Admirers are working with the YWCA to honor Betty Friedan

Betty Friedan founded the National Organization for Women with her friends in 1966. Today, Beverly Erlich, Diane Brown, Fran Keeler and some of their friends are planning how to honor one of Peoria's most famous daughters over the years, showing again how women can make big change over small conversation.

Friedan, best known for sparking the feminist movement with her 1963 book "The Feminine Mystique," was born and raised in Peoria, and though she moved away during her college years, she then returned to visit friends and family regularly, to help Illinois pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

She died Feb. 4, 2006, her 66th birthday, from complications of a fall, her hometown has struggled since to find a lasting tribute — until now.

Better than a statue
"I got to meet Betty Friedan during the ERA struggles and spoke with her at a League of Women Voters meeting. I found in her voice and her Keeler is that kind of woman who was legible for the time."

In this county, I realized Betty Friedan would not want to be a "target of parece. That attitude, or that's not going to work for her. That's not the type of living, blood-shot and tear-drenched tribute that would bett fryer."

While choosing options, the women revisited Friedan's books and a light bulb went off for Keeler.

At the end of "The Feminine Mystique," she talks about what she's learned women can do by combating their own lack of self-confidence. Friedan is described as a "professional child," who had a light bulb moment.

"That's all kinds of support. That's when the light bulbs went off." said Keeler.

A 'natural' tribute
Keeler and the others, now a committee of 10 civic women, are working to plan a natural tribute to Friedan.

"It's a marriage of tribute with existing services," said Keeler, "and it's far-reaching."

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Peoria chapter is working to raise $10,000 to support the YWCA and continue its child-care center.

"That's why it's such a natural. We didn't have to do anything new or try to reimagine the wheel."

The Betty Friedan Tribute Committee is working to raise $10,000 to support the YWCA and rename its child-care center the Betty Friedan Child Care Center. Additionally, the group is establishing a "celebration fund" within the YWCA to honor Friedan and other notable central Illinois women who have "contributed to equality in our community, furthering the natural alliance between feminism, human- ity and family life.""We are in a public park, Lakeview, so that opportunity by the area at the YWCA, still will always be there," said Scherff, noting that the controversy would not be an improvement to an educational revival of Friedan's work.

Still, the committee has found that significant fundraising is a hurdle, with the community being tapped for many worthy projects — everything from the two to the children's museum, elementary education, family housing and Children's Hospital expansion. Until now, they have been successful in raising $85,000 for that purpose and have already raised more than $10,000.

"It's wonderful. I think a lot of women — and men — will want to give even $1 or $2," said Gena Brown, program coordinator for the Mental Health Association of Illinois Valley, which raised a lot of people's lives.

Dorothy Sinclair, the second woman elected to the Peoria City Council in 1979, jokes that she "made the mistake of reading 'The Feminine Mystique,' and I turned up local off any of the ERA movement. I worked very hard on it."

It was a time of great controversy in Peoria."

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I was practically working from front-page news."

Today, a woman has no problem becoming a doctor or, as we've just seen, running for presi- dential or vice president of the United States. Yet, as years went on, when Friedan was first published, the world was a much different place, and her views were controversial.

Stated, Keeler, Brown and the others don't want people to forget.

"We want a place where we can come pay homage, where we can take our daughters and our Girl Scout troops," Keeler said. "We don't want to forget these women. We all stand on their shoulders."

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Staging this artistically rendered photograph of pioneering feminist Betty Friedan speaking at the Peoria YWCA dur- ing an Equal Rights Amendment rally in the 1970s now hangs in the Peoria County Courthouse.

Helping honor Betty Friedan

"Maybe my power and glory was that I could speak my truth as a woman and as the truth of every woman." — Betty Friedan

Betty Friedan, the mother of modern-day feminism, is one of Peoria's most influen-
tial people. Her 1963 book, "The Femi-
nine Mystique," is listed among the most influential works ever written. She is also noted as one of the 100 most influential women of all time, placing behind Eleanor Roosevelt but ahead of Joan of Arc.

A committee is creating a living tribute Friedan to work raising $10,000 to rename the YWCA child-care center the Betty Friedan Child Care Center.

To contribute:
Visit the Web site www.peoria.ywca.org. Write to:
Betty Friedan Tribute
YWCA Peoria
1013 W. Lake Ave.
Peoria, IL 61614
Or telephone: 688-1605

Peoria native Betty Friedan speaks in the 1974 file photo. The Betty Friedan Tribute Commiss- tee is working to raise $10,000 to support the YWCA and rename its child-care center the Betty Friedan Child Care Center.