

Cynthia Lee Theiss

(12/3/1947 – 4/22/2024)

“Family and Consumer Sciences is the field of study focused on the science and art of living and working well in our complex world. It’s a people centered science”.

Cindy Theiss was the pure embodiment of the definitions of Family and Consumer Sciences. Before health issues made Cindy take a more passive role, there was no member of LI FACS Professionals more well known or respected.

Cindy was active as a professional many years before there WAS a LI FACS organization. On Long Island, there was a Suffolk and a Nassau chapter of NYS Association of Family and Consumer Science Educators. I was a Nassau member and Cindy was a Suffolk member, and as we were former colleagues and the best of friends, it was natural for us to work together to help merge the two groups into one unit. As one of the founding members of LI FACS Professionals, Cindy worked tirelessly to provide service to and then recognition of the FACS teachers we represented.

Cindy always had a vision and if you knew her, you would remember that she worked, gently but inexorably, to reach those goals. As Cindy felt an obligation to bring knowledge and skills to her fellow FACS educators on LI, that is what we all did. When she and I became Co-Area Coordinators there were countless trips to Albany for statewide board meetings and conferences, to bring new developments and information back downstate. As Professional Development Co-Chairs we continued to travel to Albany to bring new skills and resources to the teachers on LI. As positions on the board of LI FACS changed, Cindy took any position and looked on it as another opportunity to serve.

There was never a time that Cindy was not thinking and working to bring more professionalism to LI FACS educators. It meant time away from school, family, and community. These were sacrifices easily made because the rewards were great. Her

fellow teachers began to seek out LI FACS local events, conferences, and workshops and began to incorporate these lessons and activities into their own classrooms. The teachers were more knowledgeable about the FACS issues on a state and local level. Attendance at these events increased, as did LI FACS membership. Realizing some success never slowed Cindy down. She continued her efforts tirelessly.

It's important to understand that Cindy didn't just do these things for LI FACS Professionals, she was a force in her own school district, too. At Babylon Jr\Sr High School she started a state renowned pre-school program, was one of the founding teachers for an advisory program, ran student fashion shows, helped with student fundraisers, created and altered costumes and props for the school plays, all while mentored many Queens College FACS student teachers. Cindy also found herself in the position to help immigrant families; settled in the district, but without resources or language skills to navigate registering their children for school. Cindy was their lifeline.

And there was her service to the community. Cindy volunteered to be a Bible teacher to youngsters in her church. Also becoming a member of the church board, she served as secretary and treasurer. Cindy became involved in the historic Conklin House located right outside of her school. She gathered fabric and willing participants to sew quilts to donate and raffle off to raise funds. During the pandemic she served classroom FACS teachers in the field by gathering, packing, and distributing over 2000 sewing kits for middle and high school students. She participated in creating and maintaining period costumes at Old Bethpage Restoration Village. Cindy became the Educational Chairperson for student tours at Sagtikos Manor in Bay Shore, while also volunteering as a tour guide in the house and a volunteer in the vegetable garden. Cindy was a Friend of the West Islip Library and worked many book sales. These are but a few of her professional and personal contributions, but there were so many.

But of all her other contributions, her true gift was connecting to people. At her memorial service, a friend described Cindy's life as a quilt where she gently stitched blocks of people together. She had the knack of laser focusing directly on you to hear you. She gave you her attention and regard. People from all walks of life, all ages, and

all colors, came together to honor and speak about her. There were the 3 generations of a family who had all participated in her pre-school program, her former school colleagues who mentioned that Cindy always offered her help AND was always there to help, members of her birthday club who realized the uplifting of spirits they got from participating in such a seemingly disparate group, the young man who she helped to foster and her contributions to his life, her family, sons and grandchildren who loved her and so many others who spoke that day. I saw Cindy Theiss as a person who was not only a very precious part of my life but of many, many others. Cindy had a profound impact on so many lives.

My heart and mind haven't truly processed her loss. That will take time. I know I am so much better for having had her in my life. I know we are all so much the better for knowing Cindy Theiss.

A colleague and friend,
Diane Weiner