



# BARTON HALL: TRIBUTE TO A LIFE OF SERVICE

*by Dave Bircher*

Lynn, Massachusetts is known as the “City of Firsts.” Throughout its long history, Lynn residents have been at the edge of new ways of thinking, doing business and interacting with their community. In recent history, Virginia Barton has been a pioneer of social and racial equality in the city.

Born and raised in Lynn, Barton has a heart for the city and knows it from Lynn Shore Drive to Lynn Woods. She started working when she was twelve years old in the factories that used to function out of the top floors of the buildings around Central Square. Barton grew up in Lynn Public Schools, attended local churches, sat on various boards and helped to form some of the most influential institutions and organizations on the North Shore.

“Downtown Lynn was gorgeous,” recalls Barton. “When you walked through downtown Lynn it was beautiful with shops, restaurants, department stores, etc.”

Ever since she was young, Virginia Barton has had a passion to serve others and give back to her community.

“When I was young, I wanted to be a missionary, but I didn’t follow through, so I’ve tried to live my life

helping people no matter where they are,” said Barton of her motive behind the change she has brought about.

Her involvement in the city first started at her church’s youth group where she served as the director.

“I gave kids an opportunity to talk,” explained Barton. “But also taught them what’s wrong and what’s right.”

Her congregation was impressed with her gifts and soon Mrs. Barton found herself working with the Blue Birds and Campfire Girls at the local elementary school. It was not long before she was allowing the little boys of the school to join in on the fun by allowing them to serve as girls’ “guardians” on outings. In addition, Barton was also active in Mother’s Club and served as “room mother” to five different classes.

Soon, Barton began to come to the realization that there should be some minority faces represented on local boards. Her first appearance was on the Visiting Nurses board where she was not warmly accepted.

“My resume will show you that I think I have hit every meaningful board in the city,” said Barton.

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Gordon in Lynn

120 Munroe Street, 2nd Floor, Lynn, Massachusetts 01901

781.599.0821 or visit [www.gordoninlynn.com](http://www.gordoninlynn.com)

As Virginia Barton's popularity as a civil servant grew, so did her responsibilities in and around the city. After Title 1 was passed, Fred Coleman, a respected principal in the Lynn Public Schools, asked if Barton would fill the role of Director of Parent Involvement. Originally, it was supposed to be a summer position, but Barton's achievements landed her a permanent position in Lynn and eventually the title of National Chairman.

"I put parent involvement on the map: locally, in the state, the region and the country," smiled Barton.

Barton's achievements do not stop there. She opened the Officina Hispana de Lynn, was cofounder of the Community Minority Cultural Center on Union Street, served as long time member of the NAACP and also as its secretary, vice president and president. In addition, Barton is the proud mother of children who have continued her legacy of leadership throughout the city in the areas of education and public service.

Gordon College's new Barton Hall in Lynn, which houses up to 24 students, is a memorial to Virginia Barton's work and dedication throughout the decades in Lynn. Barton was surprised to find out the extent of the project.

"I made it in my mind that it was a room," laughed Barton.

Barton has high hopes for Gordon in Lynn and the reciprocal impact it will have on the city and on the college.

"Looking at the building and the faces and the enthusiasm in those young people, this is the best hope for our city," said Barton. "And the giving-service back to the community is the most important ingredient."



**According to Ms. Barton, Mr. Abner Darby, co-founder of the CMCC, was the first person in Lynn to welcome Oasis Development. It was through his leading that Oasis was networked in the city. The CMCC boardroom was the first base of operation in Lynn.**

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## GORDON IN LYNN

*At the heart of Gordon in Lynn is a creative collaboration between Gordon College and the city of Lynn, Massachusetts. Through guided civic engagement, Gordon in Lynn fosters social responsibility, cultural appreciation and community leadership in students growing in maturity, knowledge and faith.*

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