

# Suburban Life

Lorraine McClish editor/477-5450



Thursday, March 3, 1988 O&E

(F18)



RANDY BORSI/staff photographer

The 12 dolls that make up "Our Fabulous Foremothers" stand on display in one of the many exhibits that have been a part of their travels.

## Our Fabulous Foremothers Dolls tell story of women's rights battle

**T**HE STORY OF "Our Fabulous Foremothers" will be told by Dr. Gladys Holdeman McKenney when she brings her collection of dolls to Farmington Hills for a program in observance of Women's History Month.

Her program makes for a show and tell afternoon as she relates the story of the woman represented by the historically accurate dolls in face, figure, stature and dress. In turn it tells the history of the struggle for women's rights, from Abigail Adams, born in 1744, to Alice Paul who died in 1977.

McKenney calls her collection "my project." The project began with one collection of 18 dolls which has grown to three collections.

One collection will be on permanent display throughout March in Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. One collection remains with McKenney for her talks to clubs, groups, historical associations and civic organizations for Women's History Month programs. The third collection, still in the making, will be used for either permanent display or to go on tour.

"Our Fabulous Foremothers" will be sponsored here by Farmington Chapter of OWL (Older Woman's League).

The event begins with lunch at noon, Saturday, March 5, in the dining room on Orchard Ridge Campus.

Oakland Community College. Tickets are \$10.50. Reservations are taken by calling Dorothy Diskin, 532-5044.

"MY PROJECT is dedicated to all of the women I met who were up against severe societal struggles while I was teaching and the remarkable solutions they worked out for themselves," McKenney said.

The time she speaks of was the mid-'60s while she was teaching social studies in Rochester High School. Her son was operating a rape crisis center, so she was acutely aware of that problem. Meanwhile she was all but operating her own hotline as stories came to her of suicides, drug use, teen-age pregnancies.

Running parallel to this were societal pressures put upon her with three refusals to adopt a class she had developed called "Women in History."

"The first time I proposed teaching the class I was laughed at," she said.

It wasn't until 1979 that the class was made part of the school curriculum.

Her first doll was made after her retirement and after an accident. She had fallen and made the doll for a granddaughter as a means of occupying herself during her recuperation.

"It was a granny doll," she said. "And for some reason I really don't understand yet I embroidered 'Vote

for Women' on the apron pocket. It must have been all the women I had read about in research for my class who worked for Women's Suffrage — how much I admired them.

"I hugged that doll and got a lump in my throat thinking of those fabulous women, and the students I was able to bring their stories to in my classes," she said.

McKENNEY'S first "Fabulous Foremothers" program was given in her church in 1984.

"I worked around the clock getting prepared for it. What I wasn't prepared for was the emotional reaction from my audience. They were

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CAMILLE MCCOY/staff photographer

Dr. Gladys Holdeman McKenney holds the granny doll that began "Our Fabulous Foremothers" collection and simultaneously began a new career for the retired Rochester High School teacher.

## Womencenter

Laughing on the way to menopause

**I**N APPRECIATION for the humor in women's lives the women who come to Womencenter will celebrate International Women's Day with "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Menopause."

"We laugh with each other over the absurdities of life, raising children, seeking true love, going to work and school, struggling to stay sane," said Mary White who directs the center on Orchard Ridge Campus, Oakland Community College.

"We laugh over the comic strategies we've devised to keep a household budget, our schedule, our communication system from daily collapse. Sometimes we find ourselves laughing to keep from crying, to lighten the load, to refresh and recharge the spirit. And we laugh together."

"We've had some pretty heavy programs to celebrate International Women's Day in the past — rape, domestic violence — it is time for us to celebrate with humor," she said.

"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Menopause" is a dinner theater event that will begin at 7 p.m. Saturday, March 12 in Building J, on the campus.

Tickets are \$12, or \$10 for seniors and students. Reservations must be made on or before March 10 by calling Womencenter, 471-7602.

THE EVENING has been planned by Womencenter supporters, friends, volunteers, the drop-ins and some members of the faculty.

The theater-in-the-round performances will run from a baby girl's first words to her age of wisdom, interspersed with courses of an international dinner, all home-prepared ethnic dishes.

Fran Gunderson, from the college's speech and communications department, will direct the performers, some from Womencenter, some from the faculty.

*"We laugh with each other over the absurdities of life . . ."*

— Mary White

"Betty Dimitry and Al Varone, both on the faculty here, will be taking the roles of 5-year-olds in their rigid boy-girl roles, in the first segment," White said. "When we get to midlife relationships and the liberated male we start borrowing pretty heavily from Nora Ephron, Erma Bombeck and Judith Viorst."

"It all has to do with our common experiences that can set us off in spontaneous peals of belly laughing. The kind of laughing that crescendos in a magical sound to transform the serious, humdrumness of existence into the fanciful, ridiculous and silly," she said.



Betty Dimitry and Al Varone, both faculty members, rehearse their roles for "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Menopause," staged to celebrate International Women's Day, on the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College.

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