

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF BELLINGHAM 75 YEARS OF SERVICE

Excerpted and edited from "Glancing Over Our Shoulder, 1931-1981" by Marguerite "Peg" Aiston.

The Soroptimist Club of Bellingham (today Soroptimist International of Bellingham) received its charter at a banquet at the Chuckanut Shell Saturday, February 7, 1931, the 5th club chartered in Washington and the 62nd club in the United States and Canada.

Members of the sponsoring Seattle club and Vancouver BC, Tacoma and Portland clubs attended and Mrs. Bertha K. Landes, former mayor of Seattle and in 1931 president of the American Federation, was the main speaker. Representatives from Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis greeted the new service organization.

Mayor John A. Kellogg was toastmaster. He was called the father of the club by the charter members because at the request of Stuart Morrow (who organized the first clubs) Mayor Kellogg talked to members of the Knothole Club, a weekly luncheon group, and from this nucleus grew the charter membership.

The club had 18 charter members whose classifications ranged from investment broker to pathologist to newspaper columnist.

From 1931 to October, 1935 the club met at weekly luncheons at the Bellingham Hotel, with one monthly dinner and business meeting at the Bellingham YWCA or members' homes...

In March of 1935 Ella Higginson, Bellingham's famous poet, was made an Honorary Member, the only person so honored to date by the Bellingham club.

Club meetings varied in the late 30s and 40s with a combination of luncheon and dinner meetings... *(Today, the club meets the first three Thursdays of each month at noon).*

We have always supported regional, Federation and Soroptimist International projects. Bellingham has sent two governors to NW Region, three of our members have been regional secretaries, two have served as District 1 director, one as District 1 secretary, and members have served as chairmen and members of committees at all levels. *(Since 1981, we have added one regional treasurer, LuWilla Croy).*

Service projects were modest during the early depression years of the 30s, but the club donated regularly to the Red Cross Milk Fund, paid for the care of first teeth of children whose parents could not afford the expense, and contributed to the Community Fund and other local causes.

In late 1941 and early 1942 members were working at the Red Cross instead of one club meeting, and during the years of WWII a major project was collecting clothing which was sent to Soroptimist clubs in Belgium.

The club furnished rooms at St. Josephs and St. Lukes hospitals, made donations to Visiting Nurses and Emergency Medical Services, and, in 1969, began the kidney machine project. This project had the support of the public as well as club members, and in June, 1974 the club celebrated the purchase of a peritoneal dialysis machine for St. Lukes hospital with help from individual donors and the Hamilton Fund to obtain additional equipment.

The Needy Children's fund started with needs of children which were not covered by any public agency and evolved into an Emergency Fund and the President's Fund, budgeted to release small sums in an emergency without further club action.

Soroptimist International was among the earliest organizations to study the problems of aging, and Bellingham began its support in the late 40s by donating money to Council on

Aging to start various local projects. The club helped the Senior Citizens Housing Center. We donated funds and a filing cabinet to Community Services for Older Adults. Club members were also active in the planning and opening of the Senior Activity Center. Louise Majeres was acting director of the Center for a time, and both she and LuWilla Croy served as president of the Council on Aging.

International Goodwill and Understanding has been supported since the early years of the club. SI of Derby, England has been our Sister Club (now Friendship Link) since the early 40s. During WW2 we sent the club Christmas boxes, and over the years have exchanged scrapbooks, newsletters and extensive correspondence... *(In more recent years, we have hosted a visit by Derby members and have in turn been hosted by the club in Derby).*

In Public Affairs our program meetings have covered everything from debates on political issues to talks on special women's problems. In the 40s Dorothy Button (representing our club) acted as sponsor at the launching of one of the locally built ships.

Our money making projects have been as varied as the service they support.

And there has been just plain old fun. Good fellowship has always flourished at meetings, money making affairs shared, conferences and conventions attended together.

Our club challenge is, as it has always been, to continue growing in our membership, our leadership and our ideas of service. The names and structure of the organization have changed, the dimensions of service are constantly changing. But basically we are now what we were in 1931, a group of executive and professional women committed to seeking out our international, national, regional and local problems and then working toward their solution.

Updated, 2006:

Since our 50th anniversary in 1981, Soroptimist International of Bellingham has focused on service to our community's women and children.

Fund-raising events have been both lavish (Cabin Fever) and modest (sales of chocolate Easter eggs); with regular rummage sales that have netted a respectable profit to further our service goals.

A major effort has been made to help combat domestic violence in our community with donations in support of the Womencare Shelter, Dorothy Place, the YWCA and Lydia Place. The Whatcom Literacy Council is another regular recipient of our financial support.

The Women's Opportunity Award is granted annually to a single mother head of household in the pursuit of further education that will allow her to become independent and contribute to the welfare of her family and re-establish her own self-esteem.

Other awards honor citizens of our community who "Make a Difference for Women" and the "Violet Richardson Award" that honors young people in our community for their volunteer activities. We also support the Northwest Women's Hall of Fame and the "Road Less Graveled" program of the Bellingham Technical College.

Soroptimist goals have not changed much in the 75 years of our existence. Today, there are 100,000 members in 120 countries of the world, where...

"Soroptimists work within their communities, their regions, their countries and with other Soroptimists across the globe to provide services and programs in the areas of Domestic Violence, Cancer Awareness, Literacy, Stopping the Traffic of Women and Children, Limbs for Life, and much much more."

CHARTER MEMBERS

Llewellynne C. Abrams
June Burn
Mabelle P. Burnett
Edith B. Carhart
Mae G. Carr
Maria S. Heinemann
Adele M. Jones
Adelaide Knauf
Jessie L. Mohr
Anna J. Prentice
Marion Pritchard
Florence C. Robinson
Gertrude A. Reid
Mary E. Rich
Florence Thorne
Lesta Tischer
Mollie O. Trezise
Maud L. Williams