

Schaefer

From A1

women in nearby Dover.

Tom Schaefer, her son, recalls that his mother talked frequently about the prison inmates — she called them students — and how she hoped they could turn their fortunes around with a little more education.

“She saw the difference she could make in their lives,” her son said. “She was a kind, giving person.”

After a life spent traveling, learning, teaching and helping, Marlyn Schaefer died on Memorial Day following a long battle with kidney disease. She was 91 years old.

Those who knew her say that Schaefer dedicated much of her life to people who were struggling, by offering whatever she could to help them find a better way.

Kathy Cuccia, a longtime colleague in the county human services department, said Schaefer urged her co-workers to always treat welfare recipients with respect, and to remain steadfast in showing them how to overcome obstacles in their lives.

Schaefer was “all about helping somebody,” Cuccia said.

“She was never going to become president of the United States or anything big like that,” Cuccia said. “But what she did was important to a lot of people.”

Born in 1930, Marlyn Walch grew up on a farm with six brothers and sisters near Prairie du Sac, just north of Madison. After high school, she moved to Chicago to attend art school while working in the glitzy downtown Marshall Field’s department store.

Returning a few years later to Wisconsin, she met Herbert Schaefer on a blind date. The couple married in 1952 and would celebrate



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Dorina Nelson, left, now a successful business owner, arrived from Romania in 1997, and an acquaintance introduced her to Marlyn Schaefer, right, who spent a year with Nelson in a public library teaching her to read and write English.

nearly 50 years of marriage together before he died in 2001.

The family moved to Racine County in the early ‘60s when Herbert landed a job at the American Motors Corp. plant in Kenosha, and later at the J.I. Case Co. tractor plant in Mount Pleasant.

Marlyn, known to many as “Marlee,” doted on the couple’s eight children in their home, which included a small farm, just east of Union Grove.

Her daughter, Marta Kultgen, said Marlyn was creative and resourceful about using the farm and her own cooking skills to keep the family fed on a tight budget. She baked bread, canned vegetables, and developed a pecan caramel roll that she sent to school to share with the children’s teachers.

“She was always busy,” Kultgen said. “We had homemade everything — everything.”

Schaefer taught her kids never to use the word “hate,” and she encouraged others, too, to avoid such nasty rhetoric.

When the youngest of the eight kids started kindergar-

ten, Schaefer took a job with the Racine County Human Services Department, counseling public aid recipients. She worked there for 20 years, retiring in 1993.

Noticing that many people on welfare also lacked in education, Schaefer began looking for an opportunity to promote literacy. She found it at the state prison in Dover, where she began tutoring inmates two days a week through the Racine Literacy Council.

She continued her work at the prison for 25 years, earning awards from both the Literacy Council and the Volunteer Center of Racine.

Schaefer also traveled extensively, visiting all 50 states as well as Europe, Australia, Mexico, Jamaica and the Bahamas.

Family and friends say she valued education, and she always sought out ways to learn something new, whether by visiting a historic place overseas or by taking a glimpse inside the life of a single mother on welfare.

“She just had a very good attitude towards life. I always admired her,” Cuccia said. “She was just very human.”