

# To Educate, Protect and Serve A CNR Alumna's Life in the Public Interest

“**Y**ou cover the fire,” said College of New Rochelle (CNR) alumna Pat Keegan '73, referring to a lesson she learned as a journalist in the first phase of her career. “No matter the beat you're assigned, when news breaks and you're the one available, be prepared to jump at the story.”

This saying would ring true throughout Keegan's rewarding career, from local Westchester County journalist, to educator, to her current position as United States Congresswoman Nita Lowey's district director. The honored responsibility, which she has held for 26 years, is coming to an end in early January when Congresswoman Lowey retires from office.

Some may say Keegan's calling to public service was foreordained. Her late father Joseph M. Keegan, who served four terms in the New Jersey General Assembly and a single term in the New Jersey Senate, would inspire her lifelong objective of advancing the greater good.

“Raised in a political family, I would attend high-profile gatherings as a child, including my father's swearing in and events hosted by the governor,” explained Keegan. “I was 8-years-old when President John F. Kennedy was elected, and I remember attending his inaugural parade fondly.”



In addition to her upbringing, Keegan's experiences in and out of the classroom as a CNR undergraduate student prepared her for graduate school, as well as her work in journalism, education and government. The women's college was led by then-President Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly, OSU who would influence Keegan and her classmates to realize their dreams. Renowned for greatly expanding CNR's policies and programs, leading global innovations in higher education and paving a pathway for women in the field, Kelly was the first woman to head the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

“While it was a time when things were not as open to women as they are now, she taught so many of us to ‘go in there and do it.’ She instilled great confidence in us,” said Keegan.

After graduating from CNR, Keegan enrolled in Columbia University's Master of Journalism program, where she would be thrown into many New York City neighborhoods on assignments, standing side-by-side with famed city reporters such as WNBC-TV's Gabe Pressman, acclaimed for his coverage of events including the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as the Beatles' first trip to the United States.

Following graduation from Columbia University, Keegan worked at a group of eight local newspapers known as the Gannett Westchester Newspapers, rising in the ranks to become education editor. After the birth of her two children, she worked as a freelance writer, and taught undergraduate journalism at Pace University and graduate journalism at Iona College. Recruited by then-State Education Commissioner Tom Sobol, she next accepted the job of director of communications for the New York State Education Department, where she worked for three years before receiving word from a friend about an opening in Congresswoman Lowey's office.

Without hesitation, as if it was in her blood, Keegan seized the opportunity. Now, as Congresswoman Lowey's district director, Keegan serves New York's 17th congressional district. With pleasure and enthusiasm, she has led constituent services



Class of 1973 45th Reunion, June 2018. Keegan is front row, far right.

and community outreach for an expansive region that includes the Lower Hudson Valley, Central and Northwestern Westchester County and Rockland County. In her role, she assists countless individuals with the navigation of complex economic and social issues related to federal agencies.

Among many standout moments, Keegan cites one that involved a 13-year-old girl awaiting emergency heart surgery. The imported medical device her surgeon needed was locked in a major delivery company warehouse 1,000 miles away. Two federal agencies needed to sign off, on a weekend no less, before the package could be delivered to the New York hospital. Keeping true to her nature, Keegan intervened using her reporting and research skills to impel the right people to deliver the device on time.

As one of the longest-serving district directors in the country, she takes pride in mentoring and learning from her counterparts. She has most enjoyed watching the Congresswoman present a Purple Heart to a World War II veteran

joined by four generations of his proud family. She has organized roundtable discussions where college students informed the Congresswoman that her bill to raise the maximum award for federal Pell Grants and distribute them year-round enabled them to stay in college and earn their degrees.

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“Pat Keegan has done an incredible job as my District Director for the last 26 years. Under her energetic and compassionate leadership, my office has helped

thousands of constituents and developed strong relationships with dozens of community organizations,” said Congresswoman Lowey of her esteemed colleague.

With humility and sophistication, Keegan has stood side-by-side with noted community leaders since grade school and has developed close relationships with these individuals at the forefront of organizations and industries generating solutions to some of the most complex social issues of our time. “Many of them have become personal friends and have made my work very rewarding,” said Keegan.

Post-January, you will likely find Keegan at her beloved Jersey Shore family home catching up on newspaper and magazine articles from years past and devoting more time to bond with her dear friends, including several CNR classmates.

You will also find her doing what will always light her fire, one that will never dim – leveraging her valued relationships to serve the community and bring people together, powerfully striving for the greater good.

Photo by John Vecchiolla