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Disabled lose longtime advocate Ollie Webb

By KRISTIN ZAGURSKI
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Ollie Mae Webb — the namesake of an Omaha center serving people with developmental disabilities and their families — spoke out often for equal treatment for disabled people.

A childhood illness left Webb with brain damage, and she was institutionalized in her late teens. In the 1970s, she became a mouthpiece for her institu-



Ollie Mae Webb
der, said Patricia McGill Smith, a longtime friend.
She was 75.

tionalized peers.

She died Tuesday at the Nebraska Medical Center after a long struggle with pneumonia and complications of a lung disorder, said Patricia McGill Smith,

Webb, her parents and her 12 brothers and sisters came to Nebraska from Oklahoma when she was young. State welfare workers placed Webb in the Beatrice State Developmental Center when she was 19, and she stayed there seven years, friend Shirley Dean said.

Webb was moved from the center into nursing homes, where she cared for the elderly seven days a week for as little as \$5 a month, McGill Smith said.

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Webb, who was told that she could never live alone, moved into an apartment in the early 1970s and eventually bought a home.

She worked mostly at restaurants, Dean said, and spent 17 years as a salad chef at Omaha's Field Club. A heart attack forced her to retire.

"She could make the best salad of any person you ever met," McGill Smith said.

Webb once invited Nebraska first lady Ruth Thone, wife of Gov. Charles Thone, to her house for lunch. McGill Smith assisted her with preparations.

"It was the prettiest lunch you ever saw," she said, "and Ollie cooked every bit of it."

Field Club members supported Webb's activism and once helped pay her airfare so she could speak in England at an international conference, Dean said. Webb often spoke publicly about the rights, responsibilities and freedom of the disabled.

"If you listened to Ollie, you would hear about 'her people' and how she loved them," McGill Smith said. "Her greatest and most outstanding skill was her ability to speak out on behalf of people's rights."

Webb amazed friends with her positive outlook and her ability to influence others.

"I can't think of too many peo-

ple who have made more of their life than Ollie," friend Tom Miller said. "When you take a look at what she became, it's incredible . . . when her early life was not a picnic at all."

Webb was an original member and a past president of Project II, a social organization for adults with developmental disabilities. She also served as president of the board of People First of Nebraska, a statewide advocacy organization for developmentally and physically disabled people.

The Greater Omaha Association for Retarded Citizens was renamed the Ollie Webb Center in 1998.

Webb loved to sew, travel, listen to music and dance, friends said. She made hundreds of quilts, and she gave them away as gifts, or sold them and gave the profits to charity.

She was born on Leap Day and would often tell people she was only 15 or 16, Miller said.

Services are at 3 p.m. Saturday at Heafey-Heafey-Hoffman Dworak-Cutler West Center Chapel, 78th Street and West Center Road.

Webb is survived by a daughter, Nancy Webb of Omaha; four brothers, John Webb of Scottsbluff, Neb., Harold Webb of Morrill, Neb., Utah Webb of Torrington, Wyo., and Eldon Webb of Festus, Mo.; and two sisters, Dorothy Miller of Gering, Neb., and Edna Cook of Scottsbluff.