

Bell, Esther Kampsen 1912 - 2002

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Esther Kampsen Bell, political mover, shaker

Esther Kampsen Bell, who died Sunday at age 89, never ran for public office. But she helped many who did. She left behind photos of herself with Kentucky's governors, including Paul Patton, signed with thanks for her help, said her son, Dan Bell of Taylor Mill. "It seems like she was always on some committee," he said. "She just liked being with people and associating with people and working on projects and trying to accomplish things."

The homemaker and mother of four became interested in politics when she joined the PTA at St. Benedict's School and later served as president. She joined the Kenton County Democratic Women's Club and held several offices, including president from 1975-77. She went on to the state organization, rising to serve as third vice president in 1979-80 and from 1982 to 1986.

When her husband, Samuel Monroe Bell, died in 1987, she became even more involved, often with her friend, Mabel Ballinger of Covington. "A lot of the politicians used to be in our living room, asking her to support them," her son said. After macular degeneration claimed Ms. Bell's eyesight, Ms. Ballinger took her to Democratic functions across the state.

Ms. Bell served as her mentor, teacher, friend and confidante, Ms. Ballinger said. "We cried many times over things over the phone, but most of the time we laughed about things," she said.

In 1999, the Democrat Women's Clubs of Kentucky gave Ms. Bell the annual Rose Award for her outstanding service and dedication. She was especially proud of her work establishing the Senior Citizens of Northern Kentucky, whose board she served on from 1972 to 1993, her son said.

Ms. Bell stood about 5 feet 10 inches tall, Ms. Ballinger said, and carried herself like a queen. She had a keen sense of humor and strong will. Once, on the way into church, a heckler called Ms. Bell, a Catholic, an abortionist because of her support for one candidate, Ms. Ballinger said. She said Ms. Bell turned and told the heckler that she had stayed in bed for three months to save one of her unborn children. "Don't you dare say that," she added.

Ms. Bell died at 10:49 a.m. at the Village Care Center in Erlanger.

Survivors in addition to Daniel Bell include another son, Dennis Michael Bell of Taylor Mill; daughters, Sue Bell Baum of Delhi, Ohio, and Jeannine Bell Smith of Crescent Springs; eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Mass of Christian burial will be at 10 a.m. Thursday at St. Benedict Church, Covington. Visitation will be from 4 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Swindler and Currin Funeral Home, Latonia. Burial will be in Mother of God Cemetery, Fort Wright.

Memorials are suggested to St. Benedict Church, 338 E. 17th St., Covington, Ky. 41014.

