



'Women On The Go'

BY MARGARET MILLER

Chamber Secretary Kept On The Gallop

Mrs. Virgil Gagnon has a job with the Westland Chamber of Commerce that she finds "the most fascinating and the most frustrating" of any she's ever held.

Fascinating, because being executive secretary of the chamber keeps Harriet Gagnon in close touch with the galloping development of the area that has been her home for 29 years.

Frustrating, because she sometimes runs out of time and answers serving the Chamber and of people of the community.

"I HAVE 12 bosses and they are all marvelous," Harriet Gagnon said, referring to the C. of C. board of directors.

"But when I took this job, they asked me if I'd fill in until the organization was built up to the point where they could hire a trained professional in the field.

"I guess that means that if I do a good job I'll get fired."

Mrs. Gagnon, wife of a Westland City councilman, began her present duties last March, but she was in on the chamber's organization from its beginning.

THE GROUP came into being in the middle of her living room floor in 1963, she said.

At that time, the area that now is the city of Westland was still Nankin Township, and Virgil Gagnon had not yet retired from his service station and garage business.

As organization got underway, Harriet Gagnon was the chamber's first secretary.

"Unofficial and unpaid," she explained.

Then Ted Kuckelman, of Belleville, who had organized several chambers of commerce, was hired as executive secretary.

MRS. GAGNON gave Kuckelman a hand on various projects frequently, until last March, when he retired, for the third time and at the age of 80.

At that point, Mrs. Gagnon said, John Nolan, of the Westland shopping center, told her the board of directors had decided they would like a replacement who would be familiar with the area and its businesses. They asked her to take on the job.

Harriet Gagnon describes the Chamber of Commerce as a "public relations agent for the city," carrying out its work involves a full day of activity, she finds.

WHEN HER telephone rings, it might be a resident complaining of broken glass in the street near his house, or someone wanting information about tax bills, or, recently, a query about when the next beauty contest would be held in Westland.

The day's mail usually brings requests for city maps or information on governmental residents. Or an outline of the school districts—there are seven of them that take in parts of Westland or questions about the community from prospective residents.

"I TRY to refer them all to the best source for answering the question," Mrs. Gagnon said, "but sometimes I have to check out the answer myself."


That's what occupies part of her time outside the office, along with visiting Westland business people to enlist new Chamber of Commerce members. As of now, she figures the chamber includes 25 to 40 per cent of the business in town.

WHILE WATCHING the great growth of the area where she lives, Harriet Gagnon has been associated with several of its businesses.

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HARRIET GAGNON in front of her Chamber of Commerce office.

"I held a number of jobs while my two sons were growing up," she said, "but I never wanted to be away from home except when they were in school, so I changed positions frequently."

For five years, from 1961 to 1966, she ran the first Tonnish post office.

"My husband's service station got so many requests for stamps and money orders that I decided to set up a station in the corner of the garage," she said.

"At first I just handled stamps, but later we had money orders, special delivery and parcel post."

AT CHRISTMAS TIME, the postal service required two extra helpers and more room than the service station could spare.

Mrs. Gagnon helped organize the Business and Professional Women's club of Westland and was its first president. She also is a former columnist for The Observer.

She married her BWB membership in 1960 and is on the board of managers of the Western Wayne County YMCA. Just now that post office work on the travel and literature series of programs begins Oct. 12 in the Wayne Memorial High School auditorium.

She also manages to find time with her own families. Ray lives in the home with his wife, Jackie. He has children Rayna, Pam and Scott David. George, better known as Mickey, and his wife, Betty, are Westland residents, and their daughters are Tammy and Terri.

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