



STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR PAT QUINN

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JANE ADDAMS DAY OP-ED

By Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn

On Dec. 10, 1931, Jane Addams brought honor to Illinois by winning the first Nobel Peace Prize ever awarded to an American woman. Now, 75 years later, the State of Illinois is honoring Jane Addams' memory with a commemorative holiday to remind us of her lifelong commitment to making the city of Chicago, the state of Illinois – and the entire world – a better place.

As we celebrate Jane Addams' life on Dec. 10, it will mark the first time in state history that we have set aside a day to commemorate a woman's accomplishments. But I hope that Jane Addams Day will prove to be more than an expression of our pride in one of Illinois' most famous citizens. The story of Jane Addams can teach young people that one person really can make a difference.

Back in 1860, when Jane Addams was born in Cedarville, well-behaved young women from small towns in northern Illinois didn't have many opportunities to go to college and pursue professional careers. But Jane Addams had an ambitious dream of changing the world.

So she moved to Chicago's West Side, with the idea of helping the many immigrants who were struggling to make ends meet. Soon Jane Addams' Hull House was serving thousands of people each week, offering safe, educational daycare for children, English and citizenship classes for adults, and a wide variety of arts and sports programs for all ages.

As the years passed, Jane Addams became a tireless advocate for reform. She worked night and day to make city water cleaner, improve city schools, and clear garbage off city streets. Inspired by her example, civic-minded executives and progressive reformers joined together to assist immigrants, protect children, safeguard workers, and guarantee the civil rights of everyone. Today, more than 70 years after her death, the organizations she helped to found are still fighting for the causes she believed in.

Over the past year, Jane Addams' legacy has inspired a new generation. As a civics project, the students of Dongola School, in far southern Illinois, decided to lobby their state legislators to establish a day honoring Jane Addams and her work. With the help of Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie, D-Chicago, and Sen. Mattie Hunter D-Chicago, we succeeded in passing Jane Addams Day. Last month Governor Blagojevich signed the bill making the new commemorative day official.

This week, we will gather at Hull House Museum in Chicago with representatives from a whole host of organizations founded by Jane Addams. As we celebrate this new commemorative holiday, I hope that people all across Illinois will be newly inspired by Jane Addams and her life, on Dec. 10 and every day. She proved that when people work together for reform, they can change the world.