

## Garden Pathways

*2009 "Woman with a Heart for Bakersfield"*

### Betty Younger



Betty Younger's heart lives in the joy of creating and bringing art into public places where everyone, especially children, can experience culture in their daily lives. This diminutive and tireless septuagenarian challenges the boundaries of size and age by creating enormous metal sculptures. Referred to as a "woman of steel" in the arts community, Betty finds junk steel and transforms it into stunning pieces of art with lots of "muscle" and welding equipment. Over twenty of her sculptures are prominently displayed throughout Kern County. Betty brings artistic vision and energy to the myriad boards she has served over the years.

An internationally recognized artist, Betty is a lifelong advocate for the arts with many firsts under her welding apron. In the early '60s, she joined the Child Guidance Guild which provided services for children and parents. She handled their marketing and worked on the logo design that is still used today: two interlocking hands of an adult and child. This was the beginning of the Guild House, whose proceeds continue to be donated back to the Guild (known as Henrietta Weill today) to help troubled Kern County children and their families. In the '70s, Betty served on the board of the Kern County Behavioral Health Association and organized its first art competition and fundraiser. Since the late '80s, Betty has continued to serve in various capacities on boards of The Arts Council of Kern and Bakersfield Museum of Art, where she helped work for its national museum accreditation. As executive director of the Arts Council in 1996-97, Betty and her board created a plan to save the Arts Council after the state withdrew all funding. In 2000, she received the silver medal at the 2000 Olympic Art Competition for her work, "The Eternal Flame." This sculpture was purchased by Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee, for the permanent art collection of the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. Betty recently opened an art gallery to promote local artists and just completed a life-size statue of Jesus out of a 1,200-pound steel pipe for the Bakersfield Rescue Mission.

A fourth-generation Californian, Betty's passion for art began when she was a child. The pioneer women in her family were talented and educated artists and writers at a time when women received little recognition – particularly for education. Encouraged to pursue her own dreams, Betty earned her bachelor's degree in fine arts and art history from San Jose State, and master's degree and teaching credential from UCLA. Upon graduating, Betty rejoined her loving family and became a teacher at her alma mater, Bakersfield High School. One of the first special education teachers, she also taught sculpture, math, and leather crafts.

Betty and her husband, Milt, a prominent local attorney, have been married fifty-four years. Together, they work tirelessly to improve and promote arts and culture in the community. She is a proud mother of three daughters: Lisa, Lynda, and CeCe, and five grandchildren. Ever forward looking, Betty continues her vision. "My goals for the future are to improve the image of Bakersfield through art, music and education."