

The women pioneers of Seaside Rotary

Thirty years ago, the Supreme Court issued a landmark decision: Rotary clubs may not exclude women from membership on the basis of gender. The vote followed the decades-long efforts of men and women from all over the Rotary world to allow for the admission of women into Rotary clubs.

Seaside Rotarian Laura Freedman was a member of the Arcadia club, “where the whole women’s movement started in 1987.”

She was the group’s second female Rotarian. “We did not lose any members, but we had a lot of rumblings,” Freedman said.

After the Supreme Court decision, Rotary clubs throughout the nation sought to rectify years of exclusion.

Rotarians in Seaside worked hard to recruit women. But even so, the transition was not without resistance.

In Seaside, Mary Blake was working as the general manager of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, a position she had held since 1984. She and banker Rhonda Wills attended their first meeting in May 1988.

“When I showed up to be inducted, half the people were gone,” Blake said.

When she asked where they were, Blake said she was told, “They’re golfing.”

‘Handwriting on the wall’

Today we don’t think much of the outrages of the past. We accept that women always had the right to vote or a promotion at work.

While talking about the Greatest Generation honors those who served in World War II, there was a battle at home for gender equality that waged into the 1980s and beyond.

It was my mother’s generation that changed that. Although she attended the University of Michigan and graduated cum laude, Marjorie was steered into a secretarial path that she was only able to break out of in the 1970s, and never, I think she would have agreed, reached to her full potential.

Just as the battle for racial equality swept the nation, gender equality followed in its wake. No male bastions were more stubborn in lifting these barriers than the men’s civic fraternal organizations that endorsed a separate but equal system — but God forbid no women standing at the bar.

At Seaside Rotary’s recent 70th anniversary celebration at the Best Western, members of the organization stressed community — both local and international — and good works.

But as Society with a capital S dragged its feet, so did service clubs and by the 1980s. The culture clash had reached the Supreme Court level. The court ruled that the clubs had to take in members of both sexes and would be liable to discrimination lawsuits.

The Court rejected Rotary International’s argument that it has a constitutional right to bar the admission of women as members of any affiliated club because of its selective membership policy, public service activities and other attributes, The New York Times reported after the May 1987 decision was delivered.

Eleanor Smeal, head of the National Organization for Women, hailed the decision as “the death knell for male-only clubs that are part of the business establishment. ... The handwriting is on the wall. These clubs are going to have to admit women.”

Freedman subsequently became the Arcadia Rotary club’s first woman president and knew she had “arrived” when one of the group’s board members called her “one of the guys.”

“When I was going to be the first woman president I had a little uprising from past presidents who wanted to make sure I was on board with what I was supposed to be doing,” Freedman said. “They decided they were going to ‘train me’ in my presidential affairs.”

Her crowning achievement came when a board director greeted her as “one of the guys.”

A personal decision

After the Supreme Court decision, Rotary clubs throughout the nation sought to rectify years of exclusion. In Sea-



Rhonda Wills and Mary Blake, Seaside’s first women Rotarians.

side, Mary Blake was working as the general manager of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, a position she had held since 1984.

At the time, it was all “straight white men,” Blake said.

But City Manager Larry Lehman and Rotary’s Fred Bassett felt Mary was the right choice to break barriers.

She had encountered gender discrimination in Portland at the Portland Bureau of Parks and Recreation and maintained a private personal life.

“It was a dangerous time having an alternative lifestyle,” Blake recalled. “I said, ‘Really, you guys don’t want me in your club.’”

To make their case more persuasive, Blake said, Rotarian George Reimers “explained the larger piece of it” — the business networking, the international programs and educational scholarships — and even offered to add a second woman member so “no one person would take the heat.”

That woman was Wills.

“My husband Jim was the president,” Wills said. “He also recruited a woman who was the manager of the U.S. Bank,” Wills said. “She chickened out at the last minute.”

The club meeting went on as normal. “When it was time to induct the women, there was a bunch of six or seven men who left,” Rhonda Wills said. “They weren’t going to be a party to this. And there was a whole contingent that didn’t show up, and there were some who got up and left. It was disappointing. Some to this day hold a grudge, 30 years later.”

Nevertheless, both women remained.

“I never had any question about coming back,” Wills said. “It’s a personal decision you have to make. (But) when you’re in a professional situations, you have to make a lot of tough decisions.”

“We all rolled up our sleeves, side by side doing everything together, sharing the work and the workload,” Blake said. “I look at what the organization is built on, It’s very powerful — that’s what is so remarkable about Rotary. We all have the ability to contribute. And we’re all eager to do that.”

On Thursday, members of Rotary District 5100 arrived in Seaside for their annual conference. Among their speakers was Sylvia Whitlock of Duarte, California, the first female Rotary Club president. A fitting 30th anniversary to complement Seaside Rotary’s 70th.

“I really felt it was my professional right to belong,” Wills said. “I’m thinking it’s worked out.”

Today, her daughter is a Rotary member.



Bob Moberg at the 70th anniversary dinner for Seaside Rotary. Moberg served as president in 1979-80, shortly after the first women joined the club.

Making a nest in Seaside

I was pleased to see an expression of recognition Tuesday morning at the Osprey Café. Tanner, a young man who works there, was doing the barista thing. “Table for one for breakfast?” he said. The room was busy. Every booth and table was full. “I think I’ll just sit at the counter,” I said. I ordered an Americano with room, my standard drink, and took a stool at the window, looking out to the Prom and Avenue U. Soon after Tanner brought my coffee and a tiny pitcher of cream. I pulled out a pen and my notebook and began jotting down some things.

Neighborhood spots like the Osprey are special because regulars feel at home, with the special advantage that at home you have to make your own food or beverage, and also clean up after yourself. Despite the general transient nature of this area, this edge of the continent we call the North Coast, we’re blessed with an abundance of neighborhood restaurants and hang outs where the locals can feel at home. Whether it’s breakfast you’re looking for, or a bowl of chowder, or chili, or a full meal, or it’s just tea or coffee or beer, there’s a perfect neighborhood hang for you.

What makes a neighborhood hang outstanding? Good food and good coffee are a plus, but vibe and atmosphere and proximity are what really count. To me, the ideal neighborhood hang is the one I can walk to. A certain level of service also helps.

Once people realized

I was here to stay, my friends began sharing their own favorite hangs. High on many peoples’ lists are Screw and Brew in Cannon Beach, as well as Bill’s Tavern. In Seaside there’s Seaside Coffee, Nonni’s Italian Bistro,

and Bagels by the Sea. The U Street Pub is a terrific neighborhood hang that stays open pretty late. Judging from the number of cars parked there in the morning, I’d say the newly re-modeled Putter Room at the Seaside Golf Course is on its way to becoming a neighborhood hang.

Some neighborhood hangs aren’t so much about food and drink as they are the other patrons. People naturally want to go where their friends go to hear the latest dish and gossip. Speaking of dish, is anyone watching the Netflix series, “13 Reasons Why”? It’s all about teen gossip and its insidious effects. Not exactly being a teenager myself, although I fess up to my own immaturity, I often wonder where do the high school kids hang out? Is it The Stand or Mazatlan they favor? If it’s Mexican food you’re craving, give the new Guajito’s on Broadway a shot. Muy buena comida! House-made tamales. Fajitas. The best chicken and shrimp tacos I’ve had in a long time. Margaritas. Wonderful and caring service by the ever-so-friendly Bautista. Hmm. This place could easily become one of my favorite neighborhood hang-outs.

LETTERS

Too fast on ‘Wahanna-bahn’

Most of the vehicles driving on Wahanna Road are Roosevelt “Drive” refugees where summer traffic backs up past the high school on the north and the creeping along begins somewhere around Petersen Point from the south. The posted 30 mph speed limit on Wahanna is routinely ignored and usually is not enforced because the road right-of-way is too narrow for sidewalks or a speed trap, and has very few areas where a cop could safely pull a speedball over without creating an additional traffic hazard that could place the officer’s very life in peril.

The most frequent law enforcement presence on Wahanna is the Gearhart Police officer who commutes from Seaside to Gearhart daily.

That is the good news. The bad news is that Seaside Mayor Jay Barber is on board for additional housing

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The Spanish-American War veterans of Seaside

Eighty-seven years ago from the headlines of the Seaside Signal: events in and around the City of Seaside in 1930.

The City of Seaside in 1930 was a busy place. While census figures had dropped from just over 1,800 people to a little over 1,500 people living in Seaside year round, the amount of civic clubs and businesses continued to increase. Dances were held all year round at the Bungalow, and weekly soirees by the many civic groups were often expanded to include other groups from Warrenton and Astoria. More efforts were being made to clean up the city on a regular basis as the Necanicum river bank had become the site for trash dumping on both sides of the river banks. There had also been some sort of repair garage along the bank of the river which had left behind old rusted out cars and other unsightly debris.

A 20-foot-by-20-foot checkerboard was proposed for the beach by

BETWEEN THE COVERS

ESTHER MOBERG



the Seaside Chamber of Commerce in 1930. Large poles would be used to push around the 18-inch round discs of wood on the 20-inch squares. The board was apparently to be made completely out of wood. No word of the checkerboard was mentioned in later papers but one can imagine summer visitors enjoying giant checkers on the beach in 1930.

Warrenton was also starting to boom in the 1930s and had its own section “The Warrenton Burg” in the Seaside Signal. Approximately 15 years after the Seaside ladies civic club had established their library and rest room, the Warrenton ladies civic club took a page out of their book and did the same, opening a ladies rest

room that was ‘neatly arranged, well equipped, and centrally located’ while being connected to the reading room and library of Warrenton. The reading room was located on Main Street, directly opposite city hall. In an echo of history repeating itself, 87 years later, the current plans next month to move the Warrenton Library into the old Serendipity restaurant building on Main Street just happens to be one block down and across the street from the current Warrenton City Hall.

A herd of 18 to 20 elk was seen often south of Seaside in August of 1930. A crowd of spectators would gather every evening in August to watch for the elk at Black bridge south of town. Trains were bringing visitors weekly to Seaside, in one week alone over 1,800 visitors were brought by train to Seaside, with trains carrying up to 550 people in one trip.

Obituaries in the Seaside Signal in 1930 still made the front page of the

paper with the headline often being “Mr. or Mrs. Smith called by death.” In August of 1930, it was noted that war veteran Thomas J. Smith passed away, who had been a veteran of the Spanish American war. There were enough veterans of the Spanish-American War on the coast, 32 years after it happened, that they met monthly in either Seaside or Astoria. It was noted that most of the veterans were from Seaside. The Spanish-American War of 1898 was instrumental in Cuba becoming independent of Spain and America, as well as at that time the United States acquired Guam and Puerto Rico from Spain.

People enjoyed driving on the beach but often misjudged how deep the tide pools were. A car plunged into a hole four feet deep while driving around Hug Point in August of 1930, and the five passengers had to escape through the windows of the car. After an hour’s work, the driver and some spectators were able to

rescue the car from the “icy waters” that they had to swim through to get the car free (this was in late August).

Back in the 1930s there was confusion about the name of the Neawanna River. Apparently legend had it that a young girl who had lived on the banks of the river was named Hannah, and her father called her Oh Hannah, leading to the river being called Ohanna or Wahanna. Most of the locals called the river either Ohanna or Wahanna. However, some of the oldest residents of the area made it clear that the real name was the Native American name of Neawanna and that the new concrete bridge and plaque that was made to commemorate the Neawanna/Wahanna Bridge should make the correct name clear. The Necanicum Bridge was also built out of concrete for the first time in 1930. The Longview, Washington, Bridge opened the same year, and the Seaside girl’s marching band was part of the parade at the unveiling.

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