

Senator Margaret Louise Carter 2017 Ageless Award Honoree

Margaret Louise Carter was born in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1935, the eighth of nine children and the youngest girl in her family. She was a strong student, however, she wound up skipping a few grades and was finally matched up with students of her own age by the time she had reached the eighth grade. She graduated as salutatorian of her senior class.

From there, Carter enrolled at Grambling State College on a music scholarship. After two and a half years at Grambling, Carter married and dropped out of school to raise her family. In 1967, Carter escaped what had become a violently abusive relationship by moving to Oregon with her five children. Finding work as a teacher's assistant in the Portland Public Schools, Carter was eventually able to return to college and graduated from Portland State University in 1972. She then started teaching at Albina Youth Opportunity School and enrolled in Oregon State University's Portland-based masters in counseling program. In 1974, she completed her master's of education in educational psychology, with a focus on counseling. Her Oregon State University degree in hand, Carter became a counselor at Portland Community College (PCC), where she worked for the next twenty-seven years.

In 1984, she ran for state office and became the first African American woman elected to the Oregon Legislature where she spent the next 28 years serving in either the House or Senate. In 2006, Carter was named Oregon Statesman of the Year by the Oregon Business Association and also served as president of the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women. During much of her Senate tenure, Carter was also the CEO of the Urban League of Portland. After the 2009 legislative session ended, Carter left the Senate to become deputy director of Oregon's Department of Human Services. She retired from the department in 2014. In retirement, she has continued to volunteer at the Albina DHS and at PCC in their area skills center, now named the Margaret Carter Skill Center. PCC also unveiled the Senator Margaret Carter Technology Education Building at the Cascade Campus in 2011. She serves on the Board of the Oregon Historical Society and has been an active mentor to young women interested in politics.

