



WOMAN'S CLUB  
OF LAGUNA BEACH  
FOUNDED 1922

## Our History

*This history was thoughtfully researched and prepared by Joan Gladstone, and updated by Anne Johnson (October 2019).*

The Woman's Club of Laguna Beach ("Club") was organized by a group of community women on January 20, 1922 to benefit the residents of Laguna Beach through philanthropic activities. When the Laguna Beach chapter was established, the women's clubs movement was picking up steam across the nation. That September, the Club joined the National Federation of Women's Clubs, founded in 1890, as well as the state and southern district federations.

The Club's first clubhouse, leased in 1925, was the "Old Ranch House" on Forest Avenue, built in 1880 by homesteader George Rogers. Later, when the City of Laguna asked the Club to exchange that land for its expansion, it offered land at the corner of St. Ann's and Glenneyre. Club Members accepted the new site with the restriction that the City preserve the beautiful Pepper tree on the original site. Members were strongly aware of the beauty the tree provided and its importance in the community. The new clubhouse was built in the beautiful Craftsman-style and remains at its current site today.

Within three years of its founding in 1922, the flourishing Club contributed to the goal of designing "the city beautiful" when its Members participated in one of the first town planning meetings. In its first decade, the Club would go on to tackle national and local issues such as endorsing a resolution by a veterans group to adopt "The Star Spangled Banner" as the national anthem and offering its clubhouse as a meeting place for Girl

Scouts “to balance the Boy’s Organization.” For more than 85 years, Club Members have supported hundreds of local and Orange County charitable organizations through donations and volunteer time.

Recipients of the Club’s generosity in the early years include some of the town’s first organizations: the Library Board, the Community Club and the Art Association. The town also benefited from their initiatives, such as spearheading the creation of a playground at Bluebird Park and helping fund construction of what was then known as South Coast Community Hospital (now Mission Hospital). Donations came from proceeds raised from their Thrift Shop and other events, and Members prepared Christmas baskets and baby baskets for families-in-need.

The Clubhouse played an important community role, hosting diverse programs from talks on current events to entertainment to purely social lunches. Past topics included Shakespeare’s life, Buddha’s philosophy, Arabian life and culture, and Sputnik.

Both of the Clubhouses served as popular venues for other local organizations. In 1927, the Old Ranch house was rented to the Little Arts Theatre for \$3.50 plus \$2 for chairs. No request seemed too small.

In the 1940s, the Woman’s Club stepped up efforts to organize fundraisers to benefit the community. After the Junior Woman’s Club was established in 1946, the first project was to raise funds to refurbish the local Youth Center.

In 1956, the Club’s activities centered on the town’s most important project, its new hospital. Members pledged \$2,500 and raised money showing films and hosting art classes at the Clubhouse. They also contributed volunteer hours and donated proceeds from Thrift Shop sales. The hospital opened July 1, 1959.

Perhaps one of the Club’s most ambitious and successful initiatives took place in 1959, when the organizations launched a fundraising campaign for the Bluebird playground. According to a July 14, 1960 article in the Laguna Beach Post, “a survey taken showed that playgrounds have been indicated

as the most urgently needed of all facilities, next to hospitals and schools.” The Club held book sales, bake sales and other events to raise funds for playground equipment, which was to include a “slide resembling a whale, a play castle, and a ‘tyke-trike-bike’ where future hot-rodders can learn the rules of the road while they wheel.”

More than 1,500 people gathered to dedicate the new Bluebird Park on May 1, 1962. “Never underestimate the power of a woman,” then City Planning Director Robert Lawrence told the paper.

In 1969, the Club opened the Women’s Resource Center to serve women with free information, referrals, legal services, job counseling and training, domestic abuse and substance abuse counseling and children’s services. The Club continues to assist women, children and families in need today.

In the 1970s, the Club established “Pennies for Art,” to provide a high school student with an art scholarship. The ‘70s also saw a broadening of charitable contributions to groups such as the Marine Institute, Child Guidance Clinic, YMCA, Providence Speech and Hearing Clinic, Laguna Beach Community Counseling and Patriot’s Day Parade. The Junior Woman’s Club was busy raising funds for local nonprofit organizations by hosting a pancake breakfast on Main Beach and a candy booth at the Festival of Arts.

By the ‘80s and ‘90s, the roster of Club beneficiaries listed the Laguna Beach Life Guards, Fireman’s Association, Human Options shelter for women and children, Meals on Wheels, the re-named Mission Hospital, and many other nonprofits. The longstanding Christmas basket tradition continued. In 1993, children affected by the town’s worst fire would be Club guests at a Christmas party.

In 1995, the Club participated in a caravan to the Santa Ana Civic Center to mark the anniversary of Women’s Suffrage. Louise Myers, 99, and a Club Member for 40 years, participated in the event. Never missing a fundraising opportunity, Club Members sold woman suffrage t-shirts and used the proceeds to support the Woman’s Club Resource Center.

That same year the Woman's Club established its "Woman of the Year" award to recognize local women who epitomize the Club's mission of enhancing the lives of others in our community through volunteer service. The first award was to Sande St. John. It is always thrilling to see the number of women nominated.

During this time the Club also established its "Outgoing Mayor" luncheon to honor the retiring City of Laguna Beach Mayor, recognizing the demands and time the community places on their volunteer Mayor. The Club holds a luncheon each year to honor this service. Both the Woman of the Year and the Outgoing Mayor luncheons have become popular, sold-out events.

In March 2019 the Club 'adopted' and held a fundraiser for our local Food Pantry, with all net proceeds going to that group.

Over these past years, new ideas have been integrated with old traditions. The Club continues to expand its community outreach and service to women through educational programs and events, as well as financial support to our local families and children in need. The clubhouse has been updated. Wine and Cheese Member socials have been added; scholarships based on volunteer hours are provided to graduating high school students, and support of our local food bank has been added to the Club's long list of local charities.

Women join the Club for a variety of reasons as they look to expand their social outreach, continuing education and professional connections. Our members are dedicated to serving the community by volunteering to help local organizations and through leadership positions, and include former and current mayors, city council members, Planning Commission, Design Review Board, and within the community in professional positions including, doctors, lawyers, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, musicians, educators and artists.

The Woman's Club has passed its 100 Year mark and is thriving. It continues to welcome women who embrace the goals of the Club ~ inclusiveness, community collaboration and civic involvement.