

# Riverside Junior Woman's Charity: Organizational History

## The Beginning (1937 – 1950's)

On February 8, 1937, Lorraine Bender of Riverside turned the concept of a young woman's club into reality. Miss Bender and 35 other Riverside girlfriends met at the Bender's home. The majority of the women were graduates of R-B class of 1935. Since there had been a Riverside Woman's Club since 1913, Miss Bender and her friends sought and obtained full blessings from the senior women. Four of these senior women acted as sponsors and continued to guide them as mentors. Hence the Riverside Junior Woman's Club was born.

The first event was a Mother-Daughter Tea in April of 1937. The first fundraiser was early in the summer of 1938, which raised \$45 in profits. Shortly there after, the Juniors voted to invest in stationary and to print up a yearbook. Although the original plan was to only allow single women in the club, in 1938 the group voted to allow married women to join. They continued the tradition of requiring a sponsor to attain membership into the club.

In 1939 Juniors participated in the Village's 4th of July parade and won a \$5.00 prize. Also 1939 marked the year in which event of the War in Europe began creeping into American communities, and the Juniors began to support the war efforts by wrapping bandages for the local Red Cross.

As the war ensued, some members found themselves having to drop out of Juniors. The annual "Rush" or membership drive focused again upon R-B High School candidates. Patriotism was high among the Juniors as we began to sing the Star Spangled Banner at the beginning of each meeting. Many of the programs presented at the monthly meetings had to do with the war, such as "Civil Defense in Riverside", "Preparation for Possible War", etc. In 1944, through the purchase of war bonds, Juniors helped the Illinois Federation Women's Group, (of which they were a member), fund a \$300,000 bomber and Hell Cat fighter.

After the war, Juniors started heading back to being more of a social club and main events included the rushing tea, a rummage sale, the pot luck dinner, Thanksgiving Dance, Christmas party, bridge party, St. Pat's party, Halloween party, sleigh rides, and guest night. The First Honorary Member was recognized by Juniors in December 1946 as Miss Mildred Mancl for her outstanding leadership efforts. In 1947, definitions of "active, inactive, or honorary member" were added to the by-laws. The February 1949 meeting was the only Juniors' meeting to have been cancelled in its history. The cancellation was due to weather. Although the 40's was a hard decade for everyone, the Juniors had a membership of 64 women by the end of the decade.

The fifties brought new members as we expanded our territory to include women from Brookfield, North Riverside and Berwyn. Many of the activities continued to be social in

nature. The women began to dress for meetings in hats and gloves. Refreshments were served with silver and lace. Some of the programs that followed the meetings were "Health, Beauty & Cooking", "Chapeau Madness", "Above All" and "The Right Hat"! In March of 1954, we held our first fashion show, although there was blizzard weather we packed the venue with a full house. In 1959 we had our first Installation Dinner. Of course, Juniors in the 50's did much to aid the needy, and support the growth of the community. Among their many service activities, they baked cookies for the Scottish Home for Christmas, collected books to donate to mental hospitals, purchased a hospital bed for a polio victim, donated \$1,000 to the Riverside Youth Center, and helped to support the Brain Research Foundation.

### **RJWC Evolution (1960 – 1990s)**

Given the American political climate, the 60's brought about a decline in membership. During 1962 a change was made to the by-laws requiring the recording secretary to take roll at each meeting, members were appointed to serve on committees and board members could not serve on committees. We continued to have interesting programs such as "Moral Decay in America and Some of the Cures We need", "Air Defense Communications", and "Language of Communism", just to name a few. Our most dramatic change, however, was with the activities. Children's functions were introduced as we began to sponsor the Easter Egg Hunt in Swan Pond, a Children's Little Theater began and a Children's Christmas party was organized with visits from Santa. We continued to have our annual dance, but 1961 brought with it the most remembered event in Junior's history! The event was "Hawaiian Holiday" and featured seven Chicago Bears in Hula attire – grass skirts and all!! On a sad note, the dance of 1963 was not a gay occasion due to the dance coinciding with the funeral for President John F. Kennedy, but it was a full crowd who attended. Throughout the 60's we were very active in our philanthropic causes. In 1960 we participated in the Polio Mothers march, we manned Tuberculosis mobile units, the Choral Group performed at nursing homes and mental hospitals for the holidays, tickets to the Children's Little Theater productions were donated to area orphanages. We also set up reading programs at the Library and Hauser Jr. High School, gave babysitting courses to area girls and provided vision screening for preschoolers. Probably one of the most familiar results of the handiwork was the donation of the turtle for Turtle Park (Longcommon Park) in 1964-65.

(One of the members said "All this work in skirts!" and we haven't even gotten to the 70s yet!)

Once again we marked the beginning of a new decade with low membership, but we still persevered, and through hard work, dedication to the Federation and the community, and close bonds of friendship, we overcame the numbers setback. New activities included: a book club, a spelling bee for local schools, candlelight bowl, a tennis group, craft-o-rama, an art auction, the theater guild, 4th of July pizza booth and the dance evolved into Las Vegas night! The fashion show was still the main fundraiser, but did not take place every year. In 1970 the co-chair for the fashion show "Fortunes and Fashions" was our current Illinois State Treasurer, complete with a "beehive" hairdo – Judy Baar Topinka! No doubt Ms. Topinka got her fundraising start with the Riverside

Junior Woman's Club. Speaking of skirts, the 1970s marked the first time that slacks were allowed at our meetings. In 1971 we had our first ad book and in 1972 the first Honorary Junior was named, after 22 years of dedicated service to the club. This was, of course, Miss Jeanne Heidler, who incidentally, is still active in the club today! In 1978, Juniors introduced a community improvement project. Homes that were beautifully maintained in town, nominated and voted on by members were issued the "Beautiful Home Award". We donated trees to the village and its residents through the "Free Tree Program" which we funded by the sale of our Junior Cookbook. We continued support to many state programs and the general federation, but also helped locally. We donated funds for a new ambulance, ambulance equipment, fire fighting masks, relocating Vietnamese families, children's records for the library, an electric typewriter to a 15 year old boy with spinal muscular atrophy and a wood burning stove for the Boy Scouts cabin.

During 80's Juniors decided to drop our membership from the National Federation, as dues became increasingly expensive and a time consuming endeavor. In 1987, we experienced our largest fundraiser, at the time, and raised \$3,500. Our programs included a wide range of topics such as "How to Boost Your Self-Esteem", "Woman's Car Clinic", "Plastic Surgery: what it can and cannot do", and "Financial Investing".

The 90's continued along the same path with an increase in fundraising success. We continued to have the Fashion show as the major fundraiser, but brought in some new social activities like Gourmet Club, Easter Bunny Brunch, and the Christmas Ornament Sale.

### **The Current Years (2000 – Present Day)**

The year 2000 marked a new millennium, a new century, a new decade and a time for change among Juniors. It marked the first dinner/dance as our largest fundraiser. In 2000 we raised over \$30,000 while having a great time at the Brookfield Zoo. We proudly donated these funds back into our community by providing the Riverside Jump Jive 125 to mark Riverside's 125th anniversary. It was the largest attended event to date in our community as we enjoyed the sounds of The Mighty Blue Kings. Even though we funded this event, we were still able to donate funds to many of our continued philanthropic recipients throughout the local area and the nation.

In closing, please remember it is through the many hearts and hands of the great women of Riverside who work together to provide a better community, continued friendship and devotion to our families as well as Riverside. Indeed, it is through these "close bonds of friendship" that we continue to keep these "virtuous actions from being forgotten".

Today, the RJWC has grown to over 100 members and is legally recognized as a charitable organization.