

The Junior League of Phoenix

Celebrating 75 Years of Community Impact

by Cathy Planchard

More than a century ago, the Junior League was formed by a 19-year-old New York City debutante who was inspired to action by the suffering she saw around her. Mobilizing a group of 80 other young women—hence the name “Junior” League—she put the power of trained volunteers to work, improving the squalid conditions in which immigrants in the area were living.

In 1935, when the Junior League of Phoenix (JLP) officially began, the need for trained, energetic volunteers was no less important. At the time, the U.S. was in the middle of the Great Depression and Adolf Hitler had rejected the Versailles Treaty. But in the midst of this turmoil, Hazel Pentecost Armstrong was directing the Phoenix League to begin a Children’s Theater project and radio performance for underprivileged children—a project that persisted for 30 years.

“This year marks our 75th anniversary of service,” says current JLP President Marion Rhoades. “Yet, we remain true to our original vision of being a catalyst for change through trained volunteers. Sometimes you’ll find us out front, leading the charge and advocating for change, while there are numerous other times when we’re behind the scenes, mobilizing volunteers, fundraising and steering projects.”

Take, for example the Orpheum Theatre in Downtown Phoenix. After the city purchased the theatre, the JLP helped to have it designated as a historic site, and mounted a successful campaign to pass a bond issue providing \$7 million for



As the first major supporter, JLP has provided volunteers and funding since 2001 for the Children’s Museum of Phoenix and will focus on providing early childhood education programming in The Junior League of Phoenix Classroom



Ryan Cotter, the inspiration behind Ryan House



JLP members with Ryan Cotter, the inspiration behind the area’s first freestanding palliative care center.



Two JLP members began a feasibility study for Ronald McDonald House of Phoenix, and helped bring the project to fruition four years later.



JLP members who lost their friend to breast cancer brought the annual Race for the Cure to the Valley.

restoration. The JLP also organized and incorporated the Orpheum Theatre Foundation to raise the additional \$4 million in private sector funds necessary to complete the project. Similarly, in 1965, when the beauty of Camelback Mountain was threatened, the JLP donated money and advocated for the Save Camelback Mountain Foundation. Today, the Orpheum Theater and Camelback Mountain stand as Phoenix landmarks.

MEDICAL INVOLVEMENT

The JLP's influence can also be seen in major health initiatives in the community. When three JLP members lost a close friend to breast cancer, they sprung into action. Partnering with Banner Good Samaritan Hospital, the JLP brought the Race for the Cure to the Valley. The inaugural race in 1993 drew 1,500 participants and raised \$65,000. In contrast, last year's race raised a record \$2 million and drew thousands of survivors and supporters to raise funds and honor those who have lost their battle with

breast cancer. Since then, league members have served on the organization's board of directors as race chairs, and as its executive director.

For Kathy Anderson, her experience with the JLP began when her three year old daughter, Emily, was diagnosed with one of the rarest forms of adult leukemia. Feeling helpless, she quickly found that any information about the disease was either out of date or written in a medical journal. The JLP became aware of the need for a family resource center through Emily's aunt, JoEllen Feltham. League members quickly mobilized, helping to develop the center's budget, volunteer program, marketing plan, and fundraising, resulting in the opening of the Emily Center within Phoenix Children's Hospital in 1990. Since that time, the Emily Center has helped more than 300,000 families and provided access to thousands of books, videos, medical articles and resources, including the region's largest Spanish collection.

Assisting families with seriously ill children has been an area in which the JLP has been

consistently involved since its inception. After conducting a feasibility study in 1980, two JLP members recognized a need for a local Ronald McDonald House and helped bring it to fruition four years later. Serving as a founding community partner of the Ryan House, the JLP has contributed over \$150,000 and countless volunteer hours to this palliative care house that will provide support for families of children with life-limiting conditions. Other JLP health initiatives include the Cystic Fibrosis Treatment Center at Good Samaritan Hospital, and the Cerebral Palsy Treatment Center and Dental Care Unit at St. Joe's hospital.

CHANGING TIMES, UNWAVERING VALUES

With nearly half of all Arizona children entering kindergarten lacking the essential skills to succeed, the JLP has focused its current efforts on early childhood development. Research indicates that children that participate in early childhood programs are more likely to



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complete school and less likely to require welfare benefits, become teen parents or partake in criminal activities. JLP is already working to address these needs with two programs that increase use of curriculum programming for literacy, as well as three programs that increase parental involvement, improve at-home reading and raise community awareness.

"Times have changed and so have the demographics of our membership, but the women of The Junior League of Phoenix still embrace the same values as that group of women in 1935," says Rhoades. "We are a diverse group bound together by a love of our community and the desire to make a difference through voluntarism and dedication." pW

Cathy Planchard is in her 10th year of membership in The Junior League of Phoenix and is currently their Vice President of Communications. She has also served on the Children's Museum of Phoenix and Women Living Free committees.


INFOLINK: www.jlp.org




The Emily Center has helped more than 300,000 families and provided access to thousands of books, videos, medical articles, and resources.




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