

Spotlight on Local History and Government

Making History and Government Local

A lesson in Honoring Hartford History

Subject correlations and lesson extensions:

This story combines local history, women's history, government, geography, civil rights, career education and current events. The story is about local historical government leader, Ann Uccello, in a current event of dedicating the naming of a major street in Hartford in her honor. This story can be used in various ways, via lessons about local history, local government, women in history or government, civil rights events, how various government departments work together to accomplish a goal, or how much government involvement there needs to be to accomplish something as seemingly simple as changing a sign. In addition, Ann Uccello was a former teacher. Another former mayor of Hartford, Mike Peters, was a fire fighter. Mayors and selectmen in other CT cities and towns have been pharmacists, butchers, restaurant owners, etc. before they became elected officials. Extend this lesson to interview local officials and discover their career backgrounds and what motivated them to become fully engaged citizens. Post edited biographies on your town or school website or email them to us and we can use them as a future spotlight. Lastly, a geography lesson may be extracted as well in discovering why streets in your own towns may have been named after other local heroes or historic incidents, Latic Street in Putnam or Wolf Den Road in Pomfret for examples. Project ideas include writing a short statement about a street on a note card; post a large wall map of your town on the bulletin board, or draw your own, surround it with the summary cards, attach one end of a piece of ribbon or yarn to the card and the other end to the street researched. Send in your entries for future spotlights. Also, please send us your lesson plan ideas so that we can share them with others.

“What started as a career as a history teacher turned out to be a career that made history.” (Excerpted from Ann Uccello Street Dedication program September 29, 2008.)

In the early years of Antonina (Ann) P. Uccello's career, she was a history teacher at East Hampton High School where one of her students was former Governor of Connecticut, William A. O'Neil. Ann Uccello was elected to the Hartford City Council in 1963 as a Republican in a heavily Democratic dominated city. Despite the party odds being against her, Ann Uccello was not only re-elected to the City Council in 1965 and 1967 but in 1967 she received the most votes of any council member, automatically deeming her mayor of Hartford. Ann became the first woman elected mayor of any major city in the United States. In 1969, there was a change in the Hartford City Charter requiring that the mayor be elected separately from members of council. Ann Uccello was then the first mayor to be elected under the charter change.

Ann Uccello served her terms as mayor of Hartford during times of civil and racial unrest. In July of 1967 when riots erupted in Hartford, then Councilwoman Uccello won national recognition for her idea of an Info-Mobile traveling in the poverty stricken areas of the city to assist disadvantaged people with job information and to help them with city

services and other needs. The evening of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, Mayor Uccello walked the streets of north Hartford until 4:30 a.m. talking with people, especially the youth, some whom she already knew by name, to show that the city cared about the tragedy that had befallen the country. The novelty of a young female mayor in their midst deterred them from the kind of rioting that devastated so many cities across the country that night. This is merely one example of how Mayor Uccello made continuous attempts to keep peace and show concern for the people of her city. Other examples include keeping watch during peaceful Vietnam demonstrations, calls for creation of community based police sub-stations, establishment of a Regional Narcotics Squad and a crackdown on drug enforcement. After Mayor Uccello met with President Nixon, Hartford became one of the first cities in the nation to receive funding for the model cities program.

Ann served as mayor of Hartford until 1971, when she resigned to become director of the newly authorized Office of Consumer Affairs in the U.S. Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C. There she served in the Nixon, Ford and Carter Administrations, receiving national and international recognition as one of the highest ranking women in government during her tenure.

Ann Uccello was named to the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 1999. Because of her unique position in various offices of government during her career, a *Hartford Courant* editorial suggested honoring her in some other way. Therefore, a committee made up of her supporters and friends met on December 5, 2007 to discuss ideas. Various proposals were made, including, in her honor, naming a major meeting room at city hall, naming a fountain outside city hall, or providing for a scholarship or an internship. But the most important proposal was to name Ann Street, a major north-south artery in Hartford, after her deeming it either Ann Uccello Street or Mayor Ann Uccello Street.

After much discussion, the Hartford City Council, on February 13, 2008, passed a resolution to change the name of street to Ann Uccello Street. The word "Mayor" was left off because the sign would have been too big, according to transportation officials in the city. It then became necessary to have signs pointing to Ann Street on I-84 reconstituted as direction for Ann Uccello Street. It took until April 2008 for CT Department of Transportation (hereinafter DOT) to approve the change in signs. There was substantial bureaucratic delay when the CT DOT, which represented the Federal DOT, since I-84 is federal highway, first said it would take five yrs to make the changes. The CT DOT was also concerned that Uccello was too long a name and would require a larger sign, which would add a prohibitive cost. After much pressure on the CT DOT, the first sign pointing to Ann Uccello Street on I-84 East on the south side was erected on June 25, 2008. The sign for Ann Street was combined with a sign for High Street, which runs parallel to Ann Street. Then, because of the length of the name it was decided that High Street should have its own sign.

Two additional signs for Ann Uccello Street were installed on I-84 on July 14, 2008. Because of the delay that was predicted by the CT DOT, Ann's supporters and the

committee contacted Secretary Of the State Susan Bysiewicz, who then contacted the CT DOT to move it along the process.

The remaining signs were changed prior to Sept. 29, 2008, when a formal dedication took place at 12:45 p.m. at the corner of Church and Ann Streets. There, the sign, covered by cloth, was revealed by former Mayor Ann Uccello herself. Dennis House, anchor of Channel 3 News, was master of ceremonies.

Note: Ann is now in her 80s living in W. Hartford.

On Nov. 22, 2008 there will be a dinner at Trinity College in honor of Ann and the street naming.