

Dr. Mary Stewart-Pellegrini

Class of 1966

MCHS Hall of Fame Induction 2024

Dr. Mary Stewart-Pellegrini embodies the spirit and values of MCHS. Growing up, her family taught her to value education, hard work, self-reliance, and service to others. Mary attended the Broadway School from age five where her teacher, Mrs. Anna O'Banion, helped cultivate her life-long love for learning. At MCHS, Mary actively participated in extracurricular activities where she learned critical thinking, teamwork, and an appreciation for the arts. Her favorites included playing clarinet in the band, writing for the *Madisonian*, and performing with the Thespian Club.



During her first year at Indiana University, Mary took a creative writing class where she discovered the value of self-reflection and non-judgmentally listening to classmates' stories. These skills helped ease her sense of responsibility for the accidental drowning of her 7-year-old brother, Paul Steven, in 1960. Reflection on that loss and other difficult memories of segregation became the catalyst for deeper self-understanding, helping her view challenging life experiences as growth and personal development opportunities.

While at IU, she earned a BS in English Literature and an MS in Adult Literacy Education. Following graduation, she moved to Boston and worked for two years at Boston University, and was later appointed the Director of Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Committee on Degrees where she supervised dissertation completions. Harvard proved to be a transformative experience, allowing her to interact with and learn from a worldwide network of visiting scholars.

As a student in Boston College's Ph.D. program, she took business and higher education administration courses to learn about the differences between managing a business and leading an academic institution. In addition, she took leadership and organizational development courses at the National Training Laboratories Institute for Applied Behavioral Science. While completing her degree, she simultaneously volunteered at Boston's Charles Street Jail, helping white-collar criminals create recidivism reduction plans to initiate their transition back into civilian life, accepted the Associate Dean of Students position at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, and was appointed to the Human Rights Commission by the Governor of Maine. She completed her dissertation, graduating with distinction from Boston College with a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration.

Returning to the Midwest, Mary blazed a trail embarking on a very successful and fulfilling career. Growing up surrounded by generations of African American farmers and self-made small business owners who had relevant skills but rarely obtained jobs outside of their community, she always had a deep appreciation for entrepreneurship and hard work. As the Director of Equal Employment Opportunities for Bell Laboratory's research facility, she attended an event in honor of Bishop

Desmond Tutu where he spoke about his role in the non-violent campaign against apartheid in South Africa. She was inspired to volunteer with the United Methodist Global Ministries in England, Thailand, Japan, China, and the Philippines.

As a Senior Management Consultant with Bell Laboratories' Organizational Effectiveness Consulting Group, Mary learned the art of consulting. While there were few models for female-owned business consulting firms at the time, Mary incorporated her own company, Stewart Management Group, LLC in 1987. Believing business growth is linked to the owner's relationship building, excellent customer service, and continuous learning she led her team for 32 years, providing management training, executive leadership coaching, teamwork assessments, and strategic business development services to numerous high-profile clients from government, academic, corporate, and non-profit sectors. Her experiences with these influential organizations and ability to study their formal and informal cultures - peoples' beliefs, customs, and attitudes attributed to her book *'Assume Nothing, Think Again'* which introduces Equity Checking[®], a novel critical thinking model that teaches individuals to identify and challenge their assumptions and biases held about others.

Her commitment to excellence in education, civic engagement, and to social justice for all people has been and remains the bedrock of her life. She is a World Trade Center survivor. Given the gift of her life, while so many lost theirs on September 11, 2001, she remains the author of her ever-changing story, supporting others in discovering how their thinking affects their choices and encouraging them to be their best selves.