

Cincinnati's First Statue Honoring a Woman by Name - A Statue of Marian Spencer Is Unveiled In June 2021

Cincinnati lacked a statue honoring a woman by name until 2021. Finally, a statue of Marian Spencer, the longtime Civil Rights advocate and community leader, now stands for public viewing in Smale Riverfront Park. How did this sculpture piece come into being, and what were the steps needed to bring it about?

Alice Schneider deserves to be singled out for both coming up with the idea for the Spencer statue and for leading this project from its conception to its completion. The process began in 2019 when Schneider, a veteran community leader herself, became aware that no statue of a named woman existed in the City. She became committed to ending this situation, and she immediately thought of Marian Spencer as a good choice to receive this honor.

The choice of Marian Spencer as this City's first woman to be honored with a statue was fitting. Still civically active in her nineties, she had carved out a career fighting for Civil Rights such as ending the segregation policy at Coney Island, and integrating Cincinnati Public Schools. She was also the first African-American woman to be elected to City Council, and she continued to be a voice for reform as a member of the Charter Committee and the Woman's City Club.

Schneider delegated her friend, Dot Christenson, author of a biography of the former Council woman, to ask Spencer whether she would approve of a statue honoring her. Pleased to be publicly acknowledged for her years of activism, Spencer provided a written statement of her approval. With this green light, the organizing began. Schneider and Christenson next won approval from the Woman's City Club to be the official sponsoring group of the statue project. With that support, Schneider could organize a fund raising campaign to cover all the costs while finding and hiring an artist to design and sculpt the statue.

Susan Noonan, a member of Schneider's new Woman's City Club Statue Committee, connected the group to Tom Tsuchiya a local sculptor. Known for his sculptures of famous Cincinnati Reds' players located near the main entrance to Great American Ball Park. Tsuchiya felt honored to be considered for this assignment. When he was hired by the Committee to create the statue, he included his apprentice, Gina Erardi, to help him design and produce the Spencer piece.

Since Schneider and her Committee members wanted the statue to be a public memorial located in a Cincinnati park, they needed to get official approval from the Park Board. In September 2019, the Board voted to approve both the Marian Spencer statue and its location in Smale Riverfront Park. The Committee sponsors proved the seriousness of their intent by promising to raise the money for its creation, installation, and continued maintenance.

An official fundraising campaign began in October 2019. The estimated cost for the

sculpting and installation was \$125,000, but Schneider set the goal at \$150,000 in order to have an ongoing maintenance fund. Since the Committee ended up raising \$175,000, it had more than enough funds to cover some additional expenses that raised the final project cost to \$160,000. It plans to use the extra \$15,000 to establish a scholarship fund in Marian Spencer's name.

Meanwhile, Tom Tsuchiya and Gina Erardi worked on the design and sculpting of the statue. Instead of just Marian Spencer alone, Tsuchiya decided to include two children, a boy and girl, holding hands with her. The sculptor thought that this addition helped capture the warmth and humanity of Spencer. The completed five foot three inch statue is a golden brown color made of stainless steel reinforced bronze.

Although Alice Schneider had hoped to have the statue completed and installed to honor Marian Spencer's one-hundredth birthday in 2020, Spencer died in July 2019. Then the COVID epidemic emerged in March 2020 to further stall the installation date. The official unveiling and dedication of the statue finally took place in a public ceremony at Smale Park on June 27th, 2021. This project that had started as an idea of Alice Schneider was now, after a lot of effective organizing, a reality.