

Drawing the Line

Dr. June McCarroll was a woman who left her mark on the world -- literally. Born in Nebraska, she was a general practitioner who moved to the Coachella Valley of California in 1904 with her husband, who was seeking a better climate to overcome tuberculosis. She became famous for traveling by horse and buggy or horseback to care for valley residents, including Indians.

But it was a near traffic collision in the fall of 1917 that started Dr. McCarroll on the road to change the streets of the nation. She was driving her Model T Ford one day on her way to see a patient when a truck heading in the opposite direction appeared on the narrow road. The truck was taking up most of the street, and the quick-thinking doctor veered her automobile to the right and into the sandy edges of the road.

After dusting herself off, a thought came to her that could have prevented the near accident by keeping cars on their side of the road -- a white line painted down the center of all the streets to divide the traffic. Dr. McCarroll got the typical bureaucratic response from the town council, telling her that the idea was ingenious but impractical. She wouldn't take no for an answer, however, and she took the concept to the local women's club. The vote was unanimous in support of the project. She continued to face governmental stubbornness, however, for seven long years before her proposal was implemented.

C.N. Hamilton was a staunch local supporter of Dr. McCarroll's plan, and when he became a member of the California Highway Commission in 1924, he convinced the commission to approve the painting of a five-mile-long experimental center line on Route 99. An additional test strip was also painted. Accidents on both stretches of roadway diminished dramatically, and soon the entire state boasted McCarroll lines on its highways. Most of the world has since followed suit.

What is the lesson for us? When you conceive of an idea in which you fervently believe, go for it, especially if individuals you respect believe it is a good one. Polite, pleasant persistence is often the key to accomplishment.

--Beecher Hunter