

OWL gives a hoot for rights of older women



By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Women over 50 need a special voice in Washington, someone to protect them against the inequities of pension programs and Social Security.

That's the opinion of Janet Good, president of the Michigan chapter of the Older Women's League, known as OWL.

OWL boasts 111 chapters in 44 states.

"Our organization is dedicated to changing legislation to help women," Good said.

"Last March we opened an office in Washington on the Hill and have a full-time lobbyist there," she added.

There are membership chapters in Livonia, Farmington and Bloomfield. For information about joining OWL, write to Good at 26089 Steele Road,

Farmington Hills, Mich. 48018.

Raising families oftentimes pulls women from the middle of their career ladder and places them on the bottom rung.

"Right at the time women are at the peak growth periods of their careers, they take time out to have children, and when they return, they must start all over again. They usually turn out to be poor when they're older," Good said.

"Many women are thrown into low-paying jobs late in life and don't get pensions, their Social Security payments are low, and they don't have health care plan," Good said.

OWL's GOALS for 1983 include lobbying for equity in pension plans, getting good health care plans for women not covered by business health care plans, and ending discrimination by employers.

"We're the only grass-roots organization in the country that deals with older women exclusively," Good said.

It's a known fact that women live longer than men, Good said. By the time a woman hits 60 years old there are nine women for every man. Women who make their careers as full-time homemakers accept the biggest inequities in the system, she said.

"Men in the work place have stock options, they get pensions. If a woman works in the home, society puts no value on her work. When a man retires, the company gives him a large amount of money, but it's not available to the wife if he predeceases her. She only gets one third, which puts her on the poverty level," she said.

Homemakers who get divorced may get settlements, but usually they are left out in the cold when it comes to hospitalization coverage.

"In a divorce situation, women no longer have hospital coverage. If she was covered, by her husband's policy, it's a traumatic experience for both women. There are four million women in this country without hospitalization insurance," she said.

OWL is making a name for itself and, hopefully through good lobbying efforts, will help many women in the years to come, Good said. The organization is only two years old and survives strictly on \$5 annual dues payments and fund-raising.

The advertising agency Young & Rubicam donated its services to create ads for a national campaign on behalf of OWL.

Good gave one example, "For men, they created retirement plans, medical benefits, profit sharing and gold watches. For women, they created Mother's Day."

When it comes to the treatment of older women, we take a lot of liberties.

In a country that prides itself on equality and humanity, it's frightening that older women are so deprived.

- 2.8 million women over 65 live in poverty, compared to less than a million men.
- 12.2 million retirement age women have no access whatsoever to pensions.
- 60% of women over 65 living alone have social security as their only income.
- 4 million women between 45-65 have no health insurance at all.

A new nationwide organization is fighting to change these facts of life. The Older Women's League (OWL) is helping women, on a national and personal level, to prepare and deal with the problems of growing old. For information, write to OWL, National Headquarters, P.O. Box 10, Wash., D.C. 20006.

Older Women's League

The advertising agency Young & Rubicam created ads such as this for OWL's national campaign.

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During July and August, all weekend trips will cost 75 cents for full-fare passengers and 50 cents for the elderly, handicapped and riders aged 6-18. No zone rates will be charged.

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