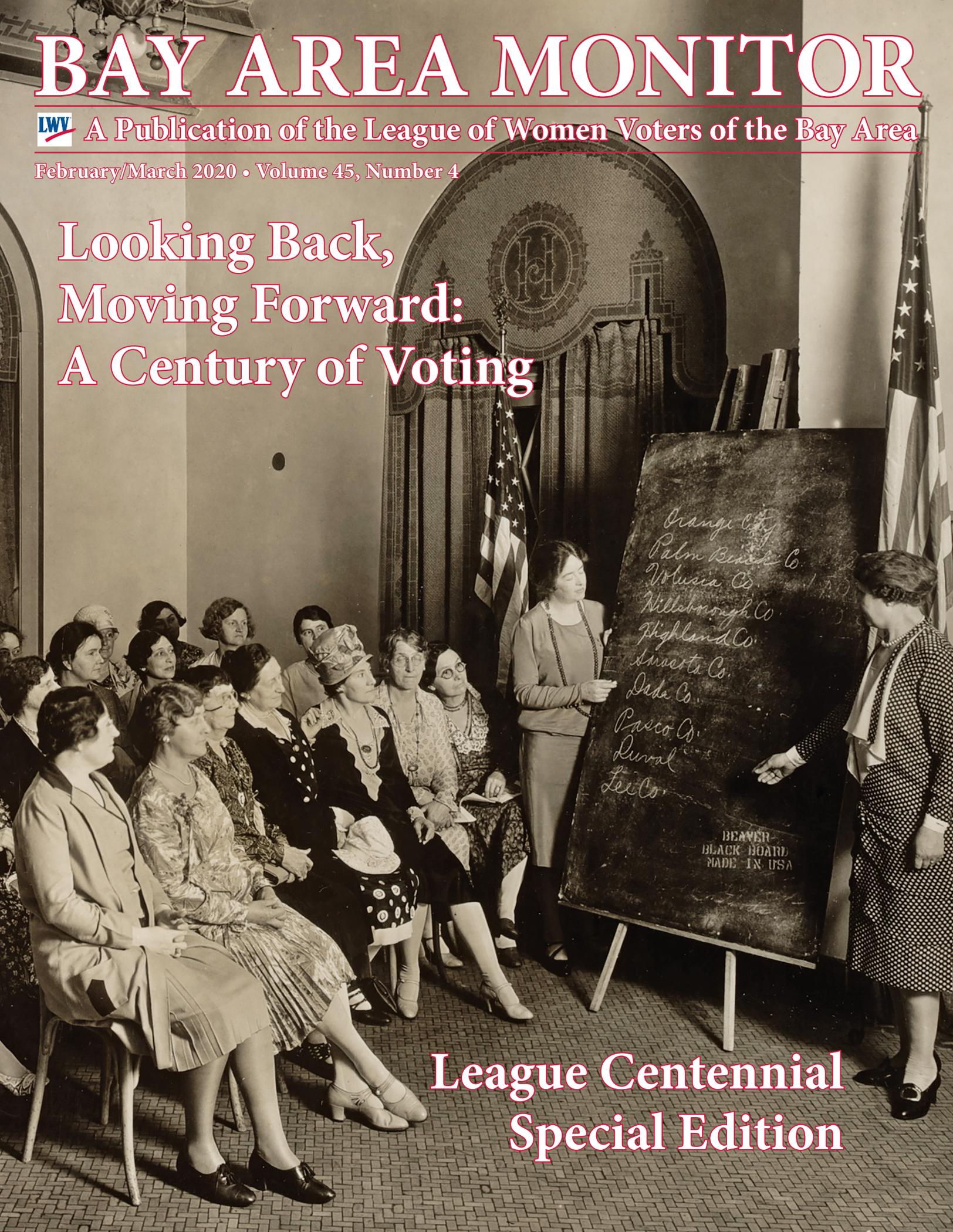


# BAY AREA MONITOR

 A Publication of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area

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## Looking Back, Moving Forward: A Century of Voting



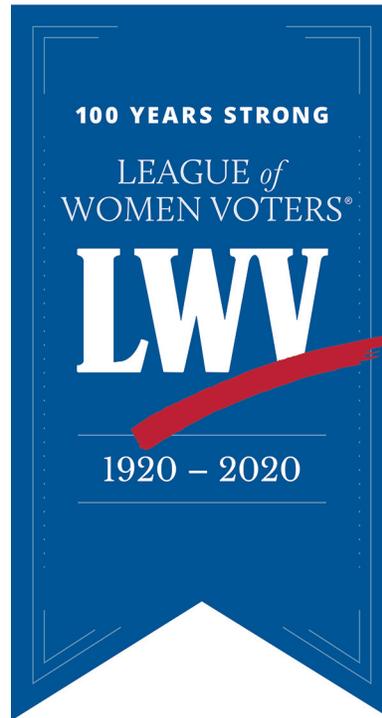
League Centennial  
Special Edition

## Happy Birthday to Us

On February 14, 1920 in the city of Chicago, the National League of Women Voters was formally established, just six months before women won the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th Amendment. To support this new segment of the electorate, the League set up “citizenship schools” to offer women lessons about civics and voting, including such basic instructions as how to mark a ballot. One of those schools appears on our front cover in a 1929 photograph courtesy of LWVUS, which leads the League’s collective centennial celebration.

The image works perfectly to convey how the *Bay Area Monitor* fits in to the broad and ambitious mission of the organization. For while the League is perhaps better known for facilitating access to the ballot — registering voters and defending voter rights — we also prepare voters to cast that ballot, making sure they participate in democracy in an informed way. We hope that our readers can see this goal reflected between these pages, that our coverage serves as its own kind of school for learning about government policy, community planning, and the process by which we all shape our collective civic life. It can be a difficult notion to convey, though, as readers may not always associate our articles about, say, mitigating air pollution with a conventional League image of a crusading woman warrior setting out to protect and promote the act of voting.

But the League centennial gives us here at the *Monitor*



a chance to celebrate that image while connecting it to the topics we write about, using a fresh approach to draw a link between political empowerment and policy literacy.

We start with a guest article from Susie and Steve Swatt telling a Bay Area-centric history of women in politics after California granted them the right to vote in 1911, and then take a look at our own LWVBA history with Leslie Stewart. Cecily O’Connor follows by examining the progress of women in the transportation field, after which Robin Meadows focuses on one woman making waves in water policy. Aleta George wraps things up with consideration of open space as a platform for democracy, with an emphasis on Women’s March 2020, whose Oakland version adorns our back cover.

Speaking of 2020 — are you ready for it? Get inspired for the coming election season and the next 100 years at Bay Area League Day (details below).

Many happy returns,

Madeline Kronenberg, LWVBA President

Alec MacDonald, Editor

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county San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento, the *Monitor*’s readership consists mainly of elected and appointed officials, government staff, business and community leaders, nonprofit affiliates, library patrons, engaged residents, and League members. Subscriptions to the publication are free.

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## After Suffrage: Women's Long Struggle for Political Equality

By Susie Swatt and Steve Swatt

When the first four women were elected to the California Assembly in 1918, the state's newspapers disagreed on the breakthrough's significance. The *Los Angeles Times* called it an "experiment." The *Oakland Tribune*, however, said it expected the women to be as competent as the men, although it acknowledged, "The record of the legislature of the last several sessions does not impose inordinately severe tests of fitness."

The women had scaled unprecedented heights of political participation seven years after California voters had narrowly given women the vote. All four were well-educated professionals and active community leaders. They understood their districts and pointedly eschewed the idea that they were radicals with feminist agendas. "Mrs. Saylor is not a faddist," noted the *San Francisco Examiner*, referring to Berkeley's Anna Saylor, who had won the November election in a landslide. She said she had no "preconceived notions of turning California legislative action upside down" and would represent the men in her district as well as the women.

An Indiana transplant, Saylor had joined the prestigious Twentieth Century Club for women and was exposed to the club's work in social services and civic affairs. Clubwomen worked tirelessly for her election, and it appeared that winning four of 120 legislative seats was merely the beginning of a golden age for California women in the public arena. In 1923, the *Oakland Tribune* asked, "Do the [Assemblywomen] hold the balance of power? That is the question which is agitating the old-time politicians."

A mere 12 days after that article appeared, San Francisco's Mae Nolan made the newspaper look prescient when she won a special election to succeed her late husband in the U.S. House of Representatives. Nolan was the first California woman elected to Congress, but she played down gender issues. "A capable woman," she said, "is a better representative than an incapable man, and vice versa." In 1925, Florence Prag Kahn, the daughter of Polish immigrants, similarly won a San Francisco House seat that had been vacated by



The first four women elected to the California Assembly in 1918 (from left): Grace Dorris, Elizabeth Hughes, Anna Saylor, and Esto Broughton.

image courtesy Sunny Mojonner, Women in California Politics

the death of her husband. Kahn secured funds to expand Bay Area military installations — even as the peace movement was taking hold — and build the Bay Bridge.

Kahn also was the first Jewish woman in Congress. Once, she was accused of being a puppet of U.S. Senate leader George Moses of New Hampshire. With a nod to her religious heritage, she replied, "Why shouldn't I choose Moses as my leader? Haven't my people been following him for ages?" Kahn served 12 years in the House, a record for California women that stood until San Francisco's Nancy Pelosi shattered it in 1999. Kahn also didn't consider herself a feminist but insisted that women must be roused to take an active part in politics "to realize the importance of their voice."

As Anna Saylor, Mae Nolan, Florence Kahn, and other women were leaving their imprints in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., activists had little reason to question the *Tribune's* prophecy. They anticipated a quantum leap for women in electoral politics. Saylor, for example, reasoned that since legislators toiled for so little pay — \$1,000 for each session — business and professional men would be reluctant to leave their personal interests for lawmaking duties. The

*continued on page 4*

## After Suffrage (from page 3)

void, she reasoned, would be filled by a new generation of activist women. But a combination of events mixed with cultural mores conspired to impede women's electoral advances.

After ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, many activists concluded that the battle for gender equality had been waged and won. The National American Woman Suffrage Association — for 30 years a driving force in the suffrage fight — had re-invented itself as the non-partisan League of Women Voters. The League wanted women to be at the forefront of social and government reform by taking advantage of the new political power they fought so hard to achieve. Gone, however, was the passion and fervor that had characterized the struggle for suffrage.

For the most part, politics remained a man's endeavor in the decades after ratification. As heads of households during the Depression, men were expected to fill scarce job openings, both in and out of politics. Journalist Norman Cousins noted that the number of working women in the country equaled the number of unemployed. "Simply fire the women, who shouldn't be working anyway, and hire the men. Presto! No unemployment. No relief rolls. No Depression."

In the 1940s, women were urged to work in defense plants instead of roaming capitol hallways. In the '50s, popular culture suggested that women belonged at home using modern kitchen conveniences and taking care of the children. In fact, in the 56 years after that historic California election in 1918, only 10 other women won legislative campaigns — none in the State Senate. And after Florence Kahn left the

House in the mid-1930s, the state sent only three additional women to Congress before the 1980s.

### Kickstarting the Modern Environmental Movement

Despite their long absence from elective office, many women achieved remarkable influence outside formal political structures, particularly in grassroots environmental activism. It was a legacy of that first wave of feminism, which had culminated in winning the battle for suffrage. Clubwomen had adopted conservation as a natural extension of their traditional roles as caretakers of their homes and families. They pressured lawmakers to save large swaths of ancient redwoods from being turned into lumber and fought to secure protections for bird species.

Similarly, in the early 1960s, shortly before the second wave of feminism took hold, women fought more modern environmental battles against over-development and air pollution. When Sylvia McLaughlin, Kay Kerr, and Esther Gulick read about the city of Berkeley's plan to fill in 2,000 acres of San Francisco Bay, they were incensed. Other cities also were intent on developing the bay for subdivisions, shopping malls, factories, and airports. The women, wives of prominent University of California figures, beseeched existing male-led national environmental groups to take up the cause but were politely rebuffed. "They said the bay is being filled, but we're saving the redwoods and saving the Sierra," McLaughlin told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "They filed out and wished us luck."

The women then took it upon themselves to pressure state and local governments to preserve the bay's future. Over cookies and coffee in their kitchens, they created Save the Bay, a campaign to prevent further bay fill. They consulted scientists and learned everything they could about the bay's fragile ecosystem. The women built a coalition of supporters and attracted news coverage and prominent endorsements and in 1963, Berkeley backed off its bay-fill plan.

Since other cities and businesses still sought to fill the bay, the women lobbied for comprehensive state oversight of bay development. Save the Bay ratcheted up its grassroots efforts and organized busloads of activists to lobby politicians in Sacramento. The result was creation in 1969 of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), which became a model for regional planning and motivated local activists throughout the Bay Area to create grassroots campaigns to stop the bulldozers and preserve open space. In subsequent years, Save the Bay broadened its efforts to include wetlands restoration, pollution reduction, and science and nature education.

Ardent environmental activist Ellen Stern Harris of

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Beverly Hills recalled that as the fight over development was being waged in the Bay Area, she was driving along Highway 1 through Malibu one day with her family. Peering out the car window, her young son could only see long stretches of fancy beachfront homes. “Where’s the water?” he asked. That innocent question launched the drive to restrict development along California’s coastline. Known as the mother of the state’s Coastal

Conservation Act of 1972, which she co-wrote, Harris said she was inspired by the Bay Area women to push for a statewide regulatory authority.

Meanwhile, Marge Levee had helped launch a grassroots campaign in the late ’50s to lessen the scourge of Southern California smog. Smog alerts had become frequent and severe, not surprising given the city’s rapid growth, automobile culture, and infamous inversion layer that trapped the smog close to the ground.

Levee had rushed her two-year-old daughter to the hospital after a severe asthma attack, and doctors recommended she move out of the Los Angeles area. “I decided instead to stay and do something about air pollution,” she said, joining eight of her friends to form Stamp Out Smog, or SOS.

The women learned about catalytic converters and other smog-abatement technology. They met with mayors and held colorful protests, parading their children wearing gas masks. From nine determined women, SOS eventually attracted more than 400 groups as coalition partners, representing tens of thousands of concerned citizens.

The women of SOS pushed for a coordinated state response to the smog crisis and a mandate that vehicles in California be equipped with exhaust-reduction devices. They activated phone trees and chain letters — the social media of the day — and packed Capitol hearings with advocates, helping to secure passage of the nation’s first statewide air pollution control legislation. The resulting California Motor Vehicle Control

Act in 1960 created a board to regulate tailpipe emissions. That board — which included scientists, academics, auto

experts, public health officers, and Marge Levee — developed the nation’s first vehicle emissions standards.

At a PTA meeting, one mother had asked SOS president Afton Slade, “Sure, air pollution is bad, but what can a bunch of women do about it?” The women of Stamp Out Smog would

go on to provide an emphatic answer: their major role in the passage of 150 pieces of state and local anti-pollution legislation.

### Breaking More Political Barriers

Whereas the first wave of feminist activism had focused primarily on voting rights, the second wave — in the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s — addressed broad issues of equality, discrimination, and justice, and new opportunities enabled more women to work for change from within the political system.

The U.S. Supreme Court in the mid-60s forced the rural-dominated California Senate to re-draw its districts based on population, and many entrenched urban Assemblymen sought greener pastures in the Senate. They were succeeded by a new breed of trailblazing female legislators who aggressively fought for social causes, such as women’s rights, consumer affairs, and civil rights.

Yvonne Brathwaite of Los Angeles, the first African-American woman elected to the legislature, was joined in 1967 by Oakland’s March Fong, the legislature’s first Asian-American woman. Fong conducted a memorable five-year fight for gender equality by successfully sponsoring legislation to ban pay toilets in public buildings, arguing that urinals for the men were free. Fong, who years later became March Fong Eu after she married businessman Henry Eu, attracted international media attention by smashing a porcelain toilet bowl on the steps of the Capitol. A member of her local



Save the Bay founders Esther Gulick, Sylvia McLaughlin, and Kay Kerr.

photo courtesy Save the Bay

## After Suffrage (from page 5)

League of Women Voters, she later served nearly 20 years as Secretary of State, expanding voter outreach, ballot access, and election reform — three chief League priorities.

In subsequent years, term limits for statewide and legislative office holders would force veteran, mostly male lawmakers out of office, opening more doors for women seeking political careers. Further, women finally had a highly visible role model in Dianne Feinstein. Perhaps inspired by her 1990 breakthrough as the state's first female major-party nominee for governor, a record number of California women ran for seats in the legislature and Congress two years later in what the media dubbed the "Year of the Woman." Feinstein, of course, would join Barbara Boxer, then Kamala Harris, to give California 27 consecutive years of two-woman representation in the U.S. Senate.

Still, California is one of only 20 states that has never elected a female governor, and women comprise less than one-third of the 120-member legislature, despite holding a record 38 seats. State Senator Toni Atkins, the only woman to lead both the Senate and Assembly, has a theory about why so few women have held positions of electoral power. "Much more than

men," she said in an interview for *Paving the Way: Women's Struggle for Political Equality in California*, "women tend to

hesitate when opportunities arise. We think about all the juggling acts with career and family ... and too often we wait for a sign, or permission that it's okay to go for it."

Women's organizations are changing the paradigm by training activists how to apply for state and local political appointments. Women also are being taught the building blocks of electoral politics — how to assemble a record of community achievement, organize a campaign, raise funds, gather endorsements,

and build coalitions. In cities throughout California, scores of women now serve as mayors, including in two of the state's most populous cities, San Francisco (London Breed) and Oakland (Libby Schaaf). More than a century after the *Los Angeles Times* characterized women in politics as an "experiment," it's clear that today's women leaders are prepared to write the next chapter in the long struggle for gender parity in self-governance. 

*Susie Swatt and Steve Swatt are coauthors of Paving the Way: Women's Struggle for Political Equality in California, published by Berkeley Public Policy Press.*



Assemblymember March Fong smashes a toilet on the steps of the State Capitol to protest pay toilets in 1969. photo by Walter Zeboski, Associated Press



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### Redwood Regional Park Renamed in Honor of Dr. Aurelia Henry Reinhardt — First Female Park District Board Member

Coinciding with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's right to vote, the East Bay Regional Park District is renaming Redwood Regional Park — Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park — after Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt, a suffragist and one of the Park District's first board members — and only woman — elected to the newly-founded Park District in 1934.

# Empowering Women in the Bay Area for Decades

By Leslie Stewart

When women won the vote in 1920, the two primary goals of the newly formed League of Women Voters were to make sure that women had the opportunity to cast an informed vote, and that they would use their new voices to amplify the messages that were most important to them.

“Your vote is your voice” has been a useful slogan in advancing this effort over the years, conveying both the power of electoral participation and the need to wield it carefully — a voice can say both wise and foolish things, simply parrot another voice, or contradict other voices.

In 1960, local Leagues in the Bay Area found that they needed a unified voice, particularly for dealing with regional agencies such as the newly formed Association of Bay Area Governments. They created a coordinating committee, which became an official “inter-League organization” called the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area in 1967.

“The League does its homework” has been quoted proudly for decades by League members, and the launch of the Bay Area League is an apt example in support of this claim. League members set out to learn about regional and sub-regional agencies and government bodies, producing an annual publication called *Bay Area Decision Makers*. This directory listed multi-county and regional agencies with information about their mission, budget, and board members; the directory served as a tool to empower both League members and the public concerned with regional government. It was published biennially until much of the information became available on the internet in the early 2000s.

In 1970, as the Association of Bay Area Governments produced the first comprehensive regional plan, LWVBA members created teachers’ packets on the plan in addition to study and consensus materials for member discussions. A description of regional governmental structure titled *Know Your Bay Area* was published in 1974. This evolved into a KQED television program, teacher workshops, and citizen education workshops.

Also in the early 1970s, LWVBA received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to carry out citizen education on the relationship between transportation and

air quality, and the need for more public transit to meet new clean air standards. Given the California love affair with cars, this was going to be a hard sell. Starting with a filmstrip and script, enthusiastic members appeared at every community group and public body where they could wrangle an invitation; they soon moved to a slide show and trained speakers as they refined the message.

The project grew into a newsletter reporting on transportation and land use decisions around the Bay Area related to the progress toward clean air. A growing network of League members attended government meetings and

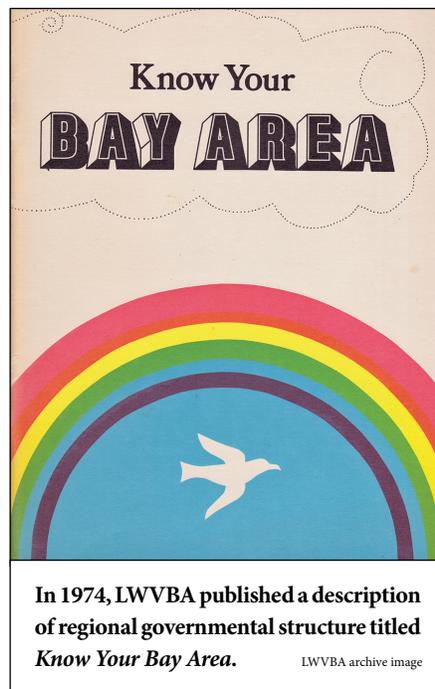
sent in notes, learning more about their local boards and commissions in the process. In 1975, the newsletter became the *Bay Area Monitor*. For 45 years, it has been the LWVBA’s premier tool for educating and empowering the public to participate in government decisions.

As League members were educating themselves and the public about regional government, transportation, and air quality, they were also educating and lobbying public officials. Many times, League members were the elected officials. Elected school boards were already seen as natural fits for women, but League members around the region used their knowledge of government gained from League studies and advocacy to win spots on city councils and county boards, and were appointed

and elected to regional boards as well.

Mary Ellen Calfee, who served on the East Bay Regional Park District board of directors in 1964, was the second woman and first member of the League on that board; she was followed by many others. League member Helen Burke was elected to the East Bay Municipal Utility District board in 1974, becoming “the first woman and died-in-the-wool environmentalist ever to sit on the governing board,” as the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote in 1978.

Attitudes toward women in these public roles were noticeably changing, although Dorothy Duffy, second LWVBA president in 1962-64, was still “Mrs. Ward Duffy” when listed as chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Bay Conservation and Development Commission in the



## Empowering Women in the Bay Area for Decades (from page 7)

1979 *Decision Makers*. Janet Gray Hayes, president of LWV San Jose and then of LWVBA from 1966-68, was elected in 1974 as the first woman mayor of San Jose, becoming the first woman mayor of a city larger than 500,000 in the U.S.

Women running for office turned to women voters for support. Barbara Boxer, elected as Marin County's first woman supervisor in 1972, was appointed to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District board; as board chair she was a vocal advocate in Sacramento for a pioneering smog inspection program strongly supported by the League statewide. In her biography, Boxer has talked about how she was stunned by the sexism in her first campaign, not just from voters but from other candidates. She won her first Congressional race with 43 percent of the male voters, but 57 percent of the women. "She faced a lot of adversity from people who didn't treat her the way they would treat a man," according to a long-time aide, Sam Chapman, quoted on her archived House of Representatives profile page.

Boxer was not a League member, but in Contra Costa, Sunne Wright McPeak ran her first campaign for county supervisor in 1979 with a group of women she had met in the League. Her opponent told a radio interviewer, "I don't know who is going to take care of her children if she wins." After beating him to become the second-ever Contra Costa woman supervisor, she

was a major force in the campaign to defeat the Peripheral Canal and later served as Secretary of the California Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency.

Many other Bay Area women educated themselves with the League and used that background as a springboard into politics. In addition to numerous city councilmembers and county supervisors, a few at the regional level have been: Jean Auer, Hillsborough councilmember who served on the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board and the State Water Resources Control Board; Katy Foulkes, Piedmont city councilmember and East Bay Municipal Utility District board member; Sue Lempert, president of her local League in 1967, City of San Mateo councilmember, and longtime member of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission; and Delaine Eastin, Union City councilmember, member of the

Association of Bay Area Governments board, and eventual State Superintendent of Education.

In recent decades, there has been less need for the League as an incubator for women planning to run for office. More women moved into the workforce, adding to their resumes but leaving less time for volunteer organizations. However, League members have continued to volunteer as watchdogs for councils, boards, and commissions; to sit on non-elected bodies and represent communities as stakeholders and "good government" representatives; and to advocate for issues to elected bodies, using their knowledge to educate League members and government representatives.

Regionwide studies by Bay Area League members have produced informative publications on transportation hubs, LAFCO commissions, and regional planning. For many years the League has also held an annual Bay Area League Day conference on a timely regional issue. Meanwhile, the *Bay Area Monitor* has expanded coverage, looking at open space, water, and housing, and has moved from a tight focus on government plans and meetings to more comprehensive coverage of some of the topics associated with policy decisions by regional agencies. The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area continues on its dual mission to educate and empower the residents of the region. 



Janet Gray Hayes speaks at the 1981 League of Women Voters of California convention in San Jose. photo courtesy the League of Women Voters of California



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Leslie Stewart covers air quality and energy for the Monitor.

# Gaining Momentum: Women in the Driver's Seat

By Cecily O'Connor

The first conference focusing on women's issues in transportation was held in 1978, a Department of Transportation-sponsored research gathering that drew criticism before it even began. After initial conference announcements were circulated, DOT was considered for the "golden fleece" award, a dubious distinction handed out by Senator William Proxmire to public agencies seen as wasteful spenders. Later, *Newsweek's* George Will penned a column decrying the conference, concluding that "if every government department feels entitled or obligated to shape policies to redress whatever 'inequities' it discerns, then government is becoming frantic." Organizers received hate mail and other forms of pushback, according to Sandra Rosenbloom, who served on the steering committee for the event.

It took another 18 years, but a second conference commenced in the mid-'90s, when social attitudes proved more welcoming to the idea that the event was necessary. More conferences followed, and last year, at the sixth iteration — the 2019 International Conference on Women's Issues in Transportation, or WiT — close to 245 people attended. This number was more than double the size of previous gatherings, said Rosenbloom, who has stayed on the steering committee to this day.

"It's 180 degrees," she said, "but it took most of the 40 years for that to happen. It didn't happen overnight."

Rosenbloom, who works as a professor of community and regional planning at the University of Texas at Austin, said she believes the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and assault is a new factor that contributed to recent interest amid increased conversations about the effect of these issues on society at large.

"I raised money for all [the conferences] and it wasn't easy until this one," she said.

## Useful Perspective

For Rosenbloom and other professionals running the conference, the event is not only a celebration of progress made since the '70s but also a reminder of work that still needs to be done. Several ongoing needs were repeatedly highlighted by transportation professionals and academics the *Bay Area Monitor* interviewed.

They'd like to see more planning and policy that recognizes women's different travel patterns, commute demands, and personal safety concerns when using public transit. It's also important to advance education and female leadership opportunities in the transportation field. And in many ways, all of these needs are linked.

"Transportation fields have not traditionally had a lot of



**The 6th International Conference on Women's Issues in Transportation was held in 2019 for three days in Irvine, where Eileen Ryder addressed a reception she helped organize.**  
photo courtesy the Transportation Research Board

women in them and decisionmakers have been denied a very useful perspective," Rosenbloom said.

While the field remains male-heavy, women are moving up in the ranks. They made up 14.6 percent of the transportation workforce as of 2017, according to research from the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI). The Bay Area chapter of Women's Transportation Seminar, a group focused on bringing more women into the field, has seen a greater number of female employees holding managerial positions, based on its most recent survey. Also important are concurrent degree programs from schools such as UC Berkeley that provide access to students wishing to earn concurrent degrees in transportation engineering and city planning.

"Women are interested in things that are technical," said Carmen Clark, a former Bay Area transportation executive. "We don't buy the stereotype anymore."

## Shaping Policy and Perceptions

History offers a guide to perceptions about female travel. Looking back 100 years ago, a woman's ability to ride a bike or independently drive a car was viewed as a tool for emancipation and promotion. In fact, journalist Emily Post ignored male dissuasions and in 1915 followed through on her plan to drive across the country from New York to San Francisco to determine whether it was possible to do so comfortably. She wrote about the experience in the book *By Motor to the Golden Gate*.

Women also were breaking stereotypes in the 1920s by participating in auto racing or piloting planes, said Dr. Martin Wachs, professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering and of city and regional planning at UC Berkeley.

## Gaining Momentum: Women in the Driver's Seat (from page 9)

“Transportation has always been a venue, a setting for upward mobility and women were among those who noticed it,” he said.

Concern for urban space also contributed to political activism, with women like Sue Bierman, a former San Francisco supervisor, leading efforts in the 1950s and '60s to stop freeway expansion into the Golden Gate Park panhandle.

Interviewees also mentioned several transportation field “firsts” in which women broke barriers at the state and local level. Adriana Gianturco was director of Caltrans from 1976 to 1983 and the first woman to serve in that role, encouraging the state to focus on mass transit. Sharon Banks was the first African-American and the first woman to lead AC Transit as general manager during the '90s.

Banks “was the model transit executive,” Wachs said. “She knew the drivers by first name, worried about the riders, as well as making sure the buses were clean and on time. She humanized the offering of transit service in a large part of the Bay Area.”

Banks died in 1999 after suffering two strokes during her tenure. Her husband later sued AC Transit in federal court for racial and gender discrimination against her, according to a 2008 *East Bay Express* article.

### Travel Patterns

Women have played an important role in how we travel by leading, shaping, and influencing policy. Paying attention to transportation issues faced by women continues to be the challenge before today's policymakers.

Most transportation research about women — regardless of whether they work full-time — generally examines their travel as it relates to linked or chained trips between home, daycare, work, and other essential stops to fulfill household or caregiving responsibilities. (Certainly, despite what researchers usually focus on, gender roles cannot be so easily pinned down.)

The flexibility necessary to complete multiple trips often means women (and men) opt for cars instead of riding a bike or using public transit. Yet it all runs counter to policy goals aimed at reducing traffic congestion and car-produced emissions.

But household responsibilities, in part, explain why some women tend to bike less than men, a preference that can surface when they're teenagers, said Susan Handy, director of the Sustainable Transportation Center at UC Davis. That's because some women don't feel safe riding in traffic or just

simply don't like biking, which is “unfortunate” because there are many health and environmental benefits, Handy said.

“But it's not as simple as giving them an electric-assist cargo bike because the attitudinal part starts earlier in terms of women not seeking biking as something they want to do.”

The decision to hop on transit is also driven by convenience factors. Even as women's participation in the labor force grows — they accounted for one-third of the total labor force in 1950 compared to 46.8 percent in 2015 — transportation data collection methods and subsequent modeling often fail to capture their linked-trip behavior.

When transit services set schedules around commuters, they do so to the detriment of women and caregivers shopping or taking elderly relatives to appointments during off-peak hours, said Asha Weinstein Agrawal, MTT's director of education and a WIIIT 2019 steering committee co-chair.

When operators are “not paying more attention to non-commute travel needs it impacts women far more than men,” Agrawal said.

### Policies to Protect

Also impeding the use of transit are worries about personal security when it comes to riding public transit or waiting at stops, particularly at night. While these are not necessarily new concerns, they're now occurring in the context of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. Los Angeles Metro released a report last fall that found women generally felt less safe on public transit compared to men. About one-quarter of women bus riders and one-third of women rail riders reported they experienced sexual harassment, based on a 2018 spring survey.

Separately, a study published in the *Journal of Transport & Health* in June explained that crowd reduction, bystander intervention, and women-only carriages are among the potential approaches to make public transit safer for people of all genders. The study was based on surveys and interviews with transit users on transit systems in Colombia and Bolivia, serving as a reminder about the risks at hand.

“One thing I think we often miss, including sometimes as researchers, is that both isolated and crowded environments pose risks for women,” said Gwen Kash, author of the study and postdoctoral fellow at Georgia Institute of Technology's School of Civil and Environmental Engineering. “We need policies to protect women at isolated bus stops at midnight and crowded subway cars at 5 p.m.”



Adriana Gianturco

photo courtesy Caltrans

BART took a step in this direction recently. It's starting an "ambassador program," a six-month pilot in which teams of BART police employees will ride evening commute trains to help deter crime and inappropriate behavior.

### Moving Their Way Up

It's important to note that personal safety considerations can affect all genders. Not only is there more research that explores these viewpoints, but there also are more women sitting at transportation management tables to consider them.

In the Bay Area, there are many examples of women holding key management positions, including Therese McMillan, a WIIIT 2019 steering committee co-chair who became executive director of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission last year. There's also Kate Miller, executive director of the Napa Valley Transportation Authority since 2012, and Tess Lengyel, who was promoted to executive director of the Alameda County Transportation

Commission last fall.

"Once in the position, I think it's a matter of opinion as to whether it makes a difference in terms of policy orientation," said Grace Crunican, who retired as BART's general manager last year and co-authored the 2015 book *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom*.

"Just like men, all women aren't alike. Some are more inclined to worry about people, or the bottom line of money, or safety. Where women stand on those issues does differ."

Above all, Crunican emphasized the ongoing need to prioritize opportunities that help women advance in the field. For her part, she helped launch the BART Leadership Academy a few years ago aimed at preparing mid-level managers for future leadership positions at transit providers.

"We need to systematically make sure women are moving their way up," she said. 

*Cecily O'Connor covers transportation for the Monitor.*

## Newsha Ajami Solves the Water Equation with Public Participation

By Robin Meadows

As a little girl in Iran, Stanford water researcher Newsha Ajami always knew she could achieve whatever she wanted. "I was raised as a gender-blind child," she recalled. "I was taught that I could beat anybody at anything." Her love of math, boundless curiosity, and passion to make a difference have taken her far beyond what she ever imagined while growing up.

Today, Ajami lives in the Bay Area and is dedicated to safeguarding our water. Her roles include directing the Urban Water Policy team at Stanford's Water in the West program and serving on the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. But she began her career in civil engineering at Tehran Polytechnic in 1993, where most of her studies were on the structural side. "I got into the world of water quite accidentally," she said. "I was looking for an internship and got one focusing on reservoir management." She's been hooked on the ins and outs of delivering water to people ever since.

Back then, she was particularly drawn to the twin challenges of using engineering to manage water scarcity, and of

managing rivers and other waterways. These interests led her to the University of Arizona in Tucson in the year 2000, where she earned a master's degree in hydrology — the science of how water is distributed and moves in nature — and water management. There, she worked on forecasting the water supply.

"I wanted to understand how accurate we are at estimating hydrological processes," Ajami said, explaining that inaccuracies can put users like farmers in a bind. "If you're uncertain about the amount of rain or snow you're going to get, farmers will be uncertain about how much they can use." She continued her forecasting work at UC Irvine beginning in 2003, ultimately

earning a Ph.D. in civil and environmental engineering.

Then Ajami's trajectory took another surprising turn, sparked by a class she'd taken at the University of Arizona on water policy. "I was just fascinated with all the laws that go into management and that sometimes don't make a lot of sense," she said. "It was wild from an engineer's perspective — it's not necessarily logical." For example, instead of allocating



Newsha Ajami photo courtesy Stanford University

## Newsha Ajami Solves the Water Equation (from page 11)

water equally amongst users, we divvy it up according to when the land was settled. People on lands that were settled first have seniority when it comes to water rights.

In 2010, Ajami delved into her interest in policy as a Science and Technology fellow at the California State Senate's Natural Resources and Water Committee. The legislature was another new world for Ajami. "It's all about relationships and priorities at a given time," she said. "There's nothing rational you can model, it's very different from math."

The experience transformed her work. "It was one of the defining moments of my life," Ajami said. "If you want to make an impact, you have to inform decision-making — I came out of the fellowship truly inspired."

Since then, Ajami has channeled that inspiration into identifying ways to boost water conservation. At Stanford's Water in the West program, she leads research on innovative — that is, non-traditional — financing that encourages users to consume less water. One example is to set up formal trading mechanisms, allowing people who conserve water to sell their unused portion. "The goal is to enable water use reduction, which leaves more in the system for others," she explained.

The idea sprang from her fellowship with the state legislature. "We worked on innovative financing in energy and climate change," Ajami said. "I thought, why don't we do this in the water sector?" Her work was at the forefront of this movement and has informed policy. Notably, she analyzed an effort to establish a public goods charge — a small fee in utility bills that funds related public-interest programs — in the energy sector. "I looked at lessons learned and pitfalls to learn how to implement it successfully in the

water sector," she explained. "It ended up getting picked up by the legislature," she said, referring to a presentation of her findings that she made to the California State Senate's Natural Resources and Water Committee in 2016.

Ajami also wants to use data on water use to change the way we approach water conservation as a society. "In resource consumption, people are always looked at just as consumers, not as participants," she said. "I want to understand the human role — what people do and how they think — and include it in engineering estimates. We're trying to use big data to better understand how human behavior impacts water."

Putting people in the equation can help water managers make better decisions. For example, Ajami's team used data from smart meters to track patterns of landscape irrigation by businesses and multi-family homes during our recent extreme drought. Some irrigated with drinking water and so were limited by state conservation mandates, while others irrigated with recycled water and so had no restrictions on use. But it turned out that both groups conserved. "You need to focus on demand, not just supply all the time," Ajami says. "Even those using recycled water cut back, so providing that supply was not a good investment."

Ajami became even more involved with water policy in 2013, when then-governor Jerry Brown appointed her to the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. This experience has deepened her insights into our water supply even further. "Before, I thought water conservation and efficiency were the most important," she said. "Today I think resource protection is the most important. If you don't protect the quality, you don't have [usable] water — I never realized how fundamental water quality is until then."

For all the challenges we face in protecting the quantity and quality of our water supply, Ajami is an optimist: "I think we can definitely work through them all." That said, she cautions that it will take more than technological fixes. "Technology is very important but I don't think it's going to be a silver bullet," she said. "Water is a limited resource, and it's all about public awareness and knowledge to make people part of the solution, rather than only the consumer of what we're giving them."

Many people don't think about water because it's cheap, available, and never runs out, she explained. But a study she led during the recent drought linked news coverage with water conservation even before the governor imposed mandatory restrictions. "If people know, they do respond," she said. 

*Robin Meadows covers water for the Monitor.*



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# Whose Space? Our Space! Voicing Democracy on the Public Commons

By Aleta George

The civic open space that surrounds the State Capitol in Sacramento has benches for rest, a rose garden for inspiration, and mature trees for shade. On a typical day at Capitol Park you're likely to see retired folks relaxing, students on tour, and employees scurrying to work with coffee.

Capitol Park at other times is transformed into a place for citizens to exercise their First Amendment rights. The Constitutional right of American citizens to peaceably assemble and communicate with their government that started with our nation's founding has become a tradition, and for over 200 years citizens and activists have assembled to carry out that right. A recent example of people gathering at the Capitol, in the Bay Area, and across America occurred on January 18 as part of the fourth annual Women's March, with many of the affiliated events taking place in civic open spaces.

"Public space, by its very nature and construct, is the neutral common ground that we the people own and fund collectively," said Nidhi Gulati at Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit that creates community-based public places. "It's the most rightful place for us to occupy as members of a civil society to express our opinions."

When "we the people" want to communicate with those who are working for us inside government buildings, civic open spaces have the least amount of hindrances, said Gulati. "Opportunity for gathering in and around public buildings should be an absolute necessity," she said.

In today's culture, cars, car-centric cities, and ubiquitous electronic devices tend to isolate us from one another. "The public realm is where you see 'the other,'" said Gulati. "Even smaller interactions with someone who might be sitting on a park bench makes it possible for you to see someone who might come from a totally different walk of life than your own. That is the power of the public space. How do we expect people to know each other, stand for a community, and understand our differences if we never see them? Public

space creates opportunities for us to see our fellow citizens and form common concerns and common values before we can even think about communicating with our government."

Several civic open spaces in the Bay Area carry the weight of history: Sproul Plaza at UC Berkeley is known as the incubator of the Free Speech Movement, and San Francisco's

Civic Center Plaza has seen tens of thousands of people rally for any number of causes, including civil and LGBTQ rights. "[Civic Center Plaza's] history of protest participation contributes to the power of the rally. I also love the backdrop of City Hall and what it represents for San Francisco as a mecca for change and radical vision," said Elizabeth Lanyon, advisor and city liaison for Women's March San Francisco.

Other civic open spaces are not as well-known, but serve people just as well. Women's March Contra Costa rallied at Civic Park in Walnut Creek with the theme "Voting Is Our Super Power." Women's March Santa Rosa rallied at the Old Courthouse Square, and Women's March Oakland descended upon Frank Ogawa Plaza to promote participation in the 2020 Census with the theme "Oakland Counts."

In addition to open spaces, public engagement also happens in government board rooms, voting booths, the opinion pages of newspapers, and on social media — but there's something special about a communal demonstration, as I learned speaking with people at a rally for political accountability at Capitol Park in December. Attendee Michelle Cadenhead said that her co-workers don't talk politics, and that being there made her "feel validated and hopeful." Jessica Gadow said, "Staying home encourages fear. Without coming out and doing these things, nothing is going to change. This is love to me." Kaitlin Walker, who attended with Rob Cunningham and their two children, said, "We want to show our kids that we're doing the work," adding, "There's so much energy making signs and getting



Members of the League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley turned out in Walnut Creek's Civic Park to demonstrate, celebrate, and register voters during the fourth annual Women's March on January 18, 2020.

photo by  
Maxine Arton

# Whose Space? Our Space! (from page 13)



Women's March Contra Costa in Walnut Creek was one of many such events held across the nation on January 18, 2020.

photo by Aleta George

ready. You don't have that kind of energy when you're home on Facebook crying."

Also, a board room, voting booth, and assorted media can have inherent barriers, said Project for Public Spaces' Gulati. Not everyone has electronic devices, for example, and some people — like Gulati, who is from India — work and live here but don't have access to the voting booth because they aren't citizens. "A system that doesn't provide other opportunities that are more accessible for people to exercise their human right is exclusionary," she said, adding that providing such access "is what the public realm is for."

Holding an event at a civic open space provides

opportunities for more people to participate. "Downtown Oakland has a number of people who are hard to count or undercounted," said Alisha Woo, co-director of Women's March Oakland. She emphasized the importance of holding the event in an accessible location, given that the surrounding area has "lots of communities who may not be fully represented or fully served."

Visuals during a civic open space rally are an important part of communicating a message. First and foremost are the people. "Thousands of people holding space in public together in cities at the same time across the country is impactful. It's important to let elected officials know that we're paying attention together as a country," said San Francisco's Lanyon.

Other visuals are planned for impact. Women's March Contra Costa featured women dressed as suffragists, which recognized the centennial of a women's right to vote. San Francisco has turned the lights of City Hall pink after every Women's March. "It is a powerful symbol of how completely the march, and all we stand for, have been embraced by our city," said Martha Shaughnessy, a founding member of Women's March San Francisco. The logo for Women's March Oakland this year was an oak tree drawn with one line to show that everybody is connected.

What are the common features of a vibrant and safe civic open space that serves the greatest number of people without hindrances? Gulati says that geographic location, centrality, and transportation are vital components. Can most people get there easily? Is public transportation available? Can a mother safely push a stroller to the location without crossing

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an eight-lane street or highway? “When you’re gathering in large crowds, how easily you can get out of the place is equally important,” said Gulati.

Another way to communicate that your event is safe for everybody, said Woo, is reflected in your accessibility, who is scheduled to speak, who the co-hosts are, who you partner with, and if the event is family-friendly.

Joining a rally at a civic open space is a powerful way to be involved in the civic process, said Woo. “There’s been a marked decrease in the quantity and quality of civic education and in general participation in the civic process. I’m talking about serving on a jury or working a polling booth. That’s something that you do in person as part of the government process. Being at a rally is a similar type of thing. It is an in-person, moving, powerful, in-community civic experience. Especially with the increased secularization of American lives, a lot of folks are looking for that.”

“A rally is an important way to inspire people to take action. People change their trajectory once inspired,” said Scarlett Bustos, lead coordinator of Women’s March Sacramento.

Women’s March events around the Bay Area kicked off a busy election and census year that calls for civic participation, whatever your beliefs. Woo and the other planners hope the marches will help to kickstart enthusiasm and action. “A lot of folks think of political and civic participation as boring, uninteresting, or as a duty. There’s a lot of negative emotions associated with it. While it can be painful and frustrating and challenging, I also hope that we can inject back a little bit of joy and positive feelings

of community. I hope that the event we put on in Oakland helped to make that happen,” she said. 

*Aleta George covers open space for the Monitor.*



Attendees of this year's Women's March Oakland gathered in Frank Ogawa Plaza.

photo by Alec MacDonald

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