

Tribute to Katherine Mayer
By Gary T. Johnson,
President, Chicago History Museum,
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We thank you all for coming here to the Chicago History Museum to celebrate the life of our beloved Trustee, Kay Mayer.

I first heard about Kay Mayer from her son, Denny Mayer. Denny told me about a lady who did things on a daily basis that people her age **just didn't do**. (Now, bear in mind, this was probably over 20 years ago!)

I first met this remarkable lady in July of 2005 – a big day for her. That was when the Board voted to name a gallery in honor of Kay. It caught her completely by surprise. Kay could not have been happier because she had a lifelong love for this museum. She easily had the best record among the trustees for attendance at our events, and she often reminded the trustees that did not keep up with her. Her last time here was for our Fourth of July celebration. From her place on the portico, she acknowledged the applause of the crowd with a wave. (By the way, Kay's gallery is right on the Museum's second floor, in the Exelon wing.)

Pretty soon, I began to notice something rather intimidating: Kay, at her age, had a better ability to remember new names than I had. I took a closer look and figured out her secret: she never let herself off the hook. She never said, "Oh, I don't need to learn that...." There's a lesson there for all of us.

Our colleague, Luciana Crovato, was born in Milan. Whenever I heard someone greeting Luciana in Italian, I knew that Kay Mayer had come to pay a visit. You **do** know that Kay spoke Italian! was it her Latin School education?

It was only recently that I learned something else, something very important. It was the Board meeting of March 2005. The Trustees were meeting in executive session, and it was one of those times when the future of a venerable institution hung in the balance.

For many years, there had been talk of a complete renovation of the museum. The plans were ready, and it was time to launch a capital campaign. The problem was that the President had just announced his resignation so that he could take his dream job at the Smithsonian in Washington. Should the plans for the new Chicago History Museum be put on hold? Here is what our Chairman, John Rowe, told me. It was **Kay Mayer** who saved the day at that meeting. She said, "**Of course** we will go forward." The fateful vote was cast, and the Acting President,

Russell Lewis, was given the job of moving ahead. The exciting plans were announced, and, as we say around here, "the rest is history."

On behalf of all the Trustees, and all the staff, and all the members, and all the volunteers of the Chicago History Museum, we are grateful for the life of our beloved friend, Kay Mayer.