



Downers Grove
Historical Society

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact:

Liz Chalberg

Board Member, DG Historical Society

Phone: 630-660-6767

Email: Lchalberg@att.net

www.dghistory.org

**Downers Grove Historical Society to honor Mary Ellen Young,
As the 2024 Montrew Dunham Award Recipient**



Every year, the Downers Grove Historical Society identifies an individual who epitomizes the spirit of ‘giving back’ to the community of Downers Grove. The late Montrew Dunham is the model for this award, a woman who, among other contributions, co-wrote our history book “Downers Grove, 1832-1982’ and wrote the follow-up ‘Downers Grove Revisited.’

This year, the Historical Society recognizes Mary Ellen Young as its 2024 recipient of the Montrew Dunham Award for her leadership to improve local childhood education, reduce bullying in schools, foster adolescent and teen mental health, and champion organizations that make Downers Grove a great place to live now and for future generations.

The ceremony will be on Sat., Oct. 5th, 2024, from 1-3 pm in the James Henry Breasted Auditorium at Lincoln Center, 935 Maple Ave. in Downers Grove. The event is free and open to the public; please register at www.dghistory.org/events/. For questions, please email info@downersgrovehistory.org

##

Full Article follows:

2024 Montrew Dunham Award Recipient – Mary Ellen Young

By Joyce Tumea

The Downers Grove Historical Society has named Mary Ellen Young as the recipient of the 2024 Montrew Dunham Award. The Montrew Dunham Award was established in 2019 by the Downers Grove Historical Society to honor those whose significant service and contributions to the Village of Downers Grove have earned them a place in its history.

Young's fields of interest have been promoting quality education, adolescent, and teen mental health, and supporting philanthropies and other worthy causes within Downers Grove. After graduating from Michigan State's College of Business in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management, she was offered a consulting position at Pannell Kerr Forster, an accounting firm with an emphasis on the hospitality industry. She traveled all over the country, including to Hawaii, performing hotel feasibility studies for developers and lending institutions during a development boom in the late 1980s.

After her marriage in 1987 to Dr. Tony Young, they settled in Downers Grove. Her first involvement in community service in Downers Grove came about after she read a newspaper article and realized the subject was "right up her alley!" she explained. Mayor Betty Cheever had announced that the Village would initiate a state-approved hotel tax and would need a committee to assist the Village Council in how to spend it. Mary Ellen expressed interest in the topic and Mayor Cheever appointed her to the Hotel Tax Advisory Board. The Advisory Board developed a strategic plan, which led to the formation of the new Visitors Bureau and the Economic Development Corporation, both funded by the hotel tax. Mary Ellen served on the Visitors Bureau (1994-2000) and became Chairperson. The Bureau funded and coordinated several exciting events including the Ice Sculpture Festival, Pro Criterium Bike Race, and Sears Home Tours.

When their second daughter was born, Young worked in her husband's orthodontic office helping to expand the business. With their two daughters in District 58 schools, Young became interested in the district and its workings. When the district reported it required a referendum to stay afloat, she dug in to learn about the situation. She created a brief for Hillcrest School parents to understand how schools are funded. Encouraged by others to run for the school board, she did so, which resulted in her serving two terms from 2001-2009.

When groundbreaking research about bullying in schools surfaced, she read the books that explained the research – "*Odd Girl Out*" and "*Queen Bees and Wannabees*." Then after reading the monthly National School Board magazine cover story, "How Girls Hurt - the Quiet Violence in Your School," she took action. Young contacted the Downers Grove Area Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), with whom she arranged a public panel discussion on Bullying in the Fall of 2003. Held at the Downers Grove Public Library, a large crowd in attendance encouraged the effort to continue. Eventually, with the help of co-founder Cathy Fisher and several committed board members, the non-profit organization, Helping Girls Navigate Adolescence (HGNA) was officially born in September 2005.

The group's first goal was to educate parents, which they accomplished by organizing a variety of speaking engagements featuring experts and authors. In 2006, their first girls' program, Chick Chat, was formed. A fun and engaging Chick Chat curriculum was created with two major strands: "Be Your Best Self" and "Friends, Frenemies, and Fiascos." The event

included small group discussions led by trained counselors and included games, crafts, yoga, and lunch. Girls engaged in topics including empathy, managing emotions, friendship skills, and self-acceptance. Sponsorships and grant money helped fund the program which included paying the counselors. Countless volunteers supported Chick Chat's success.

"At its peak," Young stated, "the program served 350 girls and used every inch of Herrick Middle School. The curriculum was shared with other communities, such as Geneva and LaGrange, who started their own Chick Chat. HGNA also developed programs for girls in early elementary and middle school. Later, the organization rebranded to become "Navigate Adolescence," to serve both girls *and* boys. Young was president of HGNA for four years and worked to make it sustainable before she stepped down to become Program Director. Together with Sandra McDonnell who became president, they expanded HGNA.

Also, during this time, Fisher and Young wrote and published a book, "Elements for Girls." It has ten theme-based chapters focusing on social-emotional skill development. The book came with a bracelet kit, and a charm depicting each chapter. The team provided parent education programs throughout the area, using the book's themes.

As a result of the Children's Mental Health Act passed in 2003, Dr. Darlene Ruscitti, DuPage County Superintendent of Schools, asked Young to join a team to implement the new Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards. In her professional role as Family Advocate, Young supported outreach to parents in each participating school.

In 2010, when the Illinois Legislature updated and strengthened the bullying legislation, Dr. Ruscitti appointed Mary Ellen to the DuPage County Anti-Bullying Task Force where she co-chaired the "Best Practices" Committee with Ruth Cross. They developed a research-based "Best Practices" manual, which received state recognition.

Her experience with public education prompted Dr. Ruscitti to appoint Mary Ellen to a vacancy on the DuPage County Regional Board of School Trustees in 2011, to which she was later elected, serving until 2019.

In 2008, she joined the Grove Foundation, a well-established local organization, and has been president since 2018. Under her guidance, the organization's funding capacity expanded through two fundraisers: Passport to Dining and the annual Golf Outing. The foundation formed a Grant Committee, and in 2023 gave a record-breaking \$15,000 in grants to local non-profits.

Over the years, Mary Ellen has been a volunteer basketball and softball coach, and Girl Scout co-leader. She continues to work with the Special Olympics Tennis Competition each June by coordinating volunteers.

The 2024 Montrew Dunham Award ceremony honoring Mary Ellen Young will be at 1 p.m. on Sat., Oct. 5, in the James Henry Breasted auditorium at Lincoln Center, 935 Maple Ave. in Downers Grove, and is free to the public. Registration is requested at www.dghistory.org/events/. For questions, please email info@downersgrovehistory.org