

This book is dedicated to the hundreds of individuals who spent untold hours encouraging citizens to participate in democracy, thereby helping to build and nourish our communities. We especially recognize the leaders who are former presidents of the League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County:

Frances Nelson

Myra Fowler

Judge Blanche Funk Miller

Carla Pakenham

Emily Schweinler

Amy Magill

Grace Rowe Harrison

Helen Sohlberg

Ruth Kors

Evelyn Aspman

Violet Graham

Ellen Pinto

Alice Mattern

Frances Garen

Donna (Price) Pepos

Laura Johnson

Thelmagene Collings

Nancy Pearson

Kristin Sergienko

Cynthia Hammer

Gayle Rieber

Jill Barkley

Olivia Watt

Linda Tanz

Harriet Amato

Cheryl Miller

Kathleen Sommers

Eileen Fox

Evelyn Kelly

Virginia Taylor

Mary Kohli

Lyz Kurnitz-Thurlow

Eugenia Fairbanks, 1907 - 2001

The 85th Anniversary edition of this booklet is dedicated to Eugenia, an example for us all. She was a long time League member, and her contributions continue through the financial designation of our League in her will.

Eugenia was a very independent and civic-minded woman.

She was an avid participant in League activities, with particular interest in the port, transportation and the environment.

For a number of years she served as the League's Observer for the Port of Tacoma, attending their meetings, representing the League, and reporting to League membership on issues of interest and concern.

We thank Eugenia and honor her for her contributions of time, energy, intellect, and financial resources.

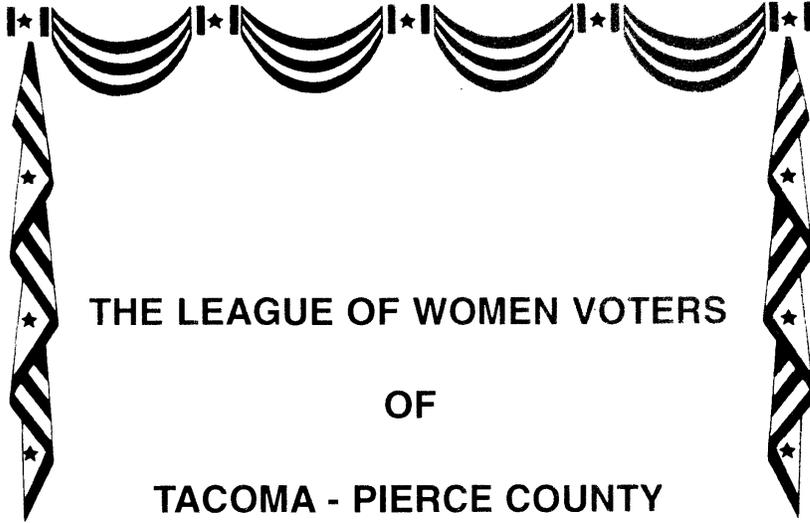
The work that was done to preserve and celebrate our League's history, in honor of the 75 Anniversary of the League of Women Voters, was wonderful and important. So important, in fact, that we need to continue it, and update this booklet. We hope you enjoy re-reading our history, as we also include reminiscences by the past decade of Presidents. We hope that future Leaguers will also find it worthy of continuing.

In this spot, ten years ago, Eileen Fox, as President (now 1st Vice-President), points out that men became welcome to join League in 1974 and that now "all citizens are welcome to join and hold leadership positions." We not only have men in League, we have committee chairs, and two men on the Board (one on the Executive Board - and he's a teenager, another underrepresented group).

Eileen also said that the way we do voter service must change, due to faster communication and different expectations. In 2003, with State League Education Fund and King 5, we successfully premiered an online chatroom for Tacoma City Council candidates.

Yet, *plus ça change, plus ça la même chose*. We continue to study, to adopt positions based on consensus or concurrence, to advocate for change based on these positions, to serve on community boards and committees, to register and educate voters. We're still the same League, with many of the same members, fighting for the same noble causes. Long may we continue!

Lyz Kurnitz-Thurlow, President 2003-2005



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF
TACOMA - PIERCE COUNTY

CELEBRATES



REFLECTIONS

Public records of activities by Tacoma-Pierce County League women are scarce. This is why the research done from League file materials by 75th Anniversary Committee members is so important and appreciated. This year, especially, it is appropriate to reflect upon past progress by and for women, since to do so will help us form the vision we need to face the future.

This booklet features descriptions of civic activities by women. This is as it should be, for membership in the League of Women Voters was not available to men until 1974. Now all citizens are welcome to join and to hold leadership positions.

Leaguers face large challenges. Our communities grow more complex. We must balance our diverse League interests with action based on positions adopted by our members after study and consensus. In addition, the way League educates the public and performs voter service must change because, with ever-faster-paced information needs and communication modes, the public wants more rapid responses from League and from governmental bodies. The possibilities are stimulating and exciting.

Our past is memorable. Indeed it is inspiring. But the past does not limit us. It empowers us!

Eileen Fox, President,
1993-1995



A complete historical review of the League of Women Voters in Tacoma and Pierce County has not been attempted until now. The League's 75th anniversary provides the impetus to dig into available records such as board minutes, scrapbooks, old bulletins and newspaper files, and to query about their memories as League leaders.

The first section of our retrospective discusses the origins of the Tacoma League and presents an overview of its activities during the early decades compiled from the sources named above, from state and national League information, and from historical accounts of the woman suffrage movement. The second section covers the period from 1940 to the present, and consists of personal contributions written or told about their terms of office by fifteen former presidents and co-presidents, along with information selected from existing records. While this section does not give us a comprehensive picture of the period, our past leaders' stories provide a valuable perspective to the historical record.

*from the 75th Anniversary Committee
February 1995*

Theodore H. White in his book, *The Making of the President — 1972*, sums up League's concern for good government through citizen participation: "Women have always been an active force in American politics and the League of Women Voters had an honor roll of achievement in congress and state legislatures... The League is a citizens' organization of good citizens who happen to be women, in good causes on government for the good of all."

League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County

“HERSTORY” OF THE EARLIEST YEARS

As the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote was passed by Congress in 1919 and went to the states for ratification, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was reorganizing to form the National League of Women Voters. The women of Tacoma were part of that effort. They had been active for nearly ten years in the effort to achieve woman suffrage nationally.

Women in Washington gained the right to vote when a suffrage amendment passed in November 1910. Following that election, delegates from the four other equal suffrage states (Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, and Colorado) convened in Tacoma and organized the National Council of Women Voters. Emma Smith DeVoe, a resident of Parkland, and a leader in the fight to gain voting rights for women in Washington, was elected president. The Council’s purpose was to assist women in exercising their right to the new franchise, and to advance the suffrage movement. Membership in the Council grew as other states adopted woman suffrage. Mrs. DeVoe attended the NAWSA convention in St. Louis in March 1919 where NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt proposed a National League of Women Voters. Upon her return to Tacoma, she arranged to merge the Council into the new national organization. On January 6, 1920, the Council became the state League of Women Voters.

For the next twenty years, there are no written records from the Tacoma League, but newspaper articles from 1922 refer to organizing efforts and name charter members: Kathryn E. Malstrom, later elected to the Washington Legislature as its first woman senator, Blanche Funk Miller, Tacoma’s first woman city clerk and later magistrate, and Jennie Wilhaite Ellis, an activist on several national committees in addition to being a regional director of the League of Women Voters.

Afloat in the 1955 Daffodil Parade urging “more active participation in the ‘Golden Future’ through voting” displayed the League’s message to thou sands. Leaguers found that crowds watching the annual parade were also a productive source of signatures for petition drives in other years.

While information about the earliest years of the Tacoma League is very sketchy, we know that this new kind of organization offered women an alternative to the tea parties and luncheons that had been the staples of local club life for years. The League’s task was to train women for their new civic role. Its approach was “practical politics.” The early national agenda sought to win social reforms using the political skills women had learned in the fight to achieve suffrage. Indications are that Tacoma League members took an active interest in local civic affairs throughout the decade of the twenties and into the thirties. Judge Elizabeth Shackelford, another early member of the League, was quoted in a Tacoma News Tribune article on February 10, 1985. “ I

think they (league members) were tackling small local issues, which was a wise thing to do. At first, they kept a low profile here in conservative Tacoma.” She also noted that the women were very cautious. “At first they didn’t want to get into arguments because they didn’t know what it might do to their husbands’ businesses. As younger women came along, they became more aggressive.”

While the national League was mobilizing to educate and involve women in national issues and the process of government, the Tacoma League focused initially on local schools. Judge Shackelford recalled, “The teachers were having an argument with the administration and the League came to their assistance. There weren’t many people coming to the aid of the teachers back then.” The teachers and League set out to convince the administration to add kindergartens to the public school system.

“At first, the reaction from men was amused,” Judge Shackelford said. “We deserved that because we were kind of amateurish. Eventually, we became more businesslike. The smarter men took us seriously, and the papers reported the league’s stand on issues.”

Another report from the Tacoma News Tribune indicates there was a reorganization of League operations in 1934, “to conform with the national League policy of working on a nonpartisan basis to promote political responsibility through an active and informed participation in government.” The new emphasis on nonpartisanship grew out of a decade of experience showing a negative effect on public perception of the League’s “sincerity” when its leaders served on their boards and held political party positions as well.

By 1940, the Tacoma League consisted of a group varying from twenty to forty people. They convened for dinner meetings, and sometimes at the YWCA. Formal business was conducted at each meeting and there were speakers who were top women and men in such fields as schools and city government, or candidates seeking public office. Discussion and study continued throughout the war years, although with fewer regular meetings and with dwindling membership. There was little action on local issues. However, there is a record of a 1946 meeting where city manager plan of government for Tacoma was proposed. Three years later League members formally agreed to work toward restructuring city government by petitioning voters.

During the early 1950s League membership suddenly tripled as the problems and politics of city government attracted community attention. In 1954 a state level League study, “Redistricting and Reapportionment of Congressional Legislative Districts,” and action

The first newsletter published for League members, Tacoma LWV Bulletin #1, appeared in October, 1950. Its principal message was to announce a candidate’s forum and was mailed with a two-cent stamp. Later this bulletin was named The Tacoma Voter. The League’s national member magazine The National Voter, also began publication in the 1950s. The national League had supported The Women’s Journal, and Woman Citizen, which originated as the journal of the suffrage movement.

“As Voter Service chair, I received a very nice letter that was lavish in its praise of the League. The young author wanted to be a god citizen and vote in the upcoming election. He needed to register at his new address, but travel was impossible at the present time. Would I please come to his residence to issue him a card? The address he provided looked innocent enough — not far from the Tacoma Public Library. Imagine my surprise when his ‘place of residence’ was the county jail. Convicted for armed robbery, he was serving a sentence in the ‘Big House.’ No wonder he was unable to travel!”

Jo Weiss

ensuing from the position adopted the next year also attracted community interest. In 1956 a national item, “Conservation: A Study of Water Resources,” offered members yet another issue of great interest. By the end of the decade membership was around two hundred.

Nearly half of League’s members now lived in communities adjacent to Tacoma, a shift that mirrored population changes in the area. Tacoma’s growth was stable while surrounding communities experienced forty-eight percent growth over ten years. League units formed in the developing fringe areas. Some members felt there should be a way suburban area members could study and take action on local issues in their communities; they did not want to be limited to a program based solely on concerns of the City of Tacoma. City members could benefit also from information on issues outside their city. As the first step toward broadening the League’s scope of governmental interest, a local study of county government was adopted. In 1957 members conducted a survey covering services and service agencies, and in 1960 the League issued the publication “Know Your County.”

The decade of the sixties found the League continuing study and action on Tacoma government, the state redistricting dilemma, and water issues. Topics such as

juvenile protection, property taxes, and school financing also appeared on growing state and national program agendas, as Leaguers faced the challenges of becoming informed citizens. Members met in discussion groups throughout the urban and suburban area. Eleven units were active in 1962, when the Puyallup Valley group formed. The next year the League’s board voted to acknowledge its role in Pierce County as well as Tacoma by requesting a change in organizational status. In 1964, the Tacoma League officially became the League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County.

HIGHLIGHTS and REMINISCENCES

Frances Nelson, 1940-1941

The oldest League minutes on file detail a dinner meeting on September 19, 1940, with forty-five members attending and Frances Nelson presiding. National League concerns focused on Lend Lease legislation. Libraries and school issues were the focus of state items. An example of one study was the reorganization of school districts.

One interesting action item reflects civil service practices at the time. An article tells of contacting the mayor and civil service commissioners, along with members of other women's groups, in regard to the civil service examinations to be held for the position of secretary to the Pension Board. The commissioners at first limited applicants to men. The efforts of the women persuaded the mayor to write a letter urging that women also be candidates. The result: the commissioners opened the position to both women and men.

Myra Fowler, 1941-1943

Meetings were moved to the College of Puget Sound commons and were changed to monthly rather than twice monthly due to the difficulties caused by the war. One of the program items at both state and local levels addressed concerns about the lack of satisfactory laws regulating child labor.

Judge Blanche Funk Miller, 1943-1944

Among the various speakers featured at League meetings were Mayor Cain, who discussed city planning, Professor Mauder from the University of Washington addressing "Some Economic Aspects of the Post War World" and Mrs. Louise Taylor, who talked about the War Manpower Commission. Prior to the fall election, congressional candidates John Coffee and Warren Magnuson spoke. Three other speakers addressed local and national health issues during this time.

One action taken by this board was a recommendation to the District #10 school board that the regulation relating to employment of [prohibition against employing] married women be removed. Another was a letter to Mayor Cain expressing League's disapproval of pinball machines and asking for their removal from the city.

Carla Pakenham, 1945-1946

The crucial need for housing and the problems of returning veterans were the subjects of many meetings. Among national issues was a discussion of the control of atomic energy, a completely new problem. A February 1946 meeting reports the first proposal for a city

manager form of government for Tacoma. The United Nations was the topic of many meetings during the next few years. The League agreed to send president-elect Schweinler to the state League convention at Coulee Dam and discussed the “ways and means of sending three additional delegates.”

A memo from 1947 Board records uses these editorial excerpts (both undated, but possibly 25th anniversary tributes):

“The League of Women Voters functions today as a powerful lighthouse pointing the way toward better and more intelligent citizenship.” (The New York Times)

“For 25 years the League of Women Voters has been a laboratory of research to find the most effective means of awakening the average American to his political responsibilities. In the next 25 years the American form of government will need desperately the kind of grass roots work the League is doing.” (The Washington Post)

Emily Schweinler,
1946-1947

Program adopted at the state level found the Tacoma League reviewing the qualifications for juvenile Court judges, juvenile laws, and studying the improvement of county government. For future state program, the Tacoma League requested a survey and

study of state taxes, Commenting that “the Washington tax system is archaic.”

Early in 1947 a discussion meeting centered on reorganization of the national League. Local members learned the League would remain nonpartisan but change from a federation of state Leagues to an association of members. Local Leagues and league boards would now elect state boards. Nationally there were 550 local Leagues in thirty-five states.

Another meeting of members considered the need for a national equal rights amendment. The League and other organizations believed a committee should be organized to study the status of women across the country.

Amy Magill, 1947-1949

A meeting was held regarding the need for more electric power in the northwest to bring new industries and employment. Program items in 1949-1950 included juvenile protection and state taxation. A slate of officers was elected by the Board of Directors, and a budget of \$209 was adopted.

Grace Rowe Harrison, 1949-1950

“Compulsory Health Insurance” was the topic of a June 1949 meeting. Pros and cons were discussed. A physician said that doctors would be hampered by regulations and that record keeping would interfere with devoting time to patient care.

League members reviewed the city charter and supported a council manager form of government. A formal motion was approved at an August 1949 meeting to circulate petitions that would place before voters the election of freeholders to write a new city charter.

National program suggestions during that year included support for conservation of natural resources and promotion of a national health insurance program.

Helen L Sohlberg, 1950-1955

“My term began ‘mid-term.’ The Tacoma League was at the point of disbanding. State President Myra Fowler called a meeting at the home of Amy Magill, a past local president. We decided to try to put the League back together again. I became president and then served two successive two-year terms.

“About this time, a number of Tacoma people including League members were looking at city government. They were unhappy about bad publicity concerning the city and its officials.

“Mayor John Anderson appointed a committee of public citizens to study and make recommendations for Tacoma city government. The names of the persons on the committee were published. I noticed there were no women listed.

“The next day after school I walked downtown from Stadium High School to talk to Mayor Anderson. I told him of my concern. He asked me for suggestions of women’s names and I gave him some. He turned to me and said, ‘What about you?’ So I served; Dr. Hugh Tudor was chairman. You probably know the rest of the story — the city manager form of government came into being.”

In 1952 the national magazine, Look, on its cover named Tacoma as one of America’s most vice-ridden cities. Yet on December 18, 1956 the same magazine honored Tacoma among eleven cities in the nation to receive the title of All American City. The Tacoma League was a co-sponsor of the drive to earn this award.

The League and the American Association of University Women had been successful in ousting a forty-three year old commission form of government by replacing it with the council manager form. The new diverse council elected in 1953 included League member Clara Goering, as well as businessmen, a doctor, lawyer, professor, a women’s garden club columnist and a title-holding professional wrestler.

In addition to their focus on city government reform, League members studied national program topics such as inflation, mutual security, conservation, and the United Nations. At the local level they also gave a great deal of attention to parks and schools.

In March of 1954 there appears for the first time a study of state election procedures named "Redistricting and Reapportionment of Congressional Legislative Districts." This item would be the subject of persistent efforts over a period of twenty-eight years, starting with the unprecedented decision by state League convention delegates in 1955 to write and promote an initiative to accomplish redistricting. After a difficult signature drive, League's initiative qualified for the ballot and was passed by the state's voters in 1956. This proved to be only the first step toward a fair and representative redistricting process, however, since the following year the Legislature amended the plan by redrawing district boundaries in a way that countered principles in the League's initiative.

Ruth Kors, 1955-1957

"What wonderful memories I have of the League. I joined in 1953 after my husband and I moved from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I needed to learn more about government and voting in my new state. It was a wonderful way to get away from babies and use my intellect! After I became a board member, Frances Garen and I drove to a League meeting in Eastern Washington and I told her that I was pregnant with my fifth child. She wondered if I still planned to be president, and I said, sure, no problem. On December 5th Joe was born. We held the board meetings in my home those days so the board members took turns holding the baby. It was great fun!"

Leaguers were busy during these years. To launch the signature drive for redistricting Initiative 199, Ruth brought baby Joe in a stroller, the twins in a market basket, and her two older children on foot to the neighborhood supermarket to circulate petitions. Later, to promote an affirmative vote for the initiative, members dressed in old fashioned dresses and paraded in downtown Tacoma, South Tacoma and Lakewood.

The initiative passed in November 1956. However, since the subsequent legislative substitute plan survived a court challenge, the League goal to create and revise legislative districts through a fair and representative process was still unrealized.

The Tacoma League was also active on local issues. As membership increased in suburban communities, a study of county government began. League continued to support a council manager form of government in Tacoma. We also worked for adequate school support and for parks management by county and city governments. National studies included water conservation and "Individual Liberties."

Evelyn Asbman, 1957-1959

The board discussed establishing an office; however, there was no enthusiasm for the project. National program items studied were foreign policy and water. Farsighted League members conducted a workshop focusing on northwest water resources, the Columbia River Basin and national water resources. On the state level the study emphasis was on juvenile protection. Interest in local issues was high resulting in two meetings devoted to the six year improvement plan for Tacoma. Other efforts included “Know Your County” and city schools issues.

Violet Graham, 1960-1961

The study of foreign policy continued as a national topic, while the study of water resources turned to a regional examination involving the Leagues of Oregon, Idaho and Montana and Washington. A booklet, *The Great Rivers of the West*, was produced with leadership by Frances Garen, and it received applause throughout the region. The Tacoma League sent two representatives to the First Interstate Hearing on Water Pollution in Olympia.

In January 1962, members began active signature gathering for Initiative 211, the League’s next effort at redistricting and reapportionment. The Daffodil Parade proved to be a fertile ground for gathering signatures. At the local level, concerns of the Tacoma League included support for the council manager government, comprehensive planning, and the perennial need for adequate school financing.

Ellen Pinto, 1961-1963

The growing League obtained its own phone line, although the “office” remained in the home of the president. Member dues increased from four dollars to five dollars per year.

Action during this period supported protection for delinquent and dependent juveniles, the council manager government for Tacoma and comprehensive planning. A new study item was the property tax.

Ellen’s final action as president was to appoint a committee to investigate changing the League’s status from a “city” to an “area” League. There were now large contingents of members in Lakewood, Puyallup, and other areas outside Tacoma city boundaries. For the redesignation, we were required to answer questions about the area size and governmental jurisdictions to be included in the expanded League, and what types of current agenda would be involved.

Alice Mattern, 1963

Shortly after being elected, the Matterns moved away from Tacoma and first vice-president Frances G became president. However, Alice remembers during her few months of leading the organization that she was so impressed with the dynamic group of young women active in League. "I could almost sit back and watch everything get done," she says. Redistricting remained a strong issue for action, since I-211 had failed at the polls.

Frances Garen, 1963-1965

Frances recalls that it was customary to have the League office in the president's home. She had two phones which would ring simultaneously day and night. Fran's husband became almost as adept as she in fielding questions on "his" phone. Near the end of Fran's term, however, the board authorized a committee to find, rent and move into office space.

It was in the middle of a luncheon meeting at Steve's on Old Tacoma Way that the first rumors of President Kennedy's death circulated. Ellen Pinto, who was presiding at the membership event, verified the fact and said we must carry on.

In early 1964 the League's change of status became official with approval by the National Board. The name of the League became the League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County, reflecting its new area-wide role. One issue for action was a call for separation of sanitary and storm sewers. A discussion item concerned whether Tacoma's Green River watershed should be open or closed to public use. During the fall election season, a "Pow-Wow" was held in Puyallup where congressional and legislative candidates appeared before a crowd of about three hundred, generating great publicity for the League.

The program calendar for that year also included the United Nations, fiscal issues, voters service, juvenile protection and continuing national water study.

Donna Price, 1965-1969

The League moved into its first office, a suite in the Allied Arts Building at 621 Pacific Avenue. Rent was \$38 per month for four hundred fifty square feet. The board authorized \$200 to equip the office for use. Donna remembers that fundraising in the local business community was the hardest part of League work, but there were always a few "faithful supporters" to help League's budget remain solvent.

More enjoyable were the voters service activities, such as the candidates' fair held at the new Tacoma Mall. She remembers that the League sponsored, with KTAC, radio

interviews with candidates positioned at tables stretched along the mall handing out campaign materials and talking with voters.

During the campaign season a League speakers bureau of sixteen members also filled thirty-three engagements at area service organizations and clubs, reaching thirteen hundred citizens with information about ballot issues. In November, ABC television asked Tacoma-Pierce County League members to report results of the general election — for pay!

Local program issues during the period concerned air and water pollution. At the national League level a position on redistricting and reapportionment was adopted stating that both houses of state legislatures should be apportioned substantially by population, an action that bolstered the state League's efforts.

Laura Johnson, 1969 -1973

“It was a turbulent time for the country and for the city. Slim Rasmussen was mayor of Tacoma, trying to create a strong mayor form of government. League had a position favoring council manager government; we were frequently at **crossed** swords. In a recall election several council members were ousted.

“County government was one of our major local studies. We reached agreement that there should be a change to a home rule system. State studies included taxes, redistricting and the environment. At the national level we studied foreign policy. The League had no national position on foreign policy, but our interest was influenced by students protesting the Vietnam War at the time.

“Approximately two hundred active members all worked on some League project. Voter registration and the speakers bureau were major voters service projects.”
Differing views on the future uses of the Nisqually Delta led to a study of the “Nisqually in Conflict,” with material prepared by members from the Pierce County and Thurston County Leagues. The Leagues then adopted a position that the delta should remain natural, allowing us to speak against proposed developments to legislators and other governmental decision makers. It was action taken many times over the next decade. The study booklet was shared widely in the community, helping others understand the complex issues and competing interests in the Nisqually Delta.

The office was moved to 260 South 5th Suite C, early in 1969, and it remained there for about six years. When the building ownership changed, once again boxes were packed up and carried to a new location — this time 315 South 11th, a storefront space.

Thelmagene Collings, 1973-1977

“I served four years on the state LWV board, as first vice-president, before serving as local League president. I helped draft Initiative 276, the state Public Disclosure Law, which passed with an overwhelming majority in 1972 after the statewide signature drive led by the League. We then (and still) lobbied the legislature to keep our law effective

Jack Pyle, special writer for The Tacoma News Tribune, in an interview with president Thelmagene Collings on January 30, 1977, wrote: “Some people call it ‘The Plague of Women Vultures,’ but even if it’s uncomplimentary that title was born out of respect for the tremendous political power wielded by the League of Women Voters.”

“My four years as local president were mainly action. We worked hard to get county government changed. More hours than I care to remember were spent talking to our county commissioners — no luck. Our League then started a petition drive to put on the next ballot the issue of selecting freeholders to write a home rule charter for Pierce County. The issue passed, but since voters were not too enthused, the commissioners never acted. However, later there was a scandal in the county sheriffs’ office, and freeholders were elected and a new charter written.

Mrs. Thelmegeene Collings, president of the Tacoma Pierce County League of Women Voters, hauled a double armload of petitions into County Auditor Richard Greco’s office this morning and asked him to start counting. If about 10,000 of the 14,500 signatures turned in are valid, Pierce County voters this fall will be asked whether they want a group of 15 freeholders to study – and perhaps recommend changes to – county government
Story Page One.

“Then there was the time our office was robbed. Ugh, what a mess! Someone stole about five dollars from our desk and messed up everything. The police dusted for fingerprints and then we had the honor of cleaning up the mess.

“To this day, I love the League of Women Voters!! I know that we are all so proud to have worked with an organization that is celebrating its 75th birthday!”

Nancy Pearson, 1977-1979

“On one of my first days as president of League an inquiry came from the Tacoma News Tribune about a position our board had just adopted calling for dissolution of the Metropolitan Park District. As a naive new leader I didn’t know about being careful talking to a reporter, and the next day much more of our conversation appeared in print than I expected! But my embarrassment did not result in recall.

“During the summer of 1977 our volunteers worked hard getting petition signatures for the reform of county government. It wasn’t until over a year later, however, when the sheriff and others were indicted on corruption charges, that the county commissioners called for an election of freeholders to write a new charter. At that time our League helped form a coalition of local ‘good government’ groups and individuals, named CAFE, to educate voters about the freeholder process and county government.

“There were other local education and action programs during my term:

- a study and public forum on community Indian issues and history,
- a study and update on the Nisqually Delta which included a walking tour of a proposed shipping facility at DuPont,
- a review of local water resources with a bus tour to the Green River wells and diversion facility,
- following land use proposals and advocating a comprehensive plan for Pierce County.

“National studies covered agricultural lands, urban concerns and energy issues. This was also the time we pushed hard for ratification of the national Equal Rights Amendment. Our League sold ERA T-shirts and sent \$1,170 in proceeds to the national office to support the campaign.

“Our League hosted the state LWV Council at the Doric Hotel in 1978. The next year we helped on a statewide initiative petition drive for a ‘bottle bill,’ then campaigned for its passage by voters (but the measure failed).

“So many opportunities for League during this term, both in member education and action! It was a fun time, a fulfilling time for me personally, and because of a great group of board leaders and volunteers a lot was accomplished.”

Kristin Sergienko 1979-1981

“The historical facts of my term are recorded elsewhere. Although recollections may not conform to reality, I will reminisce rather than research. I could fill my space with the names of those whose commitment to good government and citizen participation enabled League to speak with a strong and clear voice.

“The emphasis on local (and ‘local-local’) program demanded an enthusiastic and energetic board, and I was always thankful for their unflinching humor and generosity with time and talent. Not only did we have a dedicated board, we could count on our units to serve in various capacities: from catering our annual meeting to functioning as a resource committee.

“I think I accepted the nomination as League president to escape the bookkeeping complexities that strained my abilities during the previous term as treasurer!

“The highlight of these years for our local League and for me personally was the election of freeholders to write a home rule charter, the subsequent adoption of that charter, and the establishment of a new Pierce County government. It was a sobering and exciting responsibility to testify before the Board of Freeholders and share with them the accumulated wisdom of League’s years of study, discussions and consensus. We had worked with diligence and persistence to assure that moment, and we would continue full-bore until the charter was adopted and elections held. My first League responsibility had been the county portfolio, so I was thrilled to see that our years of study and action had been instrumental in effecting fundamental change.

“Some of our actions were somewhat less stirring. We left our storefront office at 315 S. 11th with its interesting window displays and moved to 702 Broadway to what was then the Red Cross Building. Our printing was done at nominal cost and we enjoyed access to their large conference room. This served not only for board meetings, but for general meetings with lunch served in order to encourage attendance. Practically and financially this proved to be a good move and permitted some innovative programming.

“It was a challenging two years. In addition to the focus on county government, League’s park study brought critically needed attention to Northwest Trek.

“By then I felt I had taken on a full-time job — and I’m sure the voters service chair shared my sentiments. Calls for help were answered and the rewards and results were commensurate with the efforts expended. It was a great experience.”

Cynthia Hammer and Gayle Rieber, Co-Presidents 1981-1983

“In reminiscing about our presidency, we remembered that we were the first to job-share this position in the Tacoma League. One took charge of ‘inside’ affairs such as units and office operations; the other took on ‘outside’ affairs such as voters service and issues. The next year we switched. We installed a separate phone answering machine with a voters service message on it. And we secured corporate funding for the printing of They Represent You (TRY).

“We remembered our Great Adventure in Voters Service — a pre-primary candidate forum for Port of Tacoma candidates. It was held on a boat as it cruised Commencement Bay and the waterways. Some eighteen candidates were running for two open positions that year. They were interviewed on TV while Leaguers aboard watched and ate from the buffet table. Quite dramatic it was, especially when thunder showers, lightning and wind forced the program inside and under cover. But the trip ended with a rainbow over the tideflats!

“Cynthia remembers doing a public service announcement on Channel 13. The studio was so cold that her nose was dripping — noticeably (to her, anyway) — when she saw the spot later on TV.

“We agreed that League leadership pushed us to do public things that we wouldn’t have done without the support that League gave us. And we are still friends!”

Jill Barkley, Co-President 1983-1985

“The League is like a continuing education to me,” Jill said in an interview in the Tacoma News Tribune, February 10, 1985. Although she had tried several other volunteer activities, she turned to the issue-oriented League. “ [It] just provided an opportunity to be more knowledgeable in areas that I was more interested in.”

When Jill was elected co-president, she turned from tasks such as promoting unit growth and editing the newsletter to a focus on making the organization work well for the members who volunteer their time for it. “I really have a lot of respect for these people. Their time is worth money,” she said.

Jill recognized that the League’s complexion was changing — membership campaigns now were designed to appeal to men, to other segments of the community, and to the increasing numbers of women with jobs. She felt the emphasis on non-partisanship remains as one of the League’s strongest attractions, and that the process of study followed by action based on member agreement continues to earn respect for the League. “If people ask me if the League is liberal, conservative, study-oriented or activist, the answer is ‘yes’ to everything,” Barkley said.

Jill noted that League’s studies during her tenure included hazardous waste, water quality, global security, the Pierce County jail, local human resources, local parks, childcare, and reproductive choices. As her term ended, the membership was gearing up for studies of the effectiveness of the county charter, Pierce County’s economic growth and a comprehensive plan for county land use.

Olivia Watt, Co-President 1983-1985

In an adjoining story appearing in the same newspaper, Olivia noted that the whole process of League — to examine a specific issue, bringing members’ insights to bear on facts presented by a research committee, and forming a consensus opinion — is serious business. She observed, “That has worked for us and against the League. On the one hand, women are attracted because of the opportunities it gives them to stay in touch with current events and issues. On the other hand, our group was not organized for fun and pleasure but rather for bettering our political and governmental environment. So people motivated to join a social organization will not be drawn to our membership. League is a serious group.”

Further, Watt was quoted, “It’s [League membership] satisfying for the members. As they get older, they have a place where they feel needed. They know that they are doing something useful, and they develop friendships.”

Olivia admired the League’s consistent stand over the years on national and global issues, and was particularly interested in League’s support for international cooperation, the United Nations, and arms control.

Watt expressed concern, however, with the Tacoma-Pierce County League’s lack of attention to urban problems or the social problems of disadvantaged people. She admired the League as an organization of thinking people, but regretted that the membership tends to be white, middle-class and college-educated. She wished to have us network more with minority women, and address concerns of all women in the community.

Linda Tanz, 1985-1987

“One of the many lessons participation in League teaches is that some issues take a long time to resolve! In my term we fought a number of fine fights but the time was not right to win battles!

“We supported a ballot measure to preserve the farmland in the Puyallup valley from development, but voters rejected it. We continued pushing for a county comprehensive land use plan, but nothing happened (until much later). We advocated merging the county and metropolitan park districts; there was no action.

“In the City of Tacoma, we supported pay equity when a study showed job classifications primarily filled by women paid significantly less than those filled by men, but the study stayed on the shelf.

“State level issues fared no better. A study of children’s services pointed out the need for adequate and stable funding for the needs of children at risk, but we’re still fighting for dollars. An initiative campaign for campaign finance reform failed at the polls; and an attempt to initiate state tax reform fell on deaf ears.

“However, we also produced and sponsored a monthly TV show on Channel 11 called ‘The Curious Constituent’, which, although airing early Sunday mornings, reached a new, and large, audience with education about such topics as comparable worth, the municipal courts, the work of the state insurance commissioner, and various ballot initiatives.

“For fun, while also getting the League’s business done, we had a series of dessert fundraisers at The Annie Wright School; we hosted a state convention, held at the Tacoma Dome Hotel; we decorated the office; and we had parties to commemorate League’s birthday, to host potential members, and to share discussion of current issues over lunch.

“For me, serving as president was a fantastic experience
— Thank you!”

Harriet Amato, 1987-1989

“The ‘highs’ for me as president of the League were working with the best board of directors and the finest organization on the planet; attending state and national League conventions; being associated with an organization revered for its high principles and in company with the most intelligent, dedicated, knowledgeable, gutsy group of people.

“Our program at the national level included a study on ‘Meeting Basic Human Needs’ and another that began examining ‘Health Care Reform.’ We participated in a nationwide drinking water survey. At the state level during these two years we worked on three initiatives: 1-97 for toxic waste cleanup, 1-99 to have a presidential primary, and 1-102, the Children’s Initiative. We also studied Puget Sound port districts.

“Locally we were involved with The Centennial Project, Youth 2000, pay equity for city employees, strategic planning for Tacoma public schools, and Safe Streets. Our members also studied citizen participation in the county’s local governments and examined education in Pierce County jails. In addition to all that, we moved the office up the hill, to 747 St. Helens!

“Looking back on my tenure, I can honestly say it was exciting, fun and a lot of work, intellectually and emotionally stimulating and a lot of work! Richly rewarding and exhilarating and a lot of work! To sum up, being a League president is a lot of work, but the perks are well worth every minute. League is an organization that works. You all still make my spirit sing.”

Cheryl Miller, 1989-1991

“I well remember the occasion when I was inveigled into being president of the League. The nominating committee, of which I was a member, had met for lunch to finalize the slate of officers for the coming year. All positions had been filled except for that of president. As I was lifting a forkful of food to my mouth, Anne Homan turned to me and said. “And you, Cheryl, you’ll make an excellent president.” I was flattered and honored.

“I had a wonderful, supportive board. We took an introspective look at where we were and where we wanted to go. All volunteer groups such as the League were facing the same problems. Funds were drying up and it was difficult to interest younger women who, for the most part, had both families and jobs to fill their time.

“We cut expenses to the bone, initiated quarterly budget projections, and examined carefully the dollar cost of doing business. In the summer of 1990 we were given a one-

month notice that it would be necessary to move the location of our office! We moved to our present location after negotiating a five-year lease.

“Our sponsorship of a televised candidates’ forum in conjunction with Viacom Cable TV was a first, and set a precedent for future years. Transportation issues involving both short range and long range planning were the subjects of many meetings. Land use planning was an action item for the 1988-89 year, as was support for the state Children’s Initiative and the pro-choice Initiative 120. A general meeting about education was titled ‘Programs That Work,’ and a public meeting was held that examined ‘The Pierce County Charter: Are Changes Needed?’ Anne Homan represented League on a county committee to select new voting machines. The League’s influence was felt in the community in many ways.”

Kathleen Sommers, 1991-1993

“The 1991 election season was especially active. We supported local ballot issues on the county’s Foothills Trail and to approve new voting machines. Anne Homan kept busy explaining and promoting the voting machines through demonstrations at the Tacoma Mall and at library branches. Candidate forums were conducted on cable television, the League’s Fair Campaign Practices Code was sent to all candidates and made available to the media, and with the sponsorship of local businesses we placed the Voters’ Bill of Rights in the Tacoma News Tribune.

“The League was awarded the Distinguished Citizens Award by the Municipal League, in recognition for public service in the community. To help inform citizens about regional transportation needs, we sponsored a public meeting called ‘Transportation for Tomorrow’ and we organized and facilitated another public forum as part of a state sponsored project to develop an energy strategy. Within the League an interest group formed around environmental issues, meeting monthly but separately from units.

“During my term we also participated in state studies on Child Support and Custody, and on Port Governance. State legislative activity included implementation of the Growth Management Act and a strong push for health care reform. The League was actively involved also with several state initiatives. We worked to oppose the measures limiting terms for members of Congress — 1-553 in 1991 and 1-573 the following year. We gathered signatures for 1-582 to put comprehensive campaign financing before the voters but failed to qualify for the ballot. More successful was the drive to put Initiative 120, for reproductive rights, on the ballot, and we worked with a coalition to support its passage.

“A National League study and consensus on health care was completed; we prepared for the 1992 elections with a program called ‘Take Back the System;’ and we continued pushing for federal campaign finance reform. We joined Leagues throughout the country in an exercise named Crossroads to discuss ways to modernize the League and develop a vision for its future.

“League members had a lot of fun at the various social and fund-raising events: theater parties, appraisals, and open houses. I met lots of interesting people I probably would not have met except through League. Being president of such a prestigious organization is both fun and humbling.”

Our Story Continues

Eileen Fox, President, 1993-1995

“One of the best ways to refresh one’s memory about what happened while serving as president is to refer back to the VOTER newsletters and the official minutes. Our League has not been successful at archiving our records. Preservation still is not a high priority compared to the interest in current issues. Thank goodness for those “under-the-bed” stashes.

“I do remember the extensive presentations, in the VOTER and at meetings, during our water study. Wetlands, volunteer programs, well-site management, statewide level information - allocation and management of ground water, role of the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, etc. were included. Isabel Ragland, Cheryl Miller and Liz Lathrop, the water committee, still are League members.

“Regional Transit issues were followed closely. Worth and Marian Gurley and Rosa Morgan (also, our deceased benefactor, Eugenia Fairbanks) contributed much for our League’s benefit.

“Gun control generated a lot of discussion and resulted in a State LWV position. The National League’s Crossroads Project, planning the future of League, reflected a broad effort from all local Leagues.

“Locally, Air Quality and Health Care information caught VOTER space and member attention at special meetings. The effort, locally, on state initiatives 601 and 602, regarding state spending, took a heavy toll on members’ time.

“In summary, we did, and do good work. It is appropriate to remember that. May I recommend that, while we should celebrate our achievements, it is perhaps more important to revisit the issues, themselves, periodically. That is what our positions, found in the Membership Directory, should remind us to do.”

Nancy Pearson with Kathy Sommers and Kris Sergienko, 1995-1996

“If two local League leaders sharing the presidency are co-presidents, what do you call it when three share that job? That’s how the ’95-’96 League year was managed; our leadership team was dubbed The Troika. Officially we were a steering committee. Kris Sergienko, Kathy Sommers and I each took responsibility for a portion of the tasks

of leading the board, and took turns preparing for and chairing board meetings. I remember some of my goals for that year were to enhance our local League's connections with state and national League opportunities and activities; to upgrade office equipment, and to work to increase membership. We coordinated with LWVWA to help defeat a property rights initiative. In that local election year we held or assisted with a number of candidate forums, then after elections produced and published our first municipal directory of Pierce County's 22 city and town elected officials. We started a new unit in the Puyallup area that drew new members from the growing east county area. A great Christmas party in the office brought old and new members together to celebrate our mission and our friendships. Throughout the year we worked (struggled?) to learn our way with new computer software but also enjoyed a brand new copy machine donated by a member.

“My participation in this three-way role ended with the Annual Meeting in June, 1996, where we heard about connections among early suffragists in the Northwest, including our own Pierce County heroine, Emma Smith DeVoe. The remainder of that presidential term continued with the capable leadership of Kathy and Kris, while I concentrated on new or continuing commitments to state and national League projects.”

Kris Sergienko and Kathy Sommers, Co-Presidents, 1995-1997

“We were struggling at this time to retain and recruit members. Our Board initially felt that we did not have the resources to participate in the national effort to engage the public in a discussion of campaign financing. The LWVUS received funding to develop a consensus on this issue and they, in turn, asked the state Leagues to recruit local Leagues. Money and materials were provided to those local Leagues who agreed to secure up to 20 participants in a series of meetings called the Citizen Assembly for Money + Politics. Since this would give us visibility, serve as a fundraiser and move us forward with an issue that had long been on our national agenda, we reconsidered our initial decision. Thanks to our members and an Op Ed article in the News Tribune, we enlisted 20 members of the community. And thanks to the efforts of a dedicated and skilled trio of League facilitators, we held their interest throughout the project. There were areas of general agreement in our group and throughout the country.

“Locally we formed two new units. An evening unit in NE Tacoma and a Saturday unit in East Pierce County. With a Saturday unit in Gig Harbor and the North

end and Lakewood unit, we covered a large area with possibilities for attendance and work on local issues. A Facilitator workshop gave us the hope of higher visibility in the community along with a source of funds for the local league. A local study of Water Resources and Governance as well as state and national studies on Public Higher Education in Washington State and Public Assistance as Social Policy kept us busy researching and reading. We had an observer at the Pierce County Charter Review meetings and continued to be involved in Growth Management in Pierce County as well as regional transportation issues. General meetings were held on Pierce County Growth Management and the Anticipated Impact of Welfare Reform. A series of Brown Bag lunch meetings covered subjects such as the Thea Foss Waterway, the national project called Initiative for Democracy and information presented by the Pierce County Auditor.

“In the fall of 1996, we had numerous activities related to the election such as candidates forums and the Get Out the Vote voter registration campaign. A public meeting was held at Green River CC on Tools for Drinking Water Protection. We participated in a tour of Chambers Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant and heard of the plans for this property. A Municipal Directory was produced and a Policies and Procedures Committee helped the board to function more effectively. It was a privilege and fun to work together, and with Nancy the previous year.”

Evelyn Kelly and Virginia Taylor, Co-Presidents 1999-2001

“The first item of business at the beginning of our tenure was to face the financial reality of the budget crunch. Our expenses were greater than our income. Various avenues to raise additional income were discussed. Our rent was the major factor in the drain on the budget. Several meetings with Mr. Riley ensued. The ultimate solution was to downsize from three rooms to one. He was sensitive to our plight and adjusted the rent accordingly to fit within our budget. Then began the physical exercise of condensing records, publications, and disposing of unneeded furniture. Members who had been responsible for various studies were called in to review all the records pertaining to those studies to determine what should be kept for permanent files and what could be discarded. Most of our furniture had been donated by various members over the years. Donors were contacted to see if they would prefer to get the furniture back or left to the League to have it appraised for sale. We were fortunate to have the antique dealer in the neighborhood purchase the items. This generated over \$500 to our budget. From the downsizing of records and furniture we were able to remain in one room in the current

location. We had an open house and silent auction for the membership shortly after the downsizing of the office. This was the first time for most of the members to see our new quarters. Many expressed surprise and amazement that we had been able to get everything into one room. The silent auction was very successful.

“Money had been taken from our savings for the past few years for the operations of the organization. We felt that this was not a feasible way to continue doing business. Some money raising events were held. One of the more successful and effortless was selling tickets to the Grand Cinema Theatre. We also had an antique appraisal event where members brought items to be appraised and contributed a small amount for the service.

“We made every effort to make the League visible in the community. We responded to requests to speak to various groups and explain about the League. Among these was a presentation to a Girl Scout troop meeting at Franklin Elementary School. Evelyn who is a life-time member of the Girl Scouts wore her official leader’s uniform. We participated in the D-Net program, contacting local politicians to get them to put their positions online. For the first time we sent a representative to the Presidents’ Council meetings. We also sent representatives to the Capital Finance Review Board. We explained the League program and process to the Lakewood Rotary Club. We participated in the Candidate Forums where representatives from various groups questioned local and state candidates about their stands on various issues.

“A fun, enjoyable ice cream social was held at the DeVoe Mansion to celebrate the induction of Emma DeVoe into the National Women’s Hall of Fame. The refreshments were typical of a very formal entertainment occasion of the early nineteen hundreds. Many League attendees dressed in period costumes which added to the festivities. Emma DeVoe and May Arkright Hutton, two prominent, early-day suffragists in our state, were portrayed in costume by local actresses.

“A new, much needed copier was donated to the office through the efforts of Charlotte Valbert. We appreciated the efforts of the other board members and getting to really know each other.”

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Lyz Kurnitz-Thurlow, 2003-2005

As I read this booklet, I am impressed by all those who've come before. We don't manage to do as many things as League did in the past, but we're doing okay. We have three active Units holding monthly meetings (North End, Lakewood & Neighbors, and East Pierce), and have had some terrific public meetings and parties as well.

The 2003 election season was especially hot in Tacoma. Working with TV Tacoma, we revived the tradition of League moderating candidates forums. We covered the City Council, Port Commissioners, Tacoma School Board and Civil Service Board for both the primary and general elections. We also moderated and co-sponsored several other forums in Tacoma and throughout Pierce County. In 2004, we continued to moderate and co-sponsor forums and we added a booth at the Puyallup Farmers' Market to our voter registration efforts.

In 2003, we held a general meeting, with an all-star panel, on the form of government for Tacoma, although the proposed change was not going to be on the ballot. This is still a hot issue. Several City Charter changes were on the 2004 ballot, and some people still want to see Tacoma change to a government with a strong mayor, rather than the current council manager form. (See Helen Solhberg's report from the 1950s.)

In the spring, at a general meeting called Campaign Confidential, Julie Anderson, Rosa Franklin, and Val Offenbecher all public office-holders, enthralled their listeners as they discussed what their campaigns had been like. This was followed by a reception in the gallery at Tacoma Community College.

Speaking of parties, we held one honoring our long-time League members, complete with a skit about the women's suffrage movement, and group singing. It was and always is wonderful for me to meet with so many Tacoma-Pierce County League members, as I've only been here since 2001. This booklet is receiving its premiere at a Valentine Birthday Party. There are definitely more parties since I have been president. (That's really because of the terrific Membership Committee.)

During these two years, we have also done a two-year State League consensus study on voting, and a consensus update on the State tax position. We have also studied health care and held a general meeting on Growth Management in Pierce County. During the balance of this term, we will be discussing health care, domestic violence, and the Port of Tacoma.

That we can do this is thanks to a terrific Board, several members very active in off-Board positions, and our wonderful membership. This is, of course, a very incomplete list. The behind-the-scenes stuff is what keeps us going, but it's not what we talk about mostly. Thanks to all those, in the forefront and behind the scenes, who answer questions, prepare for our meetings, write and produce the VOTER, host meetings, bake cookies, make coffee, open the mail, answer the phone, fix the machines, and make donations. I'm sure I am saying this on behalf of all the Presidents of all the Leagues during all this time.

Acknowledgments for the 75th Anniversary Booklet

The 75th Anniversary committee members who researched and prepared material for the booklet were: Nancy Pearson (chair), Ann Elliston, Jean Gillmer, Worth Gurley, Virginia Taylor, and Jo Weiss. Other members gave assistance through interviews on specific sections. The committee especially thanks all the former presidents who furnished their written recollections or gave interviews on their terms of office. Reading committee members: Evelyn Kelly, Keena Peabody, and Virginia Taylor. Cover design was by Jo Weiss, typography by Jane Shafer.

The 85th Anniversary Booklet

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