

SYLVIA MAY MEAR

(nee FOUNTAIN) 05/07/1922 – 27/05/2010

Sylvia lived her entire life in Hertford and loved her community. Involved with setting up the Community Centre on Sele Farm estate, she championed the youth club and activities for the elderly. A volunteer for Age Concern for over 50 years, she served as County Chair and as a member of the UK committee. She launched the Visiting Scheme in Hertford which quickly went countywide. A trustee for Age Endeavour and Relief in Need in Hertford, Sylvia still found time to manage a local fashion store and be a school governor, all while caring for her family. In 2000, Sylvia received the East Hertfordshire Council's community award, and in 2007 was named a Hero of Hertford in the town churches' search for unsung heroes.



Sylvia joined Soroptimist International Hertford & District in May 1967, and brought this same energy and commitment to the club. She served as secretary and regional representative for many years, and her willingness to serve as president three times undoubtedly prevented the demise of the club. Sylvia recognised the importance of promoting Soroptimist values in the wider community and masterminded some very high profile events.

On her own admission, being a Soroptimist broadened Sylvia's outlook, giving her greater awareness of global issues facing women and girls and the determination to do something about them. She represented London Chilterns Region on what is now Programme Action, served as secretary for 6 years and was President 1984/1985.

She celebrated her Regional President's Day in County Hall Hertford, holding the Business Meeting in the Council Chamber. This was followed by a fashion show with each of the 20 clubs providing a model! How did she do this? Probably with the same powers of persuasion that enabled her to borrow clothes belonging to the late Barbara Cartland!

Sylvia was a doer who inspired others. She was one of the most influential people in the founding of SI Thames Valley, enabling the club to join London Chilterns Region in 1990.

Sylvia served on the Federation Executive and was their representative for UNICEF for 4 years. It was during this period that she inaugurated a Frugal Supper at SI Hertford in order to raise funds to support the work of the Charity in the Romanian orphanages. The Frugal Supper has become an annual event for SI Hertford in Sylvia's memory, with proceeds earmarked for the current Federation Project.

When Federation President Hilary Page asked Sylvia to be Chair of her 1990 Conference in Jersey, Hilary had full confidence in Sylvia's organisational skills and attention to detail.

Despite her involvement at Regional and Federation level, Sylvia's feet remained firmly on the ground and she never wavered in her dedication to both her club and her work in the community. She was ahead of her time in recognising mental health issues in the elderly, and never lost sight of the fact that Soroptimist International is a service organisation.

A Hertford girl through and through and a true Soroptimist, service was the cornerstone of Sylvia's life.

Photo credit SI Hertford Archives