





The Judy Lynch Years

Erie County's Unsung Architect

By Chloe Forbes







“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Editor’s Note

The following essay on Erie, Pennsylvania, political and civic leader Dr. Judith "Judy” Lynch is part of the Jefferson Educational Society’s Tribute series, which examines the lives of extraordinary people who have had a profound effect on the Erie regional community and beyond. Prior installments in this series can be found at JESPublications.Substack.com.

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About the JES

The Jefferson Educational Society of Erie (JES) is a nonprofit institution founded to promote civic enlightenment, and community progress for the Erie Region through the study, research, discussion, of those ideas and events that have influenced the human condition. It offers courses, seminars, publications, and lectures which explain the central ideas which have formed the past, assist in exploring the present, and offer guidance to enhance the civic future of the Erie Region.

About the Author

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"We're started, go ahead," boomed a voice behind the camera.

In the center of the frame, about 15 feet away, Judy M. Lynch stood up, the words "The Black Death and Covid-19: Are There Similarities?" illuminated behind her petite 5-foot-two stature and neatly cropped gray hair.

It was March 26, 2020, just three days after Pennsylvania ordered residents to stay home, leaving the streets bare in an almost apocalyptic scene as people turned on their TVs and computers to learn more about the sweeping new virus — Covid-19 — that had been declared a global pandemic.

To her at-home audience, Lynch introduced her former government colleague, Anita Rogowski, and explained they would compare Covid-19 to the most fatal disease outbreak in history, the Black Death of the 1300s.

"We believe in that comparison; there are insights and surprises that we might share, and it might give us hope because we are both — both of us — very optimistic about this great enterprise, this great challenge that we face," Lynch said.

When the stay-at-home orders were first announced, Lynch didn't storm her local grocery store to stock up on essentials; she took stock of the situation and created something to help others better understand the situation.

“There are people who stress about their own needs, then there are people who stress about the community’s needs,” said Dr. Ferki Ferati, the Jefferson Educational Society’s president and the man behind the camera that day. “Judy is the latter.”

Lynch’s life is marked by its profound interaction between education and public service. Over the decades, her journey included serving as a CIA official in the 1950s, teaching history to high school and college students, being elected as the first chair of Erie County Council, and spending two decades as Erie County executive, guiding the region from the brink of economic ruin. She was also the founding chair of the Jefferson Educational Society, an influential author and scholar, and a driving force behind multiple civic and educational initiatives. But she’s also a mother, wife, daughter, animal lover, environmental advocate, historian, neighbor, world traveler, and lifelong learner. Her story is one of resilience, heartbreak, hard-earned trust, and the almost unthinkable heights that became possible for one of the county’s best-known trailblazers.

Lessons from Euclid Avenue & the Dinner Table

Her story starts on Christmas Day, Dec. 25, 1937, when Judith Marie Maloney was born to Dr. Daniel Maloney and Mary Maloney (nee Driscoll), the third of what would be four children, and the only daughter.

The family lived in Saegertown, just south of Erie County, and their house on Euclid Avenue doubled as Daniel's medical practice and the family's residence, with Mary taking on the role of medical assistant in addition to homemaker, rare for that time.



Mary Maloney

The house was a short distance from the rail lines, and in a nation coming out of the Great Depression, an almost Biblical scene unfolded as young Judy Maloney watched Mother Mary open the door to those dressed in rags and coming from the nearest train car, often seeking food or medical assistance, and offering Judy her first lesson in caring for those in need.

But the family was soon uprooted as the actions at Pearl Harbor in December 1941 caused Daniel to take a more critical role, volunteering to serve in the Army Air Corps. He was commissioned in 1943 and worked at Buckley and Lowry Air Force bases and at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center.

The family lived in Colorado near the medical center, and while Daniel and Mary both worked during the week, the weekends meant trips to the mountains, deserts, and museums for Judy and her siblings. But there was no

escaping the war, as its horrors lay on Daniel's medical tables and popped up on screens before movies like "Dumbo" and "Bambi" began, causing Judy to hide under her seat where the glowing images of warfare couldn't reach her so easily.

On one especially memorable day in 1944, Daniel came home and told his children to lug all their toys and belongings to the second floor of the house. The situation, as Daniel explained, was that another doctor at Fitzsimons was developing penicillin for wartime use, but because the doctor was Jewish, no one would rent an apartment to his family. Therefore, the children had to make room for the family to live on the first floor of the house, offering Judy another lesson on inclusion and discrimination.

When the war ended, Daniel entered talks to buy a hospital in Longmont, Colorado, but when his aging mother refused to move to Colorado, the family decided to move back to Crawford County, this time to Meadville.

Judy's grandmother, Lillian Maude Wingfield Maloney, was Judy's "true family hero" and has been one of her greatest influences. Maude told Judy stories about their family lineage, which was closely linked to American history. Her ancestor Edward Wingfield was elected the first governor of the colony in Virginia that would later become known as Jamestown, only to be wrongfully sent back to England after legend has it that he ruffled the feathers of the famous John Smith.

Nevertheless, the family lineage made its return to America, with Maude's father fighting the Civil War. In 1907, Maude married James D. Maloney, a gauger for Standard Oil who was sent to West Virginia by John D. Rockefeller, adding economic prowess to the faction of public servants.

Tragedy struck in 1909, though, when Maude gave birth to daughter Martha, and, at 3 months old, Martha died. In that same year, Maude's husband and father died, and she gave birth to Judy's father, Daniel. In response, Maude put herself and her sister Mellie through West Virginia Wesleyan College. She then obtained her teaching certificate from Edinboro College and was hired by Judy's future husband's grandfather to teach in Cussewago Township, tying an invisible string to the two families that would later result in the marriage of Judy and Terry Lynch.



Daniel Maloney

Maude didn't stop there, working as a schoolteacher, nurse, and housekeeper to put Daniel through medical school.

"Education, education, education," was her motto, Judy said. Part of the reason Maude was intent on the family returning to the region after World War II was that the education standards in Pennsylvania were so high.

In Meadville, Judy watched her other role model, her father, be a champion for the people. His patients were mostly rural, immigrants, or impoverished. For those who could not pay, he provided medical care, free of charge, often letting people pay in crops or chickens for his services. Judy would later in life hear many stories of Daniel, and, at one point, she received a check from a family that wanted to repay her for the impact Daniel had on their family. Judy declined and insisted the money be used in service to others.

By the time the family moved to Meadville, Daniel had served on the Saegertown School Board and the Board of Directors for Saegertown Ginger Ale, then a prominent regional manufacturer with global acclaim. And later, from 1959 to 1967, Daniel served as Crawford County coroner, losing only in 1967 when a tie resulted in a coin flip that didn't go in his favor.

"Politics and elective office were a natural thing, and he was very outgoing and charismatic," Judy said of her father.

However, he was fallible, and she watched her mother's strength in times when their marriage was trying, teaching Judy the kind of resilience she first learned from Maude. Both of her parents constantly read, though, and one thing that brought everyone together was their talks about world politics and power.

“This is what we talked about at dinner,” Judy said. “It was always about what was politically happening in the country, in the world, in the area, so it was a family affair.”

In high school, Judy joined the debate team, which went on to win state and tri-state championships before her graduation in 1955. She then began school at Allegheny College, taking every history class she could and working in the library, but she still wanted to learn more, and in 1956, a class trip gave her a new path to pursue, this time in the nation's capital.

Liberation Inside and Outside of the Classroom

While headlines documented a brief but tense discord between world powers over control of the Suez Canal in what is now called the Suez Crisis, Judy and her Allegheny class traveled to Washington, D.C. They visited most of the embassies of countries connected with the Middle East war and left Judy “mesmerized.” So much so that she decided to transfer to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., to study political science and history.

In any spare time she had, Judy walked the whole city, visiting every public building and embassy that she could, calling her time at George Washington “liberating.” The speakers at commencement were Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles, brothers who wielded unprecedented control over foreign powers, with John serving as Secretary of State

under President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Allen as director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).



Judy in Washington, D.C., 1959.

At the time, Judy was very much moved by the Cold War, and the brothers greatly shaped that war by using covert diplomacy and operations with a strong anti-communist view. Judy decided that she, too, wanted to be an agent in the triumph of America in the Cold War, so she applied for and obtained a job working for the CIA.

Later, her children would swap bedtime stories in which they pictured their mom crouched beneath windows of the White House, spying on the country's top officials, preparing to save the nation. Her job was classified work, analyzing photos of the Volga River region of the Soviet Union in Russia to monitor Soviet industrialization and munitions factories. She held her job in the CIA from 1958 to 1960 before returning to northwestern Pennsylvania to marry James Terrance “Terry” Lynch.

The Lynch and Maloney/Wingfield families had always been linked. Judy's father, Daniel, had delivered the Lynch children and later oversaw care of Terry's mother when she was diagnosed with cancer. Judy and Terry became close while a part of the same tight-knit high school class. He had visited her a few times in Washington, D.C., but he was attending the School of Pharmacy at the University of Pittsburgh on a scholarship from Eckerd Corporation, the second-largest pharmacy chain in the U.S. at the time. Upon graduation, he was hired as assistant manager of the Eckerd store in Meadville.

Upon moving back to Meadville, Judy enrolled at Allegheny College to obtain her teaching certification, and Terry and Judy married on Oct. 1, 1960. Soon after, the two began building their family, with their first daughter, Ann, born in 1961. Also in 1961, Terry was transferred to an Eckerd store in Erie, where the company was founded. It moved them from their apartment on Park Avenue in Meadville to a house on Chelsea Avenue in Millcreek Township that would serve as Judy's home for 64 years. The family also expanded, with three more daughters: Mary, followed by Beth, then Kathryn.

Judy's mother moved to Erie County as well, buying a residence near the budding Lynch family after the last of her children flew the coop and following her separation from Daniel.

Both parents had their own battles and mistakes, with addiction being something Daniel and Mary suffered from. Daniel died of a heart attack in 1968, and Mary worked at an Erie nursing home, where her Aunt Mellie Wingfield was a resident. In the time when Judy was rising to political power in the 1980s, it was also marked by a time of hardship, as her mother's health declined to the complications of Alzheimer's. Judy was eventually the only family member at her mother's side when Mary died in 1989.

Mary had been helpful in the 1960s in lending a hand to the young Lynch family, and by 1970, Judy secured a teaching position at the former Villa Maria Academy — a private, all-girls Roman Catholic high school in Erie — after two years of student teaching.

The school was undergoing a restructuring of its courses, so Judy was given a new course to teach called World Cultures and Politics, meant to give students a view of the world in current and historical context. What she didn't expect was how it would completely change her views. In 1972, she took her class on a field trip to Moscow and Leningrad, the two major political hubs of the Soviet Union at the time, and within the region that Judy had studied during her time at the CIA.

"To me, visiting the Soviet Union after I had been in the CIA and after all the study that I had gone through was just totally a revelation because the Soviet Union at that time was

extraordinarily poor," she said. "I could not believe it. I kept saying to myself, 'This is what we're afraid of?'"

Their hotel included flooring that did not reach the walls; they were not allowed to drink the tap water; and as the Villa students walked around well-groomed and in their blue jeans, people stared. Along with the students, Judy brought her daughter, Ann, on the trip, who said that, at the time, there were strict regulations for foreign tourism, but Judy was not deterred by that. They were in the streets of Moscow one day when they came upon a visibly drunk man who was on the sidewalk, drawing. Judy approached him, learned he spoke English, and spent an hour talking with him. He then showed them how to operate the machines in the street to get water and explained what it was really like for him living in Moscow. In the end, Judy bought one of the man's pictures, which hangs in Ann's living room to this day.

"It's caring about the person and being brave to go and learn in a situation where most people would not, and being rewarded," Ann said.

In the years that followed, Judy would take more field trips internationally, including taking daughter Mary to Egypt, where she declined an offer of marriage that would have gained the family some prized camels in exchange. Judy took daughter Beth to Israel around 1980, Beth recalled, when Israel and the broader Zionist movement faced a profound

ideological, political, and socioeconomic turning point with division over the future direction of the state.

“That was a real eye-opener for me,” Beth said. “Especially with (Judy’s) background, I had to read all about the Zionist movement before the trip, and I was quizzed on it.”



An early photo of the Lynch family. From left is Kathryn, Mary, Beth, Judy, Ann, and Terry (in front).

Oftentimes, when Judy created tests on world culture for her students, her daughters were also subject to take them. “We didn’t get Winnie the Pooh as kids,” Beth said. “We got the French Revolution.”

Just like the lessons she was taught growing up, Judy often gave her children lessons on the importance of education and

history, as well as the values of being inclusive and caring for others. While they all had jobs around the house that were strictly adhered to, they also had fun.

“(Judy) would make the best apple pie — Dutch apple pie — and for Christmas, we made a dozen or so and delivered them to friends and neighbors,” Beth recalled, joking that it was the extent of Judy’s ability in the kitchen, but it was always something they looked forward to doing together.

Traveling became a pastime for the family, investing in a camper and loading up their station wagon to drive around the country. It was on the way back from one of those trips in 1974 when Judy learned that her youngest brother had sent in her name upon seeing an advertisement in the newspaper seeking candidates to serve on the Erie County Home Rule Study Commission, which would be on the ballot that year. The commission, if approved by voters, would review various forms of government against the current form of government to see if it needed to change to better address the county's challenges.

“Did I see myself as a political official? I didn’t,” Judy said. “It wasn’t anything that I thought of.” But unwilling to give up on the candidacy, Judy decided to go through with the campaign to get her name on the ballot, and what followed changed the course of Erie County history.

An Underdog Entrance

Her first campaign is what Judy describes as “hectic.” She went door to door with boxes of campaign materials and explained who she was and her intentions as part of the commission. Judy had grown up in a household that switched from long-time Democrats to Republicans after Harry Truman became president and proposed a new healthcare system that Judy’s father felt was an imposition of government on his industry. Judy, on the other hand, became more of a Democrat leading up to when she first entered the political scene, as she was “exceedingly influenced” by what she deems “horrors” of war again. This time, it was the Vietnam War, leaving her disillusioned with the Republican Party and its leaders' approach to conflict.

Running as a Democrat, she said husband Terry “definitely was an asset” because he had run for public office on the state level, and although he did not win, he became active in the local Democratic Party, eventually serving as chair of the Millcreek Township Democratic Party. He became known within the party and was a very sociable person, leading him to be a member of several organizations and a volunteer firefighter for the West Lake Fire Department.

However, the real instrument for her success, Judy believes, was her students. At that time, teachers were very revered, and Judy became a household name for her students’ families, many of whom were wealthier and more influential

in the community. Her knowledge in the classroom about politics seemed to transfer well to public service in their eyes. She was also wrapping up her master's degree in social studies from Gannon University.

Voters in the county approved the commission by a 31,677 to 27,287 margin, but Judy herself got the last seat on the commission by just a few votes. The night of the election, then-Democratic Party Chairman Roger Fischer called her on the phone to break the news to her.

"He's laughing, I can hardly understand him, and he says, 'you won, you won, you won,' then he's telling me by what a narrow margin it was," she explained. "I was thrilled I had won but also concerned about what lay ahead, and the Home Rule Study Commission was probably the most significant educational event of my life."

The idea for the Home Rule Study Commission had come from a group of highly influential men who believed the county was not functioning the way it should be and they cited the region's economic decline as an indicator that change was needed. In 1959, the city adopted a "strong mayor" form of government, and the leaders of this group felt it was time for the county to follow suit.

The commission was made up of 11 members, and Judy was elected vice chair alongside Chair Irving Olds Murphy, a Republican and member of that influential group that felt a

change was necessary. Judy said they were very compatible professionally, and she had a deep respect for his successful legal career. Together, they led the commission as it examined alternative forms of government and spoke to various academic experts along with former and current elected officials. From that November through the following year, the commission met weekly at sites throughout Erie County, so members could convey information about the study commission to civic organizations, labor unions, business groups, and the public.

At the time, the county had a commissioner model in which there were two commissioners of one party and one commissioner of the other, which was meant to strike a balance between the majority and minority, but some counties found fault with its blending of legislative and executive powers, arguing it was inefficient for solving modern challenges. Only one county, Delaware County, was using a home rule form of government at the time, which took effect in 1976. Erie joined the ranks of Lackawanna, Northampton, and Lehigh counties that found the home rule form of government to be most effective and transitioned in the late 1970s. The Erie County Home Rule Study Commission officially conveyed its findings to the public in May 1976 with a recommendation that a referendum be held on Nov. 2, 1976, to ask electors whether the county should adopt a home rule charter. Immediately, there was the

formation of “Vote Yes” and “Vote No” committees. Although Judy was lauded for her work as co-chair of the Vote Yes campaign, which ultimately was victorious, she said that she didn’t think that the form of government was necessarily the main issue.

“What was happening in the 1980s, it was cataclysmic deindustrialization,” she said. “It had started in the ’70s and picked up in the ’80s, so was it the form of government? Perhaps. I don’t know.”

After the new form of government was approved in 1976, elections were to take place in 1977 for county executive and the seven seats on county council that represented districts throughout Erie County. Though Judy hadn’t thought of herself as a politician, Ann said that “once she got a taste and realized that she had some skill and passion to serve as an elected official, she really blossomed as a person.”

Once the charter passed, Judy held sort of a “family conference,” Beth recalled, saying that Judy expressed interest in running for the first-ever county council, and everyone said yes except for Beth. Looking back on it now, Beth said it was “more of a selfish, bratty teenager thing to not want to be in a fishbowl” with all of its attention and that she is “exceptionally proud” of her mother.

After her experience on the study commission, former newspaper reporter and editor Jeff Pinski said that Judy

became “a real policy wonk,” and while it doesn’t sound exciting, he remarked that those are the people who actually make government work. Judy won the primary vote for the First District in a field against multiple men, beating her runner-up, Robert Corritore, by just three votes.

“Again, she won by a handful, literally a handful, of votes,” Jeff said. “Just a few votes separated her from what was going to become the future.”

In November, she beat C. Thomas Benson, 7,628 to 5,767, and once again, Fischer called with the good news. Judy was the only woman elected to council and took office alongside Anthony “Buzz” Andrezeski, Fiore Leone, Gary Bukowski, Ken Wayne, Richard Nygaard, and Irving Olds Murphy.

Gary Bukowski recalled the elevator ride to the first county council meeting, as he stood with Murphy and Judy: “We all said, ‘I wonder who’s going to be the chairman,’ and I’m just smiling because I had my idea of who I was going to nominate, but I didn’t divulge that until we went upstairs and we had to vote.” Minutes later, he nominated Judy to become Erie County Council’s first chairperson, his decision based on her background in history and knowledge of political machinations.

The charter required council to adopt an administrative code, personnel code, and operational procedures within its first six months, and Bukowski called Judy a “task master” and a

“natural in the role,” which fit the bill at the time. It wasn’t without intense scrutiny, though. From the first meeting, when Judy forgot her purse at the courthouse, she was under fire. A snippet in the Erie Daily Times read, “Mostly cloudy and a chance of showers today says Hadley the Weather Bull. Hadley says he hopes Erie County Council’s new chairwoman hangs on tighter to the county’s purse-strings than she does her own,” and pointed to Judy leaving her purse at the courthouse, saying, “The weight of new responsibilities far exceed those of a purse, Hadley guesses.”

It was 1978, and Erie County had just elected its first-ever council chairperson, yet the newspaper's first order of business was her purse.

“I laughed,” Lynch said of the incident, “but remember, my upbringing was an all-boy family. I had been competing with boys my entire life; that’s nothing new.”

Lynch worked with council, County Executive Russell “Robbie” Robison, county department heads, and county employees to create the code that would act as a sort of constitution for Erie County government, in addition to levying the annual tax rate and adopting the annual budget. She did not, however, agree on many issues with Robison, and once he announced that he would not seek reelection in 1981, Lynch decided to enter the running. In her announcement, she said that a change in county administration “is absolutely imperative,” citing a revolving

door of top administrative personnel and ricocheting “from crisis to crisis” as her reasons. The “crises” included a strike, a 35% decrease in funding to children’s services, and the dire financial situation of the Erie County Geriatric Center (today’s Pleasant Ridge Manor), among others. She believed she could bring “clarity and harmony” to county government.

Lynch ran on a campaign of strengthening the county’s economy and financial situation while creating jobs and having an open-door policy to both the media and the public — much to the dismay of Beth, whose fishbowl nightmares came true one day as she was walking out of the shower, wrapped in her towel, when she ran into Morning News reporter John Guerriero, who stopped her and wanted to have a conversation.

In the previous three years while Robison was county executive, Lynch was teaching a local government class at Villa, and it proved her capable once again to the families of Villa students. Lynch was the only candidate on the primary election ballot working full time, but she only missed four days of school throughout the campaign.

Her campaign committee advised her to not draw attention to her gender and was dismayed when Lynch spoke to the Rotary Club, which was all men in 1981, and quipped that she was happy to be there because there was no long line to the women’s restroom.

“I was very aware women were not regarded as equal to men in terms of politics and serving in political offices,” Lynch said. In fact, Kathryn had asked her mother a few years earlier if she would ever run for county executive.

“She said to me, ‘You know, I don’t think anyone would ever elect a woman,’” Kathryn recalled. “And she didn’t say that to discourage me. She said that because that was her current reality.”

That changed in 1981, though, as Lynch paved the way for other women, gaining the support of influential men while the women in Erie County turned out in significant numbers for the primary. Lynch emerged with a 1,000-plus lead over newscaster Jim DeSantis and a stronger lead over mayoral assistant Joe Robie. By the time November came around, Lynch coasted to an easy victory, doubling the number of votes cast for her opponent, teacher Michael Johnson.

“It’s elating,” Lynch said at the time to the Erie Daily News, following it quickly with, “there’s quite a bit of work to be done before taking office in January, however.”

Captaining a Sinking Ship

The extent of work to be done became a grimmer picture in the days, weeks, and months that followed. When Judy took office, the budget contained $2 million in debt to be repaid by July 1982.

“It’s like being the captain of the Titanic,” Lynch cracked at the time.

And as soon as she entered office, she caused more waves by retaining top personnel from Robison’s Republican administration, like executive secretary Jill Beck, who Jeff Pinski said, “turned out to be one of her most loyal employees for the next 20 years,” along with Michele Ridge, the library’s executive director and wife of Republican politician and future governor Tom Ridge. Instead of cleaning house, Lynch chose to keep people who knew the system and how to do their jobs so that she could get to work immediately.

The first thing Lynch did was look at all the services in the budget that were not required by the state. Because the county is a child of the state and federal government branches, it is limited in what it can do due to the number of required services and limitations in ways to earn revenue. At the time, Erie County had a multitude of parks, and while Lynch recognized that parks are rich additions to their communities thanks to their environmental and recreational nature — causes she continues to champion today — she also knew that she didn’t have the money to continue maintaining them. Since the county was not required by the state to oversee and maintain the parks, she approached each municipality’s leaders and asked if they would like autonomy over their park. Just like that, many municipalities took

control of park planning and maintenance to make them unique to each place while also cutting costs for the county.

Simultaneously, as Lynch dealt with the budget deficit, unemployment rates across the country rose to their highest since the Great Depression, and inflation skyrocketed, causing tight monetary policies and spelling trouble for Rust Belt communities as manufacturing industries like those in Erie County suffered the worst job losses.



Judy early in her career.

"That is to say, right after she took office, the country went into a severe economic slump," said Robert "Bob" Ploehn, who entered his position about two to three months after Lynch was elected county executive. Ploehn served as executive director of the Economic Development Corporation of Erie County, a private nonprofit structured as an overarching economic coordination and planning agency, and head of the Greater Erie Industrial Development Corporation (GEIDC), an entity often tied under that umbrella or working closely beside it, focused on industrial and real estate development.

Lynch and Ploehn would end up working beside each other for 18 years and formed a close relationship. He was more of a spitfire, using blunt and charged language when he said it wasn't always called for, making him "not the most diplomatic."

"The way the story went was that Bob Ploehn created the fires and Judy Lynch put them out," he said with a laugh, adding that Lynch had the "political acumen" to weave her way through interest groups, politicians, labor unions, and environmental groups in a way that was tactful and considerate even when there were conflicting opinions. That was especially true when being pro-industry was not aligned with the Democratic Party.

When Lynch and Ploehn entered their positions, the Louis J. Tullio Arena (now Erie Insurance Arena) was under construction, leaving the Erie County Field House, which used to be the biggest venue for entertainment, empty. Then came the concept that the county, in partnership with GEIDC, could create an industrial park there to draw industry and create jobs in the area. Lynch agreed right away and "went full speed ahead," motivated to attract federal and state dollars for the project, which would require putting in water and sewer lines that extended from those in the city of Erie to Millcreek Township, where the building was located on Route 8 near Interstate 90.

The two made their way to Washington, D.C., at the behest of Lynch to let federal representatives know their agenda for economic development in Erie County and make the case for why political willpower was needed to fill the gaps that the private nonprofit could not at that time. She was able to secure government assistance to complete the project, which would become the Thomas E. Bundy Industrial Park.

While the traditional sectors of the Erie County economy continued to decline, Lynch noted a shift toward the service sector, including hospitality, retail, healthcare, and higher education. A significant number of people wanted to build industries on 12th Street, but Ploehn and Lynch felt that industries needed to be near the highways, as Interstate 79 had just opened in Erie County in 1979. Through discussions with developers, the Nick Scott family, the Bob Baldwin family, and GEIDC, Ploehn facilitated the extension of water and sewer lines to create more industrial parks, with the support of the Lynch administration.

“If you had to characterize economic development in those decades, the ’80s and ’90s,” he said, “it really would be expansion into Millcreek, Summit, and Fairview townships — new industries, new businesses.”

The parks included Robert Baldwin Industrial Park in Summit Township (opened in 1990), Michael J. Veshecco Industrial Park on Erie’s west side (opened in 1993), the Fairview Business Park on the site of the former Commodore

Downs racetrack (opened in 2002), and other parks in Corry, Albion, and the city of Erie. In their last project together, in 1999, GEIDC and the county developed Knowledge Park in Harborcreek Township, adjacent to Penn State Behrend, the first high-tech business park outside of Pittsburgh in western Pennsylvania.

The GEIDC provided low-interest loans for industries entering the parks, boosting jobs and the economy. GEIDC also worked with the Lynch administration to spearhead the employee buyout of Erie Forge and Steel in 1990, which preserved 260 jobs and created 80 more at more than livable wages.

Ploehn said that looking at the overall population and employment numbers at the time, there is not a huge total growth, but he believes that Erie County would be in a far worse position if not for those developments in the ’80s and ’90s.

However, Lynch remains conflicted. By moving industry and business to the suburbs, “we were kind of the death knell for the city of Erie,” Lynch said, explaining that patronage for the Boston Store emigrated to the Millcreek Mall and businesses off the Interstate 90 corridor on Peach Street. Despite Lynch’s introspection, many would argue that the retail evolution was inevitable.

“It did grow the total economy, but it ended up in a real disaster for the city,” she said. This would later come into play when she assisted the city in making the bayfront a major tourism hub.

Another economic initiative followed a natural disaster in the western part of the county. In May 1985, a tornado with winds up to 260 mph devastated Albion and Cranesville, killing 12 and injuring more than 80 while flattening about 10 blocks in the center of town. As soon as news spread that the tornado ripped through the Albion area, Lynch was on the scene. Then Gov. Dick Thornburg traveled to Albion to hold a press conference, but in the weeks that followed, the state and federal emergency management agencies dragged their feet. It caused Lynch to make noise and attract the attention of U.S. Rep. Tom Ridge, Thornburg’s administration, and Ronald Reagan’s administration — all Republicans — to get the help Erie County needed in a timelier fashion.

“Again, it was showing her ability to work with whomever to get the job done for the people,” Pinski said.

Lynch said that her alliance, especially in pivotal moments, was not to her party but to her people.



Judy in 1989.

"I thought of my position as important, and I knew that I was representing the Democratic Party, but I was not a hard and fast Democrat," she said. "Wherever I could get the instruments or revenue or whatever I think I needed to be done, I worked toward that."

When the state announced it was going to build five new prisons throughout the commonwealth, and Erie County was last on the list for possible locations, Lynch stepped in, making the case that after the 1985 tornado, this would help revive Albion and bring jobs and investment back. She was successful with the help of other political leaders, and despite some naysayers who didn't want a prison near their homes, a majority of area residents favored the prison. At one point, the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad employed hundreds of workers, but by 1980, the railroad phased out its Albion portion, and the 1985 tornado was a nail in its economic coffin. Judy secured the coveted prison placement in 1990, and the prison opened in 1993. The project was about $120 million and employed about 300 correctional officers and 100 support personnel. It showed

her commitment to the rural areas of Erie County as well as the suburbs and the city of Erie.

By the end of the decade, the Morning News deemed the 1980s the “Lynch years,” saying that, “overall, County Executive Judy Lynch must be given high marks for being a successful administrator, often in the face of uncontrollable obstacles.” The article cited overcoming a budget deficit, attracting state money, and creating top-rated human services programs to attract further funding in a time when the Reagan administration was cutting federal funds. Lynch had established an early lead in the 1985 election against Republican opponent George Winston, which continued until all the votes were counted.

She was also making strides in her personal life at the time. When Judy’s father died in 1968, his assets were divided among the four children, including stocks. Maude had saved every penny she had to put her and her sister through college and continued her frugality, but when the Great Depression hit and the banks closed, she received stocks instead of her money back. They were not worth anything at the time, but when Judy’s brother Danny asked if he could buy Judy’s share, she decided to check their worth.

Upon finding out that the stocks were worth nearly $50,000, Judy decided to invest in buying a cottage on Kelso Beach. Judy's family grew up going to Edinboro Lake and Conneaut Lake in the summers, so she wanted her own property, and she

wanted to be able to rent it out each summer to make a little extra money. She would still need a loan, though, and in 1987, her husband Terry pointed out that women were not able to obtain loans for commercial or business use without the signature of a male relative, which he refused to do. Her response? “Watch me.”

The county had done business with PNC over the years and given her ability to successfully navigate a budget of hundreds of millions of dollars, PNC agreed to give her a loan for the property. She would later buy another in 2000, and the business continues today. Despite her act of defiance, she decided to let Terry be on the deed.

“To see her so empowered, it was inspiring,” Beth said. “You know, ‘I am woman, hear me roar.’”

That sentiment continued as 1989 in Erie County was known as the “year of the women,” as Erie County reelected Lynch, chose Stephanie Domitrovich as the first female judge, and City Councilwoman Joyce Savocchio moved up the ranks after a close victory in the Democratic primary and a landslide victory in the general election to become mayor of Erie. Savocchio was the first-ever woman at the head of Erie city government. The election of Republican Denise Robison and Democrat Gayle Wright to Erie City Council added to the power shift.

“The ’90s were the time for women to come into their own,” Savocchio said. “It started gradually, but in the ’90s, women were winning, especially at the local level.”

She noted that people like Lynch paved the way for her, and she felt that although the two of them ran as being the best candidates for the job rather than relying on their gender, it felt like they had to work harder to prove their worth.

“The taxpayers were getting a lot for their money because you had to be twice as good as any man to get something,” Savocchio said.

At the time, Erie was suffering from high unemployment rates, broad impacts of deindustrialization, poor bond status — meaning the city was unable to secure favorable interest rates, despite physical decay of structures on the bayfront, and severe infrastructure problems that included a polluted Presque Isle Bay and an outdated combined sewer system that risked daily state fines. At the end of his tenure, as Mayor Louis J. Tullio’s health had begun deteriorating, the city faced major fiscal and structural problems that compelled Savocchio to tighten its fiscal belt through a hiring freeze, selected layoffs, and other measures.

“(Lynch) understood right from the beginning that Erie was part of Erie County,” Savocchio said. “I think we both felt a sense of responsibility toward one another to benefit each

other, and I think that was a really strong foundation for the things we did together."

Savocchio had served as a city councilwoman during Lynch's first two terms as county executive but would remain mayor until the end of Lynch's 20 years on the job. In Savocchio's first term alone, she earned the nickname "infrastructure queen" for her work on water and sewer projects.



Judy Lynch with Hillary Clinton during a campaign stop for Bill Clinton in the 1990s. Lynch served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1992, 1996, 2008, and 2012.

She balanced the budget for the first time in a decade without an increase in taxes or fees, improved the city's bond rating from a BB to an investment grade of A-, improving the city's ability to borrow funds for improvement projects, and continued refurbishing the bayfront on projects begun by earlier administrations.

One of the first calls that Savocchio received as mayor was from the executives for Erie Strayer Company, a global leader in manufacturing at the time for turbines, saying they planned to close the Erie plant. She said that as a new mayor, "that's not what you want to hear," but they also wouldn't give her a direct answer about why they were leaving. It wasn't the taxes, the business expenses, the workforce, or the weather. What she found out was that there was a set of railroad tracks that, when the turbines were moved over them in transport, it created problems. She knew that asking the railroad company to flatten the tracks would take years, so she worked with Lynch's cooperation to raise the streets and fix the problem to halt the impending closure. Working together under the Economic Development Corporation of Erie County and GEIDC, the two collaborated on many projects over the years.

A hallmark of Savocchio's career became the further development of the bayfront after key planning and projects that were launched under the administrations of Mayor Art

Gardner and Mayor Tullio, as well as the Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority.

Among the first key bayfront projects was the county's construction of the Raymond M. Blasco Memorial Library and Maritime Museum. One of the first meetings that the city and county had in 1990 was about the deteriorated condition of the Erie County Library on South Park Row (now part of the federal court campus). At first, Lynch wanted to build a library within the Boston Store, which would draw people back to the heart of the city of Erie. "That didn't fly," noted Gary Bukowski, who was county council chair at the time, explaining that there was backlash because people wanted a new building constructed and Savocchio already had plans to create apartments in the Boston Store building.

When faced with the question of how to get funding for a new building, Lynch thought, "You get under a faucet and turn the faucet on. That faucet is the federal or state office." And at that time, all eyes were on the bayfront.

When Lynch proposed the idea of building a library on the bayfront, voters, planners, and council members alike voted against it, instead favoring the site of the old Sears building that would instead later become the location of the baseball park, today's UPMC Park. Lynch fiercely opposed the downtown site and instead argued that a landmark public building would anchor the city's waterfront efforts. She was right.

“She’s never been given the credit she deserved for that,” Savocchio said.

Lynch spearheaded the negotiations with the state, Penelec, and the Port Authority to acquire the land, which had held Penelec’s former coal-generated power plant. Penelec donated portions of the cleared land for public use, which enabled cultural anchors like the homeport for the U.S. Brig Niagara and the Maritime Museum to take shape. The library and museum project temporarily stalled, though, when bids for the project were higher than expected, placing the project in a $2.3 million deficit.

For over a decade, Lynch had fought an unrelated legal battle over state reimbursements for Pleasant Ridge Manor, the county’s nursing home facility. Although the case went in Erie County’s favor, the state refused to pay the full amount due to disputes over legal fees. Arguments continued until 1995, when Gov. Tom Ridge pushed through a $2 million settlement that Lynch had negotiated with former Gov. Robert Casey, allocating the money to the library and museum construction and effectively moving past the stalemate.

The library, museum, and Brig Niagara mooring site demonstrated how local projects can become a reality through public-private partnerships that include state and local funding, coupled with political willpower. Judy aligned county resources and public contributions with a $2 million philanthropic endowment left by Raymond M. Blasco to fund

the rest of the library project, which took 18 months and over $14 million to complete. When it opened in 1996, Lynch called it “Erie’s bayfront Parthenon,” and members of Erie County Council called Lynch “St. Judy of the Library” for her advocacy of library services.

By going one unprecedented step forward and integrating the Blasco Library into a broader county library system, it became the flagship site and headquarters that enables resource sharing across the county, something that Blasco also envisioned. Housing the library system under the county protected it from the fate of smaller independent libraries that are not funded by the government. It became a model of government that was interested in bettering the day-to-day livelihood of constituents, similar to Lynch’s establishment of a countywide 911 system.

The library became a space for innovation, also as Blasco had intended, thanks to people like Lynch, who brought his intentions to life. When there was extra space between the library and museum, Lynch made it into office space after a young man — Joel Deuterman — asked for her help in creating a cable system for emails. There, he created the Velocity Network, now known as V-NET Fiber, the premier locally owned and operated internet service provider in northwestern Pennsylvania. It grew from pioneering dial-up in the 1990s to the leading source for fiber optic internet.

“The library became — unbeknownst to a whole lot of people and not necessarily advertised as such — a growing field and a way in which we could assist young entrepreneurs,” Lynch said. She saw it as the perfect space for germinating and growing ideas and then providing the resources to lift those ideas off the ground. The sentiment continues today with the library’s Idea Lab.

Lynch has reached extra high at times throughout her public service career, and one of those times was when she ran for Ridge’s congressional seat when he became governor. The 1994 race was packed with competitors.

Lynch had served on many statewide boards, including the planning board (as chair), United Way Board, and Good Schools Pennsylvania Board, in addition to serving on the automation task force, the judicial review commission, and as vice chair of the advisory council for libraries. Ridge’s district covered much of northwestern Pennsylvania, including Erie, Mercer, Crawford, and Butler counties. Phil English was an Erie Republican who had previously served as Erie city controller and ran statewide for treasurer in 1988. He was young, polished, and closely tied to the GOP establishment. Meanwhile, Bill Leavens was a Sharon attorney and Democrat from Mercer County. He emerged from a crowded Democratic primary field that included several Erie-area Democrats, including Lynch and state Sen.

Andrezeski. Because the Erie vote split multiple ways, Leavens won the nomination.

“If you ask me who the threat was, up until the day of the election, I thought it was between Judy Lynch and myself, and, to be very candid with you, I think I could be gracious and be a member of the Lynch team had she won,” said Andrezeski, who lost to Bill Leavens by a couple hundred votes in the primary, in comments he made to the Erie Daily Times.

For Lynch, it was a learning experience. When she decided to run, she had already worked in federal government, spent years in Washington, D.C., and knew a lot about government and politics. In a 1994 debate, she explained that government must be a catalyst for change, and “it’s easy to talk the talk, but I have walked the walk.”

Her daughter, Kathryn, said that soon after Judy began campaigning, she learned the hard way that it was a money game, and she wasn’t the type of person to place that burden on her friends and colleagues. In the end, Lynch was not greatly upset when she lost.

“Quite honestly, the amount of control and the amount of influence that money had on the congressional election was something really problematic for me,” she said. “I’m not going to go out and ask for money.”

Lynch was back at her desk in the courthouse the next day, full steam ahead in her position as county executive and not looking back.

Still, the ever-ambitious Lynch continued to push herself into new situations. In 2001, she received her doctorate with distinction in political science from the University of Pittsburgh. At the time, there was a fight over the ownership of Erie healthcare giants Saint Vincent Health Center and Hamot Medical Center. She wanted to know what was going on in the hospitals and saw it as indicative of a larger issue of ownership in the healthcare system. In her dissertation, Lynch examined the system and looked to Crawford County as an example of what happens when facilities stay independent. She would work all day, then drive to Pittsburgh a few days a week for night classes.

“She’s a woman that has really committed her life to education and public service,” Savocchio said, recalling that time. “If you want an example of a woman who has really achieved in so many areas and yet has remained humble, she will never sing her own praises. I admire that humility, but she deserves recognition. She’s made a tremendous contribution to this community.”

Lynch was also defined by her willingness to advocate for others, expanding the role of human services in Erie County government. From 1993 to 2001, Lynch’s administration used state and federal grants to increase the Department of

Human Services budget from $47.7 million to $124 million with only 2% of the funds coming from county money.



Judy and family (from left) Ann, Mary, Terry, Beth, and Kathryn.

In 2001, Director of Human Services John D. Petulla, credited Lynch for her support and collaboration with various agencies to obtain increased aid for programs addressing mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, childcare, juvenile detention, and abused children. Lynch also prioritized programs for breast cancer awareness, teenage pregnancy prevention, and support for impoverished children.

In 2000 and 2001, Lynch made one of her biggest contributions to the community during her time as county executive. The city of Erie originally operated Tullio Arena, Jerry Uht Park (now UPMC Park), and the Warner Theatre as

part of the Erie Civic Center complex, but steady annual deficits were enough to threaten its survival. To ensure the sustainability of these entertainment centers, Lynch and Savocchio proposed a transfer from the city to the county. The county, which formed the Erie County Convention Center Authority in 2000 to oversee a proposed $26 million convention center on Erie's east bayfront, accepted the transfer. In short order, Gov. Ridge OK'd the state funding for the new Bayfront Convention Center, which at the time was estimated to pump about $15 million in new tourism dollars into the community annually and create 250 to 400 full-time jobs either directly or through spinoff businesses thanks to the adjoining hotel, parking garage, and restaurant infrastructure that would be built around the center.

Despite opposition from hoteliers, the county imposed a 5% countywide hotel tax, of which 80% would go back to the Erie County Convention Center Authority to promote tourism. By moving the ballpark (UPMC Park), Warner Theatre, the Civic Center (now Erie Insurance Arena), and the Bayfront Convention Center under that umbrella, they were given funding rather than fighting their own budget battles with the city, revolutionizing Erie's tourism industry. Today, the authority is known as Erie Events, and it exists not just to run venues but to promote, attract, develop, and expand business, industry, commerce, and tourism in Erie County. The Erie SeaWolves continue to draw national

attention to Erie, while Erie Insurance Arena and the Bayfront Convention Center sponsor the Erie Otters minor league hockey team, concerts, trade shows, conventions, and enable the Jefferson Educational Society and other regional organizations to bring world-renowned speakers and major events to Erie County.

When Lynch ran for reelection in 2001, after serving 20 years, she told the Erie Times-News that, “If this is my last, that’s OK.” At the time, the political climate had grown tense. Lynch had always campaigned on the economy and the need for jobs, so her opponent, Republican nominee Rick Schenker, pointed to the closing of the Hammermill Paper Co. plant and U.S. Airways’ elimination of jet service to the Erie International Airport and blamed Lynch. Her daughter, Kathryn, said it was a public firing after Judy had given everything to the job, and it was made even worse by the fact that Schenker, who gained notoriety as the spokesman for the local district of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, did not have the extensive background in government that Judy had. Principally with business support, Schenker also spent nearly twice as much money as Lynch did in his election campaign, making it once again into at least somewhat of a money game. Ultimately, Schenker won by a narrow margin.

“I’ve never seen her so deflated,” said daughter Beth. “That was heartbreaking.”

Judy recalled cleaning the things out of her office and then quickly traveling down to Kathryn's house in Virginia.

"I started to cry," she said. "To lose an election, it hurts. You invest so much of yourself."

Pinski said that Lynch didn't necessarily get defeated the last time she ran because she was doing anything wrong. He believes that after four years on county council and 20 years as county executive, people felt they needed someone new to fix their new problems.

"I think that most would admit that after that, they regretted that they did not return her for a sixth time," he said.

Her daughters flew her to Arizona to stay with Beth and get her out of Erie for a bit. Ann said that she was never as proud of her mother as she was after Judy lost that election because she decided to reinvent herself.

"Not giving up, not blaming others, but looking for 'how do I improve things from here?'" Ann said. "That, I think, is the true test of a person."

Lynch didn't stay in Arizona long, though, as Beth said, "she has ants in her pants. She's not one to sit by idly." So began Lynch's new chapter.

A Lesson in History

When she returned to northwestern Pennsylvania, Lynch had a homecoming of sorts. Because she loved Meadville and Allegheny College's campus, she began to teach there. In the 2000 presidential election and the midterm elections in 2002, young voter turnout in Pennsylvania followed a broader national trend characterized by historically low youth participation. While at Allegheny, Judy took on the role of facilitating civic engagement efforts to empower college students to take action in their communities and register to vote. While there, she also completed a study on the tool and dye industry of the area, commonly known as "Tool City USA."

While she had great appreciation for the intellect of her students at Allegheny, Judy said that their agreeable nature in academics was at times troubling to her, as she had unorthodox ways of teaching that were meant to engage students in debate and conversation. Additionally, the drive from Millcreek to Meadville would get treacherous in the winter, and by 2004, Judy was ready to return to Erie County.

She picked up the phone and called Dr. William Garvey, who she said had helped her throughout her political career. He then placed her at Mercyhurst's North East campus as a professor of political science and history.

There, she found her students were more willing to question her teachings and take an active role in her lessons. She found this conversational type of teaching to be rewarding and stayed there until her retirement in 2017.

Lynch continued to meet with Garvey and joined him, along with other community leaders in the decision to found the Jefferson Educational Society. The founders intended the organization to be a place that examined modern concepts and accelerated the adoption of new ideas to help drive community progress.

JES President Ferki Ferati recalled that first board meeting in 2008 when Lynch was appointed the first chairperson of the organization. He had been a student at Mercyhurst some years earlier and found her intimidating by proxy of his friends who at time struggled with her rigorous coursework.

“My impression of her was that she was tough,” Ferki said. “I think thereafter, for a couple of years, I was kind of walking on eggshells.”

Lynch, who believes in the principle of civic enlightenment and the pursuit of freedom through education, was clear about her intentions for the organization.

“Judy set the tone for the board that nobody had an agenda (politically),” Ferati said. “They were just there to help the community.”

About a year into its founding, Garvey became ill, and Dr. Ferati, as executive director, was faced with important decisions to make about the JES's second-ever Global Summit speaker series. He called Lynch to get her input, but instead of providing input, she assured him that she trusted him to get the job done.

A few months later, Lynch walked out of the event Ferki had agonized over and said it was the best talk she had ever heard. "She smiled, and it was like a door opened to her," he said.



Bill Clinton and Judy Lynch during Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2015.

The precedent that Lynch set, which focuses on inspiring others rather than micromanaging them, continues to be an integral part of the Jefferson today. From there, the two

would go on to become closely connected as friends and collaborators. Under their leadership, the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy would eventually emerge in 2015, with Lynch serving as its inaugural director. Each year, the JCLA cohort continues to learn about state, federal, and local governments in the region, and examine a problem in Erie County and advance the conversation in a meaningful way.

Lynch has always believed she has an obligation to the people around her and who come after her. She also believes that good intentions without knowledge or structure accomplish very little, leading her to continually teach others. In the past, she said she finds the answers to the future, and through her career, she has created pathways that empower others to do that too.

It’s what brought her to a camera on a chilly day in March in 2020, just three days after Pennsylvania ordered its residents to stay home because of the pandemic. Ferati was behind the lens. Lynch was in the frame.

"Can we end on a positive note?" he asked.

After an hour of statistics and grim details, she changed her tone.

“We will come through it, and not only that, I think that there will be great pride in what we accomplished,” Lynch said.

She was right, but the years that have followed would test that optimism in ways she could not have anticipated. Four years later, in February 2024, her daughter, Mary, died.

Mary's passing followed Terry's, who had died in 2017. While they remained married for 56 years, Judy said that she and Terry were never the type of couple who had to be attached; they each had their own circles and interests.



Judy Lynch with her daughter, Mary.

"He was probably more proud of being Irish than he was of being American," she said. "And that's because of the singing, the songs, the drinking, and the spirit and the socializing — all those aspects that we think of as being part

of the Irish collective." The proud Irish heritage that both her parents carried was passed down to Mary.

Before Jack Campbell got his first job at Pleasant Ridge Manor working under Lynch, he grew up in the same neighborhood and school as the Lynch girls. When Campbell took an interest in music, Mary was always there to sit and listen to him play.

"She was one of those people who were just very easy to be around and cheerful," he said. "She always had that going for her, and that brought people together."

Campbell remembered parties at Judy's Kelso Beach cottages when Mary would return after spending time in Arizona with Beth and just wanted to sing and dance and be joyful together. Like her mother, she had a knack for bringing all sorts of people together.

"I miss her, and I think a lot of people do," Campbell said. "Because sometimes you have that glue that brings people together, and she was that."

The year carried on, though, and it came with excitement in the midst of grief. By fall 2024, Judy Lynch had published her life's scholarly work in what her family calls "a labor of love."

The book project had started with her doctoral thesis and work for Allegheny College, but it began to take shape in 2010 when Dr. Ferati began meeting with the Workforce Investment Board, which covered five counties in northwestern

Pennsylvania. The concern arose that nobody really had a comprehensive understanding of the economic history of the region, and because Lynch was already working on some writing assignments for the JES, Ferati approached her about writing the economic history of the region.

After 17 years of research, the result was “America's Early Frontier: Economic History of Northwestern Pennsylvania (1753-2024)” published by the JES.



Judy Lynch and Jefferson Educational Society Director of Publications Pat Cuneo during the 2024 launch of Lynch’s book ‘America’s Early Frontier.’

In the economic textbook, Lynch guides the reader through the American story by examining the history and development of four counties of northwestern Pennsylvania: Erie, Crawford, Venango, and Warren, and the people, events, topography, companies, competition, and inventions that helped shape them. She writes about industries that were leveled and regions that had to find new footing.

What she could not have known was how soon she would need to find her own footing once again.

In 2025, Judy's house of over 60 years, filled with mementos like her desk from when she was county executive, burned down the day before Thanksgiving, and a month later, when she would normally be celebrating Christmas and her birthday, her beloved dog Max died. After a lifetime of facing addiction in her family, grieving those closest to her, and facing public firings at times, this felt like a breaking point. She now feels like sorrow is a most familiar companion.

"It sits in my soul," she said. "It's heavy."

Sifting through debris has taken a long time, and she typically comes up empty-handed, as if the fire didn't just consume the house but took her past with it. What has made it through the harshest conditions and transcended generations isn't always things, though, oftentimes it's the lessons.

In the aftermath of the fire, Judy flew out to Arizona to spend time with her daughter, Beth, as her new house was taking shape.

“Honest to God, you can’t tell her no, which is good and bad,” Beth said. “She is so motivated.”

She continues to walk a mile and a half each day, although these days, the grief accompanying her looks a little different. While in Arizona, Judy adopted a new dog, which she wanted to name Anubis, after the Egyptian god of the afterlife and guardian of the graves. Fitting for the loss that led her to that point. But her grandchildren had other ideas, and now his name is Bernie Sanders.

She accepts this with characteristic measured approval. "I like Bernie Sanders," she said. "But I get a little dismayed by all this talk about socialism, because most of the people talking about it don't know the definition. They should go look it up."

As she takes Bernie the dog for his walk, he trots beside her. She pauses every so often to pick up wrappers, bottles, and straws left lying around in small, quiet acts of reverence — but Judy Lynch is still not one to stand on the sidelines. She attends events at the JES and is the first to shoot her hand up in the air, asking questions about the future and challenging the speakers. Just as she has her entire life, Judy continues to put the community’s well-being first and contemplate its future.

“I think that her legacy is an example not just to women, but I think to men as well, certainly in her political life, but even in the way she’s lived her life — that she’d led a life worth living,” said Joyce Savocchio. “She’s touched on so many aspects of our lives or of anybody’s personal life or career life through her love of this city and the county, a place that she’s called home.

“She’s made history, and she’s left a record that she can be proud of.”

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