,” Tsuchiya said. “Marian wasn’t like that. She was a person of the people.”

“It’s a special design that reflects the motto of the city of Cincinnati and UC – Juncta Juvant -- which means ‘Strength In Unity,’” Tsuchiya added. “She was a wonderful person to be honored with a statue. She was very brave and stood up to right what was wrong. It was important to capture for image for eternity.”