

# Suburban Life

Lorraine McClish editor/477-5450



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## Woman of the Year

### Organizational know-how wins title for executive director

By Lorraine McClish

**B**ETTY PAINE, executive director of Farmington Community Center, has been named "Woman of the Year."

The title comes from the Farmington Area Business and Professional Women who honor someone who meets the criteria of promoting the welfare of women in the community, while setting an example for others.

"She's initiated seven special interest groups that involve about 600 members since she's been director of the center, which include a lot of women," said Joyce Schmidt, speaking for the local chapter of the national organization.

"The center's mailing list has names on it from 75 communities now, which has got to say something about the classes she's offering. She started the Second Edition (a resale shop) that is bringing in about \$1,200 in revenue every year. She initiated the Volunteer Guild, the Professional Women's Network, the center's Women's Club and gave the Writer's Guild a place to meet when it had no place else to go," Schmidt said.

Paine has also increased the center's revenue by 300 percent and doubled the number of persons who regularly participate in center activities, while overseeing a staff of 14 and the workings of 200 volunteers since she took her position in 1979.

PAINE SAYS she sees her work in the center as "filling a void, addressing a need, the whole purpose is to respond. I would hope that our staff, the board, the volunteers, all act as eyes and ears for the requests that come. That's why we're here. Many of the special interest groups that have been started have come directly from requests. Some are those we sensed a need for, became aware of and then went about seeing what we could do about it."

Paine is adamant about not im-

itating anything that would be a duplication of anything else offered within the two cities. . . . And equally adamant about structuring new groups to meet its particular needs.

"We did a lot of research before launching the Professional Woman's Network," she said, giving that as an example. "We found that most of these women just did not have the time for one more night meeting so we scheduled breakfast meetings."

"We also purposely did not tie into any national affiliation so those who came to the meetings weren't bound to anybody else's by-laws. They could make their own, or none at all. This was their network and they could handle it as they saw fit."

The Farmington Community Center Men's Club, and after that, the Farmington Community Center Women's Club, were both given the same free rein and each has taken different routes with Paine's philosophy.

Bringing in newcomers to the center through the special interest groups carried a two-fold benefit. Some of those newcomers became volunteers after being introduced to the center, which in turn made for more participation in the center's fund-raisers.

PAINE GREW UP in Mason City, Iowa, the town Meredith Wilson made known as River City in "The Music Man," and crossed the foot bridge in that city to take her piano lessons.

"Oh, yes, there really is a foot bridge there, and also an excellent music program. I was a beneficiary of that musically minded city after Meredith Wilson's fame," she said.

She won a scholarship to University of Kansas as a string bass player, then switched to study education and graduated from University of Iowa.

She has worked as a classroom teacher, a media consultant and worked with students who had language and reading problems.

Prior to taking her job here, she

had a hand-weaving business that she operated from her home and was string bass player for Oakway Symphony.

Throughout her adult life she has been a volunteer, in one capacity or another. The volunteer job she is active in now is planning management sessions for non-profit organizations through VACF (Volunteer Action Center Forum).

"I have always believed in volunteering," she said. "My favorite thing is to initiate, organize, start. I do this because I enjoy it. I get a lot of satisfaction from this. Volunteering should be pleasant and I work to make things pleasant for all of the volunteers we have come to the center."

PAINE SAID one of her biggest satisfactions is "when one of our volunteers discovers what volunteering is all about."

Volunteers come to the center for many reasons: a social outlet, stepping stone to a paid position, to feel useful, to fill time, because they believe in the project or the cause, because they believe they have a talent to give, or feel a need to give.

"What so many of them don't realize is how much they have to give, how many talents that they do have. The joy comes in knowing that they can do something they have never tried before, that they can organize and run a huge event."

"Some come thinking they want to do something that takes no thought at all and then discover they are doing something that takes a lot of thought. They discover they are finding creative ways to do a job or finding a skill they never knew they had," she said.

Paine lives in Bloomfield Township with her husband, Perry. The couple have two children. David Paine is owner of a Domino's Pizza franchise in Ypsilanti. Lynn Paine is a landscape architect working and living in New Zealand.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Betty Paine says she derives a great deal of satisfaction from organizing and initiating new programs. The projects and programs she's initiated for Farmington Community

Center brought her the "Woman of the Year" honors from Farmington's Business and Professional Women.

## Divorce after 50

### For women it can be a nightmare leading to outright poverty

By Faye Kuzma  
special writer

**S**UDDENLY DIVORCED after 30 or 40 years of marriage, women feel stunned and confused.

Few are in a position to look after their financial security.

The divorced woman often finds she is without the daily financial support or the retirement security she counted on.

Left without real assets in her

own name, left without job skills, left without experience in the labor market, the older woman can experience more than a drop in income. She can experience outright poverty.

"What is divorce about? Money,

and beyond that, money. And beyond that, it's about money," said Phyllis Rapaport, whose marriage of 32 years ended in 1972, when she was 56.

RAPAPORT WAS the featured speaker at a recent Symposium on Divorce After 50, which was sponsored by the Older Women's League State Task Force on Divorce, the Northwest YWCA, the Farmington Hills OWL Chapter and the Michigan Conference. NOW. The symposium took place at the Northwest YWCA in Redford Township.

Rapaport graduated from the University of Detroit Law School in May and is awaiting the results of her bar examination. She said she hopes to use her legal skills to help other older women who have gone through a divorce.

Rapaport said her divorce settlement was not equitable.

"I want you to know I was just a sweet little homemaker," she said. "I didn't know whether a hundred dollars was more or less than a thousand."

Rapaport summed up her ex-husband's attitude: "(My husband) sent word: 'Break her spirit, leave her penniless and don't spare expenses.' That's rough. I had to go to law school to find out what happened."

**ANOTHER PROBLEM** stems from the way a settlement distributes assets.

"If you don't have capital to support that never-ending battle, forget the alimony. It's not worth it," said Gail Burk, a social worker who attended the symposium. Burk, 46, has eight children. She was divorced two years ago, after 25 years of marriage.

"I deal with women who receive the house and no income," Burk said. "They lose the house because they can't pay the taxes."

*"It used to be that we would look with shock at the eastern countries where a man just shook his finger at his wife three times and repeated 'I divorce you.' In our country once is enough."*

— Phyllis Rapaport

"I have a lot of older women on my case load. They got divorced, and they're destitute now."

"Equity, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder," quipped Rapaport, who continued, "Sometimes a 50/50 division is not equitable, because he still has a stream of earnings that she may not have."

**THE ATTORNEY'S ROLE** depends on who is being defended, Rapaport said.

"Counsel for the husband has one main job to do: Prevent the wife from finding out the facts she wants to know about the corporation, business or job as well as the personal assets, other businesses, partnerships, overtime, pay, offices and so on," Rapaport said.

"Both attorneys are using the same court rules, the same statutes, the same case book to accomplish opposite tasks. Both are familiar with the criteria for malpractice and court misconduct."

"However, you're not familiar with those things. And if they don't cheat you out of a lot of money, nobody will take your case anyhow."

**NO-FAULT DIVORCE** has further taken away the leverage women used to have, Rapaport said. Although originally considered a reform to a set of laws that varied from state to state, no-fault divorce now is being viewed far less favorably by those concerned with women's issues.

"They really thought that (no-fault divorce) was going to be a

bonanza for women," said Fran Green, Birmingham therapist and divorce workshop director who attended the symposium. "But it's really been a disaster for women."

With no-fault divorce, the only grounds necessary for divorce in many states is a statement by either party that the marriage is "irretrievably broken." As a result, a spouse no longer has a means for objecting to the divorce and bargaining for a more equitable settlement.

"It used to be that we would look with shock at the eastern countries where a man just shook his finger at his wife and three times repeated, 'I divorce you,'" Rapaport said. "In our country, once is enough."

AS FOR child support and the woman's role, Rapaport chuckled, "I would urge women to take on the role of fairy godmother."

She also advised: "Tell your daughter that if she's gainfully employed, when she goes out with her husband, and he orders a \$10 meal, she must order a \$6 meal. If she does not work, she must sit close to him, because she's only entitled to what he leaves on his plate."

OWL is a national non-profit organization addressing the concerns of middle and older women.

The Central Detroit chapter of OWL is planning an issue forum on Monday, Nov. 17, at the Downtown YWCA.

To join OWL, send a \$10 check made out to OWL, to 26089 Steele Road, Farmington Hills 48018.



STEVE FECHT

Phyllis Rapaport tells the story of her own 32-year marriage that ended in divorce.