

~Martha G. Parfet~

If it were mandated that honorary degree candidates must represent the values of the institution, Martha Gilmore Parfet would epitomize the ideal recipient for Kalamazoo College.

Community leadership, intellectual curiosity, appreciation of the natural world, willingness to take risks, respect for tradition, and a consummate sensitivity to human needs for sustenance, as well as dignity: These are the characteristics that define Martha Parfet and are illustrated in her achievements.

Her dedication to her roots coalesced in her chairmanship of the Kalamazoo Foundation. Mrs. Parfet guided the community foundation founded by her grandfather, W. E. Upjohn, in more visionary patterns than even that pioneer imagined.

Service as president of Service Club of Kalamazoo, Inc., the forerunner of Junior League, and as an organizer of Gryphon Place Crisis Counseling Center prepared her for the dynamics of the greater community. Immersion in the activities of the Kalamazoo Civic Players and the Civic Auditorium Trustee Corporation taught the somber lessons of arts funding.

A lifelong learner, Mrs. Parfet became a devoted and knowledgeable bird watcher and photographer. Her passionate interest in environmental concerns led to her role in establishing the Kalamazoo Nature Center and chairing its board. A quick and intense study of architecture and construction was required to chair the building committee for the Nature Center's unique Interpretive Center.

Tapped by her uncle, Irving S. Gilmore, to succeed him as president of Gilmore Brothers stores, Mrs. Parfet has delved creatively and thoroughly into the world of merchandising. The next step was to assimilate the principles of economic development to strengthen all of downtown Kalamazoo. Her presidency of the Downtown Development Association encompassed the crucial planning stages of the Arcadia Creek project and forged new private and public partnerships.

This bobby-soxer of the '40s emerges as a role model for women of the '90s . . . entrepreneurial, philanthropic, civic-minded, courageous. Her sense of fairness, integrity and team play may stem from her lifetime interest in sports. Her compassion and gentleness may mirror her life as a wife, mother, and grandmother.

However, her most engaging traits are her wit . . . often directed at herself . . . her extreme modesty and abhorrence of ceremony. It is a credit to Kalamazoo College that we were able to persuade Martha Gilmore Parfet to permit the College to honor her today with the degree of Doctor of Humanities, so richly and appropriately deserved.

Elizabeth S. Upjohn-Mason, June 10, 1995