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Concern celebrates past and looks toward future

By Sherry Kahan and Margaret Miller staff writers

It was the early 1970s and, as Betty Shaw of Redford put it, women interested in environmental issues were considered "little old ladies in tennis shoes."

But the ideas that took seed in Earth Day of 1970 were definitely not of the tennis-shoe variety.

And the women who gave them thought and then substance now have to their credit a decade of ecological consciousness-raising that has drawn in a variety of environment-minded people.

They pulled together into Concern Detroit Inc., which began its meetings here early in 1972, taking as its model a similar organization in Washington D.C.

Concern was formed "to enlist and encourage the active support of American Women in helping to solve the critical problems of the environment."

And some of those enlisted recycled a few memories when the organization held a 10th anniversary luncheon to celebrate its past, keep the communities aware of its presence and look to what it can do in the future.

SEVERAL MEMBERS talked at the luncheon in Unity Temple of Detroit about the accomplishments of Concern — an office in Troy where volunteers help answer consumers' questions, a regular "Consumer Mailbag" column published in this newspaper, environmental fact sheets, two cookbooks, a calendar, television reports and speakers who go out to educate the public.

The leaders also led discussion about whether Concern in the future, and small committees came up with enough ideas to fill the next 10 years with ease.

The women gathered hoped their organization could influence better land use, push for greater use of solar energy and help find incentives to recycle solid wastes.

They pledged themselves to intensify efforts to educate children about their environment and they announced themselves ready to fight pesticides, substance abuse and toxic waste.

Delighted with the amount of environmental legislation that has been enacted since Earth Day, they said they'll continue as watchdogs of the state legislature "because the gains can be lost very fast."

THE BEGINNINGS of Concern Detroit go back to the organization of similar name in the nation's capital. It was home base both for Carolyn Killefer, founder of the local group, and Barbara Van Dusen of Birmingham, its current president.

"Carolyn came to Detroit from Washington," said Connor Mills of Farmington, "and she knew the people who had organized Concern there. Besides putting out information, they used to testify on environmental issues before congressional committees."

Transferred to Detroit with her auto industry executive husband, Mrs. Killefer also transferred here her interest in ecology and conservation.

She enlisted the aid of Mills, Nan Martin of Birmingham and Susan Klingbeil of Grosse Pointe to begin an organization like the one she had known.

"Carolyn and I went to Washington to consult with the Concern leaders there," Mills said.

"We modeled our constitution and by-laws on theirs, but we always have been completely separate."

'Consumers can make a difference; that's what it comes down to. Each individual can find a way to be less wasteful and smarter in the marketplace.'

— Concern, Inc. President Barbara Van Dusen

The Killersfers now have left the area and the three local founders are now less active, but Concern keeps going strong, with a good deal of the leadership now centered in Barbara Van Dusen and Grace Gluskin, executive director.

Van Dusen took over the presidency in 1976 after she and her husband Richard return to Birmingham after a four-year stay in Washington.

"I had been with Concern in Washington and the Detroit group had been going about a year when we came back," she said. "I decided that was what I wanted to get involved with."

VAN DUSEN finds conservation her primary focus in the many activities of Concern.

"I worry about all the waste in our use-it-once, throw-it-away society," she said. "I try in my own life to recycle and conserve. I'm a 'big lady.' Just this week, I took a load of newspapers to a company in Royal Oak — I sold them and will give the money to Concern."

She admitted ruefully that "I drive my husband nuts," but added that Richard Van Dusen is one of many she is educating about non-wasteful living.

"He rinses out bottles now," she said, "but I'm still working on getting him to turn off the water while he brushes his teeth."

Gluskin began her environmentalism with an organization called Citizens for Survival, joining Concern 9½ years ago as its executive secretary.

"I was most impressed with the sincerity of the people who work in this area," she said, looking back. "I found myself thinking about what kind of world I wanted for my kids."

Gluskin now keeps the office at One Northfield Plaza open 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday-Friday and spreads the work of Concern Inc. activities through the Mailbag column and in radio and television appearance. She also directs the work of volunteers, now numbering up to 50 including the board members.

"Many of them have been with us for several years," she said. "We must be doing something right."

BETTY SHAW, who now is the organization's vice president, working with Van Dusen, secretary Joann Kowalski of Detroit and treasurer Carol Schrasbun of Grosse Pointe, talked at the luncheon about how her brand of environmentalism took her to bottle recycling.

She worked at first with a group of Livonia high school students, who were running a bottle return center and welcomed her offer of adult help because they needed someone to staff the office while they were in school.

In 1971 she opened a recycling center in Redford. While many similar centers folded after a brief life, "those of us who persevered discovered the situation was much more complex than we had imagined," Shaw said.

"Some of us began to expand our knowledge of solid waste. We went to all-day seminars and workshops and visited pilot resource recovery plants."



A lot of environmental action goes on in the Concern Detroit, Inc. office in Troy. From left are Grace Gluskin, executive director; volunteers Dawn Markus of Bloomfield Township and Anne Sayers of Clarkston, Betty Shaw



LINDA SOLOMON/photographer

Connor Mills (left) of Farmington and Susan Klingbeil of Grosse Pointe, two of the founders of Concern Detroit, were among the guests at a party in the home of Concern President Barbara Van Dusen, marking the organization's 10th anniversary.

"Volunteer recycling centers were excellent examples of the public's direct involvement in environmental matters. Here people actually did something. They removed hundreds of thousands of tons of materials from the solid waste stream and put them back into use."

"This process prolonged the life of existing landfills and recycled steel, aluminum, glass and paper. It saved energy. It also saved communities thousands of dollars in disposal fees."

But she reminded Concern members that the next decade will bring them many challenges.

"We must keep the strong legislation that is now in place," Shaw said. "However, standing still and holding fast are not enough. Organizations like Concern must continue to stretch and grow in order to address the next generation of environmental problems."

President Van Dusen sounded a note of hope as she looked at her organization.

"Consumers can make a difference, that's what it comes down to. Each individual can find a way to be less wasteful and smarter in the marketplace. And people are changing. I see it every day when I shop."



LINDA SOLOMON/photographer

Jim and Betty Shaw of Redford also were among the anniversary party guests.

Surprise for director

'Amazing Grace' given honors



LINDA SOLOMON/photographer

A surprised Grace Gluskin (right) open gifts from grateful Concern members at the 10-year gala hosted by Barbara and Richard Van Dusen (left).

Grace Gluskin, executive director for Concern, Inc. miring most of its decade of environmental watchdogging, was the center of a surprise ceremony as the organization celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Concern members billed the reception in the Birmingham home of Richard and Barbara Van Dusen as an anniversary party, but guests were asked to contribute to a scrapbook and pile of small gifts for the West Bloomfield resident described by co-environmentalists as "Amazing Grace."

Gluskin has for 9½ years has been office manager and principal disseminator of Concern information.

Pictures and letters filled the album, and the executive director also received a T-shirt lettered "Grace, Our Concern," a "hat full of symbolism" from which real flowers sprouted, a gold pin and a poem composed and read by her husband, Dr. Ronald Gluskin, an optician with offices in Livonia and Farmington.

"I WAS totally surprised — didn't suspect a thing until my mother and sister showed up," said Mrs. Gluskin.

"By the time they finished I was roared up one side and toasted down the other."

Barbara Van Dusen said the organization had been "looking for a chance to honor Grace and give her a pat on the back."

She noted that Gluskin has been most capable in public relations work for the Concern organization.

"She is very knowledgeable about all

the subjects we deal with, and she always keeps in mind our goals and purposes," said Van Dusen. "She gets things across well, and she is an expert in working with the volunteers who help carry out our programs."

IN HER capacity as executive director, Gluskin operates the Troy office, represents the group in governmental matters, gives talks before organizations and in the electronic media and produces — on recycled paper — the Consumer Mailbag column printed in this newspaper.

Conference, sale set

Concern, Inc. will sponsor a conference on ways to conserve money as well as materials from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 22, in Unity Temple, 17505 Second, Detroit.

In conjunction with the conference the organization plans a garage sale with a new twist.

No money will change hands in the event, described by Concern as a recycling opportunity. Those who attend are asked to bring donations, and they will be given donations for what they bring. Then participants will be entitled to take home the same number of sale items.

Those interested in registering for the conference may call Concern, Inc. in its Troy-based office, 879-1333.

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