

## Speaking up for women's rights



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAREN SPINDEL

I used to go to the high school and bring my first American Express card. I'd show it to the students and ask them if they know what's special about it. Of course they don't know, so I'll tell them that it's special because it says: Card member since 1974, has my name on it; the first year, I, as a married woman, could get credit of my own.

**Karen Spindel**

Named Feminist of the Month

The Veteran Feminists of America have named Clifton resident Karen Spindel as Feminist of the Month for her many years of work toward the feminist movement. Spindel is pictured second from left in the photo on the left. Spindel's daughters Samantha, below left, and Rachel, also participated in many of the rallies alongside their mother. Rachel, also pictured far right in photo on left, is the coordinator for the local Passaic County chapter of NOW.

## Clifton woman named Feminist of the Month

By Eli Zwillenberg  
Correspondent

CLIFTON — Karen Spindel, long-time Clifton resident, is being honored as Feminist of the Month by the Veteran Feminists of America.

To hear Spindel tell it, she's been a feminist her entire life, but only politically active as one since the early 1970s. The early achievement most mentioned by Spindel and her supporters in the National Organization of Women (NOW) and Veteran Feminists of America is having earned a mechanical engineering degree from George Washington University in the 1960s. These days most young women do not understand why that's a greater accomplishment for a woman than for a man,



and that is what she wishes to illuminate in her upcoming memoir.

In talking to me, Spindel revealed that what really set her

apart from her contemporaries in the 1960s and '70s was that where other women were complacent, she was active. Where other women accepted mistreatment, she bristled at unequal treatment. Spindel wasn't the only one, but she is certainly an exceptional example.

"What really galvanized my desire to pursue that degree was something that happened at a family gathering. It was some holiday or other and all the cousins were talking about what college they were looking at. I always loved science and math so I said I was thinking of going to engineering school. My uncle said if I got an engineering degree he would eat his hat. So I did."

Spindel's uncle did not actually eat his hat, but she did actually get



an honors badge from Phi Beta Pi, the engineering honor society. In the years between entering GWU and graduating she said she encountered much misogynistic

resistance and several instances of outright discrimination.

In one episode described in her

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memoir, just a month or two before graduating from GWU she had the opportunity to attend a class trip to the Bethlehem Steel plant in Maryland. Spindel said, like all her classmates on the bus, she was excited at the prospect of seeing one place where her designs might be made material reality. Unfortunately, she was not allowed into the building.

“Back then all I could wear were skirts. They first said that it was too dangerous. Then they said it involved walking on catwalks and the workers would be able to look up my skirt, so I said that I’d come back with slacks. Of course that wouldn’t happen. Eventually they escorted everyone else off the bus and sent an armed guard to sit on the seat next to me. When they came back to ask if I wanted to join them for lunch I said, ‘Why? Do you need someone to do the dishes?’” The incident was not only a stinging blow to her feelings of equality, but also a concern professionally - Spindel was soon to graduate and said if she couldn’t even take a factory tour, she worried, would she be able to get a job?