



MichiganWomenForward



Elizabeth Lehman Belen

(1886 - 1975)

Inducted: 2014 Locale: Lansing Era: Historical
Area(s) of Achievement: Business, Nursing, Politics

In 1932, Elizabeth Lehman Belen founded and was state chairman of the Eleanor Roosevelt League of Women, which formed to promote the role of women under the motto “Forward Ever, Backward Never.” In 1936, she was the first woman and the first Democrat elected to the State House of Representatives from her Lansing district. She was the second woman ever elected to the Michigan House and was a charter member and president of the National Order of Women Legislators.

In 1939-43, as vice chairman of the Michigan Democratic State Central Committee, Belen became director of the Woman’s Division of the State Committee. She organized precinct campaign schools across the state and the bipartisan Michigan Woman’s Government League in the early 1940s. She served several governors in positions such as state labor commissioner, the special commission to study problems of aging, and the advisory council of the Michigan Board of Nurses. Belen taught parliamentary law and procedure for 25 years.

As a nursing school graduate and visiting nurse, Belen founded the Lansing Visiting Nurses Association in the 1920s. Drafted by the Army during the Spanish Flu outbreak in 1918, she arranged infirmaries to care for army training corps victims at the former Michigan Agricultural College. Also, she was later a head surgical nurse at Lansing’s St. Lawrence Hospital.

In the 1930s, Belen created Belen’s Flowers, a successful family business in Lansing for more than seven decades. She organized and served as president of the Allied Florists of the Capitol Area and as president of the Michigan Telaflora. After helping the Woman’s Club House Association secure funding from United Way, she established the Lansing Woman’s Home (later Willow Manor). Her daughter Lucile, a city leader and politician active in the arts, health care and education, preceded her in the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame. Elizabeth Belen said a woman needs to be interested in politics, “whatever her party, for the good of the country.”