

Sydney Mae Maraist Durand

Southern Mutual Help Association, Inc. Board Member and friend.



Sydney loved Louisiana! She was the voice of the people and had a love for helping them. She spent tireless hours working hard for them, taking their calls, visiting with them and finding solutions to any problem. She was a friend of the people and treated them like family.

She had true dedication and was ahead of her time, opening doors for women. Sydney was a pioneer for women in local and state government and became the first woman elected to serve as a State Representative for District 46 and the first woman police juror in St. Martin Parish.

She was always positive and compassionate for those less fortunate and nothing was too big for her to handle. She promoted health care and put her heart into everything she did.

SMHA was able to obtain a helicopter immediately after the 2005 hurricanes, flew over the most devastated areas and had access, because of Sydney, to military-protected places. SMHA was able to assess the damages and begin to help those residents. She called and chaired a joint hearing in the State Legislature to advocate the dangers of re-entry to those areas. Along with SMHA, she distributed re-entry kits to residents so that they could enter their property with less health hazards.

Sydney was directly responsible for getting a law passed that would protect organizations like SMHA from being sued for having volunteers brought in to help clean up the aftermath of the hurricanes.

She could have retired after her 37 year career in the oil industry but chose to spend her retirement involved in government representing the people of Louisiana so that she could make their lives better. She served 16 years in office in the Louisiana legislature, serving as Chairwoman of the House Health and Welfare Committee, on the House Executive Committee, appointed to serve as a member of the Children, Families & Health Committee, Regional Trauma Patient Care Statewide System Task Force, Governor's Commission on Disability Affairs, and the Louisiana Women's Policy and Research Commission.

She had a passion for the outdoors and her horses, hunting, fishing and catching gators. The knife-wielding, alligator-hunting grandmother caught the attention of Jamie Oliver, the famous English chef who contacted her to film an episode for his show. He was fascinated by her. Jamie bagged his first gator and cooked it during the filming. It was a proud and exciting time for Sydney to be part of his "American Road Trip" series – the four part Louisiana episodes.

Her love for people will live on. Sydney is not gone, her spirit is everywhere and continues to touch the lives of so many people. She has made a difference to everyone she has ever met.