

Documenting a Progressive Life

Perlmut Crafts a Documentary on Congresswoman Cook

By JESSE DISBROW

Connie Cook was one of the area's most progressive congresswomen, and Sue Perlmut hopes that a new documentary will help inform people about Cook and the issues she faced.

Perlmut has always had a background in theatre and performance, she's been a part of performances and troupes since high school. Within the past eight years she's put together a pair of documentaries and directed a fitness video.

The workout video is for older people working to stay fit that she says she uses a few times a week, and the documentary is on Hospicare. Perlmut said that both her parents used Hospicare services and she wanted to give back to the organization by collecting Hospicare stories into a documentary. Perlmut worked with an aspiring filmmaker, Christopher Julian, who also hadn't made a documentary film prior to "101 Ways to Retire," on both

of the documentaries. Perlmut said that during filming of the Hospicare documentary "Beets and Beens: Living and Dying with Hospicare" Julian moved out to Seattle, however, he continued filming out there and the documentary was able to get perspectives from both coasts.

Perlmut took a little bit of time off from documentaries before starting the Connie Cook project, though she said that the idea for it predated the start of the project by several years.

"I admire her for doing this at a time when many other women weren't," said Perlmut. "I think she has a real tale to tell."

Perlmut got the original idea in 2009 after Cook passed away. She was speaking to others who knew her at the memorial service, including her daughter, Cathy Cook, and learned quite a lot about Connie Cook. Perlmut said she spoke to congresswomen



*Perlmut with her workout video and documentaries.
(Photo by Jesse Disbrow.)*

an Barbara Lifton, who decided to get member item money for the project. Each congressperson can ask for special funding for a project within their district, member funding has been used before to help build firehouses, start local programs and for other initiatives. In the last year, Lifton was able to get that member item mon-

ey and the project was able to get underway with the funding going through Planned Parenthood.

Cook was a very interesting person and a pioneer, according to Perlmut. Cook had a pilot's license by the 1940s and was one of a handful of women who graduated from Cornell Law

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School in 1943. Cook was a state assemblywoman, but she also was a pioneer when practicing law.

Cook took on a case that helped pave the way for female priests in the Episcopal church, successfully suing the organization to allow a female priest from Syracuse, ordained in Pennsylvania, to keep her priesthood.

In Cook's time in the New York State Assembly she worked to make abortions legal in New York. In 1970, she sponsored a bill to repeal state anti-abortion laws and to provide for legal, on-demand abortions during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy.

After Cook left the assembly in 1974, she became Cornell's first woman vice president in 1976. She was also a trustee of the college from 1969-1974.

Perlmut's documentary features many of the people who interacted with Cook during her life, shooting locally, in Albany and planning to shoot in New York City, where Cook spent some years practicing law.

For Perlmut, who



*Congresswoman Cook was an early advocate of safe, legal abortion.
(photo provided)*

described herself as a feminist, Cook was an inspiring figure. Perlmut remembers protesting the lack of legal abortions around the time Cook was working on the new law. Perlmut also found out Cook visited the nursery school where she worked in Harlem.

Perlmut was working with Nils Hoover as her director of photography, but he has since moved to Austin, TX. While Hoover is still helping out Perlmut will need to find someone else to go on location with her in New York City. Carol Kammen, the Town of Ithaca historian, has helped write the documentary and has done a fair share of the research. Cook's daughter Cathy is serving as the producer, and Ann Di-

Petta has been working to assist Perlmut. Chibo Shinagawa has been working as an intern on the project and Chris Foito has been doing sound work and some of the editing. Lifton and Planned Parenthood have offered some of the funding.

However, to finish the project, Perlmut said that she'd need some more money to shoot in NYC and then edit the final project. Perlmut hopes that she can get enough funding to finish the project and then offer it free of charge to community centers, schools and other places as an educational tool. She's also working with local cable channel, Pegasus, on the project. You can check out her website closetohome

productions.com to find a link to donate. Perlmut also said she's used the crowdfunding website IndieGoGo to raise funds. Crowdfunding is the use of a third party platform, in this case a website, to solicit funds from strangers. It allows people working on projects to reach a broader audience than local fundraising. Perlmut's been excited to see donations come in from total strangers, including a few from Canada.

If she reaches her funding goals, she'd like to finish filming by the end of the year and have editing done by the end of the winter, with the project ready for an Ithaca premier sometime in the middle of next year.