

# Mary Regula, congressman's wife, known as area gem

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*Photo By Linda Hall*

Mary Regula, wife of long-term Congressman Ralph Regula, poses by her portrait in the National First Ladies' Library, which she founded in Canton. The complex includes Ida Saxton-McKinley's home, restored to the McKinley era, and an Education and Research Center. The museum and research center attract calls and visitors from all over the world.

By LINDA HALL

Staff Writer

WOOSTER -- While longtime Congressman Ralph Regula has garnered much attention in his decades of public service, his "other half" is well-known in her own right.

"You can't talk about Ralph without talking about Mary," said state Sen. Ron Amstutz, praising her for her efforts in founding the National First Ladies' Library, "another gem in our area," in Canton.

Opened in June 1998 with the dedication of the Saxton-McKinley House as the home of the library, the house, located on 331 Market Ave. South was restored to the William McKinley era.

The Education and Research Center, formerly the City National Bank Building, 205 Market Ave. South, was opened in September 2003 and features a research library, exhibits and a small theater.

The National First Ladies' Library offers an online bibliography; materials and mementos related to the nation's First Ladies and the era in which they lived; a collection of audio and video recordings and photographs; and copies of letters and manuscripts.

It also sponsors educational programs, seminars and authors' lectures about the first ladies.

Several first ladies, including Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush, have participated in ceremonies and events related to the museum and research facility.

Mary Regula is tireless in promoting it, recently asking Amstutz, "Have you had the full tour?"

The First Ladies' Library "was an idea whose time had come," Mary Regula said.

"Hillary (Clinton) happened to be the sitting first lady ... and knew what I wanted," she said.

Clinton called it "a great idea," Mary Regula recalled, and offered not only to be the honorary chairwoman, but to get the other former first ladies on board with the project as well.

"Unlike former presidents, they're like a sorority," Mary Regula said.

Having always "loved people and history," Mary Regula is a cheerleader for first ladies, all the way back to Martha Washington.

"Martha didn't just sit in her home during the Revolutionary War," she said. "Who do you think mended the clothes and did the cooking?"

"She had funds to help finance the war," Mary Regula said, adding, "(Martha Washington) not only gave (George Washington) the wealth; she gave him the prestige. It was Martha who pushed him and thought he was bound for greatness."

"I started (this library) with 13 activist women," she said.

Its fame is spreading.

"We had close to 50 people the other day from Texas," she said, "and a call from St. Petersburg," which she originally thought to be from Florida, but turned out to be from Russia.

"A month ago we had 17 people from China."

"I get a lot of questions from all over the world," said the Regulas' daughter, Martha, the library's director, who wrote her master's thesis about online bibliographies. "I got one from Spain (from an individual) doing a thesis on American first ladies."

"When I think about it, I never really dreamed it was going to grow the way it did," Mary Regula said. "(Started) 10 years earlier or 10 years later, I don't think it would have."

"The first ladies were ready, too," she said.

The library was funded privately; its first major contributor was General Motors, Mary Regula said. The First Ladies' Library complex was also the beneficiary of a \$2.5 million Save America's Treasures matching grant for the Education and Research Center.

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