

# Male clubs, phooey

## Mahaffey criticizes clubs for excluding women

By Teri Banas  
Staff writer

Corporations such as Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. and Burroughs Corp. have stopped sponsoring memberships at the Detroit Athletic Club because to do so would give conflicting messages to their employees, said Detroit Councilwoman Maryann Mahaffey last week in Birmingham.

Mahaffey told the story of one Burroughs's attorney who found that while her company was working internally to "advance women in executive positions," sponsoring a corporate membership at an all-male club served an opposite purpose.

"Companies pay dues to private clubs because they want a presence in that organization, because that is where the movers and shakers meet," Mahaffey told an audience of mostly professional women at a breakfast last Thursday in the Community House.

Likewise for men, she noted: "Belonging to a club where business is conducted is necessary to equal opportunity and options."

BUT EQUAL opportunities exist when private organizations block memberships for women, she said.

"Women cannot achieve their full potential if denied access to where business is conducted because that means they don't have free access. For me, the women's movement has meant opening up options."

"One member told me it's very important to belong to this club and to get included in activities because it can help you move up the ladder. It's where the deals are made," she said.

A guest of several local women's groups, Mahaffey was asked to talk about the downtown Detroit club's exclusion of women, an issue that sparked controversy when its board of directors voted to exclude women members by class.

MAHAFFEY EMERGED as an outspoken critic of the club's practices at that time. She is continuing the battle by drafting an anti-dis-

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— Maryanne Mahaffey  
Detroit council member

crimination ordinance for the city of Detroit.

Modeling it after similar laws in New York and Philadelphia, she said she would not introduce it for a vote until she lobbied for public support to put pressure on her council colleagues.

Mahaffey reiterated to the group the root of her opposition.

"Corporate dues and entertainment expenses are deducted as business expenses on one's income tax. When you deduct those expenses, you're not paying taxes on it and that deprives the rest of us. My position has been if they want to discriminate, that's OK, but don't ask for special parking privileges and business deductions," she told the group.

While most of those who spoke up agreed with Mahaffey's position, a few did not.

ONE AUDIENCE member objected saying, "You have one governmental body trying to set parameters (on membership) for a private club, which is their right."

Mahaffey responded by likening the involvement to government's role in outlawing racial discrimination and child labor laws.

"If private clubs want to discriminate, fine, but don't deduct your business expenses when you discriminate. Another thing, at the DAC we've assigned police officers there and asked them not to ticket. Now we're using tax dollars for that, and we're missing tax dollars for an institution that discriminates. That's the argument."

Thursday's topic struck close to home for a number of women in the group, who related personal experiences to each other of being rejected

from full membership in a number of local country clubs.

ONE WOMAN, who enjoys playing golf and likes to entertain clients on the golf course, said she was "very disappointed" by one turn-down. "That was in spite of the fact that I could afford it," she said.

Declining to identify herself, she said: "It's disturbing but I'm not an activist enough to do anything about it."

Instead, she takes her clients out to one of the many municipal courses in the Birmingham area.

Another member of the audience, who described herself as in her 80s, said she agreed the DAC should remain an exclusively male organization.

"Let the boys have their fun," she said. "They love to get down there and tell big stories. The fellas have to go somewhere to get away from these powerful women," she said with a laugh.

MAHAFFEY RESPONDED: "If I go somewhere and see men gathered in the corner, I'm not going to interfere."

She added that when she first vis-

ited the DAC she was asked to use the side door, but refused. "That's not my style," she said.

Asked if she had ever contemplated joining the DAC, Mahaffey said "No, my position has been fighting for the rights of women. And frankly, it's a little expensive."

Judy Anderson, incoming president of the Birmingham Junior League, one of the sponsors of Thursday's breakfast meeting, said her organization nationwide refuses to rent meeting space in any organization that limits its membership.



GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Councilwoman Maryann Mahaffey speaking in Birmingham.

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