

THE WOMEN'S ACTION COALITION OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

A HISTORY

by

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Before we began

IWY--the International Women's Year--1975. The current generation of high school and college women have not even heard of it. For them it has dropped out of history. Yet its legacy has created a different quality of consciousness about women's work and women's worth that for these young women has changed the range of possibilities within which they will be able to find their future.

The international project, which began under the initiative of the Women's Commission of the United Nations, was launched with the following statement concerning the status of women:

Considering that discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents their participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity;

Convinced that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world, and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields,

The year will be observed with the theme:
"Equality, Development, and Peace."

American participation in the IWY began with a proclamation by President Richard Nixon in 1972, followed in 1975 by President Gerald Ford's executive order naming a task force of distinguished women, headed by Jill Ruckelshaus, to oversee U.S. involvement. Maryland's Prince George's County soon followed, being recognized nationally (in Ms. Magazine, for example) as the first locality in the nation to issue a proclamation establishing 1975 as International Women's Year and to create a task force.

On July 2, 1974, County Executive William Gullett named the 15-member task force of women leaders, chaired by Mary E. (Betty) Turnbull of the Prince George's Federation of Women's Clubs, "to plan and implement a program to bring us a long stride closer to

full women's rights in life and on the lawbooks." Throughout the year events related to women's activities were planned by this task force: a poster contest for children; programs featuring "The Woman of the Month" and "The Woman of the Year"; an all-day seminar on how to get into positions of leadership on county boards and commissions; establishment of a scholarship for international travel for a county high school student; and creation of three scholarships for returning women at the Prince George's County Community College.

How we began

On Saturday, June 21, 1975, the IWY Task Force hosted a breakfast at the Watkins Nature Center in Largo, designed both to celebrate the United Nations International Women's Year and to honor county women in the fields of education and public and community relations. Over 150 men and women, all county leaders, gathered to offer special recognition to Dr. Selma Lippeatt, VicePresident of Prince George's Community College, and Zella P. Saylor, originator and chief editor of the Adelphi Grist, for achievements in their respective fields.

Then, following a suggestion by the host group, who sought a way to continue the collaboration of diverse women's groups, which they recognized as the primary outgrowth of the year's projects that had brought them together, the entire gathering, by formal motion, committed themselves to establish a coalition of women within the county. Through united action they hoped to benefit all women of Prince George's County.

The first steps

By the second meeting of the committee which was formed to define and prepare guidelines for the projected coalition, the group chose the name Women's Action Coalition of Prince George's County. Seven members of the original IWY Task Force formed the nucleus for organizing the new coalition: Betty Turnbull, of the Prince George's Federation of Women's Clubs; Mary Ahalt, of the Business and Professional Women's Club of College Park; Jill Moss Greenberg, of the Prince George's County Women's Political Caucus; Millicent Hutt, of the county's Commission for Women; Dolly Packard, of the Southern Prince George's chapter of the National Organization for Women; Mary Jo Strauss, of the Oxon Hill Branch of the American Association of University Women; and Alice Wiley, of the county's Department of Social Services.

At the first meeting of the planning body, called on July 29 at Hampton Mall, Betty Turnbull outlined the needs of the coalition:

1. Women's groups must bind together to form a cohesive group.
 2. Common denominators of interest among groups should be identified.
 3. Objectives should be outlined and agreed-upon actions implemented.
 4. The organizational structure should be decided upon.
 5. Officers, a Board of Directors, or some other form of direction should be chosen.
 6. A platform of issues must be identified on a purely objective level, without personal thought to party affiliation or personal feelings that could cause group dissension.
- Implicit but unstated in this list of needs was the understanding that member groups could agree to disagree--that is, that the coalition, as a body, would stay away from controversial issues but that member groups would be expected to work toward their own agendas, even though these might often conflict with the agendas of other member groups.

In a brainstorming session that followed, those present realized that a larger group would be needed for the planning process. Although some issues of concern were identified, the group recognized that considerable fact-finding would be needed. Among issues discussed were: women as victims, improved health care for women and children, day care availability, a rape crisis center, transportation needs, voter registration, alcohol and drug problems in the county, and enforcement of Title IX (that is, sex equity in education).

On August 19, 1975, a much larger group--37 women and one man--gathered again at Hampton Mall to begin the task of forming the new coalition. After hearing a presentation by Dr. Ralph Holland, Executive Director of Prince George's County Day Care, on facilities available to meet unserved needs for day care within the county, the group began by forming committees. The first dealt directly with issues raised by Dr. Holland's talk. Members of the Child Care Committee were Barbara Spittle, Jill Moss Greenberg, Stephanie Demma, Erma Curtis, Jacqueline Williams, and Millicent Hutt.

Another group, the Bylaws Committee, agreed to work from a rough draft of proposed bylaws, read by Betty Turnbull, in order to prepare a document for adoption by the coalition. Members of this group, chaired by Mary Jo Strauss, were Julia Golden, Evelyn Bata, Audrey Marra, Dottie Wynn, Agnes Bowersox, Michelle Simms, Mary Ahalt, and Alice Wiley.

Audrey Marra, as chair, and Emma Everson agreed to take over public relations functions for the working group--an important role, since a primary function of the coalition was defined as

"communications with one another" and coordination of activities between the member groups.

As the first indication of the kind of concerted action possible through the proposed coalition, representatives were urged by Maryland State Delegate Pauline Menes to take back to their respective groups the news that County Police Chief J. Rhoads was planning to hire more women and minorities on the police force. Through their respective groups, representatives were asked to locate women interested in applying for such positions.

At regular monthly meetings thereafter, the group focused on bylaws, organizational questions, and the issue of how much to charge for membership. Although dues that were too high might reduce potential membership, all felt that the coalition should be self-supporting and that its officers should not be required to engage in fundraising efforts that would dilute its work.

With the December meeting, the formal adoption of bylaws made possible the independent existence of the new coalition. At this meeting members of the group also affirmed their commitment to maintaining the organization as an independent entity, not as an adjunct of the county. The question had arisen in an inquiry by County Executive Winfield Kelly, who had expressed great interest in the IWY Task Force and in WAC.

To prepare for the first meeting of the new organization, which would begin officially on January 22, a package including a cover letter and an application form was sent to each potential member organization.

Policies on Membership

Almost at once a controversy arose concerning eligibility for membership in the coalition. In the draft of the by-laws presented at the January meeting, Section 2 of Article III on membership read as follows:

Each active Member and the Staff Coordinator of The Prince George's County International Women's Year (1975) Task Force may upon payment of the full 1976 annual dues become a Charter Member of THE COALITION. Except for representation in absentia by an ALTERNATE, each IWY Charter Member will have all the rights of a DELEGATE, and may serve on Committees and/or as an Officer of THE COALITION.

Some present felt, however, that no persons as individuals should possess status equal to that of delegates from member organizations; and discussion was heated. In order to resolve the disagreement, Section 2 was referred back to the Bylaws Committee, augmented now by three new members--Claire Bigelow, Rita Bastek, and Jane Page. Eventually a new section on membership was adopted, including a Proviso concerning the IWY Task Force group:

The membership shall consist of women's organizations in Prince George's County who support THE COALITION objectives. Applications for membership shall be submitted to the Executive Board for approval. One DELEGATE and one ALTERNATE shall be designated by each member organization at the time of joining.

Proviso: The active participants from the IWY (1975) Task Force will serve for two years as an Advisory Board to the COALITION. Upon payment of the 1976 and the 1977 dues each Task Force participant will have full individual voting privileges with all the rights of COALITION membership.

When a question was raised as to who would be eligible to vote on adoption of the proposed bylaws, the chair ruled that all persons present, as had been the policy at all previous meetings, should be eligible to vote. Until the bylaws were adopted and the coalition had become an official organization, it was felt that no distinction could be made in terms of voting rights. The Proviso was passed by a vote of 18 to 2, with 6 abstentions.

Another issue concerned the eligibility of official bodies of the county government to apply for membership in the coalition. By unanimous agreement, all present reaffirmed the importance of complete independence of the coalition. It was ruled that official bodies would be permitted to send liaisons to coalition meetings but that these representatives would have no voting rights.

Dues for the first year of the coalition were set at \$15, payable at the April meeting and carrying eligibility through August 1976.

Founding Members

By the March 1976 meeting, the following organizations had

joined the Coalition: Council of Catholic Women, represented by Barbara Spittle (later by Julia Golden); Northern Prince George's NOW, represented by Agnes Bowersox; Southern Prince George's NOW, Regina J. Cody; the Women's Center and Referral Service, Linda Fihelly; College Park Branch of AAUW, Ginny Reinhard; the Women's Club of College Park, Jane Page; the IWY Task Force, Millicent Hutt, Mary J. Ahalt, and Betty Turnbull. Later other groups and their representatives were added: Dolly Packard, IWY; Mary Jo Strauss, Oxon Hill AAUW; Anna Mistretta (later Evelyn Mueller), Federation of Republican Women; Delta Sigma Theta, Prince George's Alumnae Chapter, Ethel Rogers; Prince George's County Extension Homemakers, Madeleine Beard; Henson Valley Republican Women's Club, Katherine Garnett.

At the May meeting, a nominating committee (Agnes Bowersox, Millicent Hutt, Audrey Olson, Elizabeth Shema, and Dorothy Trepani) presented a slate of officers, who were elected and installed in June: Julia Golden (Council of Catholic Women), President; Dolly Packard (IWY), Vice President; and Madeleine Beard (Prince George's Homemakers), Secretary. In the absence of a nomination for Treasurer, Agnes Bowersox (Northern Prince George's NOW) agreed to serve. When she resigned in September 1977, Mary Jo Strauss (Oxon Hill AAUW) assumed the post.

Early Actions

Spousal abuse and day care for children were major priorities during the first months of the Coalition. On December 14, 1976, Coalition delegates presented to the County Executive a proposal for establishment of a shelter for victims of spousal abuse, the first of several such proposals later to be made by the Coalition. This proposal was not acted upon by the county, pending recommendations from the county's Commission for Women. (In the following April the Commission did, in fact, recommend establishment of such a center, setting up a task force to obtain funding. Some members of WAC served on this task force.)

In January 1977 the first Coalition newsletter, created by Audrey Marra, was authorized on her recommendation that communication functions among member organizations and publicity outside the Coalition be separated. Beginning in February and continuing for all of the ensuing nine years of the Coalition's history, Audrey Marra has published the organization's newsletter, a task involving at least six editions annually. Besides being sent to the delegates and presidents of all member organizations, the newsletter has also gone to the county executive and members of the county council, as well as occasionally to members of the local news media and to the administrative aide for the Congressional Representative. In

1982 at the Women's Fair, Audrey Marra was presented with a plaque from the Coalition honoring her for this indispensable contribution.

The first reference to holding a Women's Fair occurred also at the January 1977 meeting. A committee consisting of Betty Turnbull, chair, Jill Moss Greenberg, Dolly Packard, Agnes Bowersox, and Betty Renshaw was appointed to explore possibilities and to contact the Prince George's Community College about use of campus facilities for such an enterprise.

In June 1977, founding chair Betty Turnbull left WAC when she was appointed by the County Executive to membership on the Commission for Women. There she later chaired the subcommittee on battered women. She returned to the WAC meeting of October 1977, however, to turn over to the Coalition a check for \$246.74, the balance of IWY Task Force funds. At this meeting President Golden presented to Betty Turnbull on behalf of the Coalition a certificate of appreciation for her leadership and dedication in raising the status of women in Prince George's County.

At the end of November 1977, an article in the Prince George's Journal raised a flurry of responses in the form of letters-to-the-editor from WAC members over the article's misrepresentation of WAC's structure and membership. In summarizing the kinds of issues in which WAC had taken an active role, Julia Golden mentioned the transition center for battered persons, a series of workshops during October providing career guidance for area women, coordination of child care, publication of a newsletter, and monitoring of state and county legislation affecting women. Mary Jo Strauss confronted head-on the issue which had doubtless elicited the negative description of the Coalition in the first place:

Abortion has not been a Coalition concern and reference to the subject had no legitimate place in [the] article. Certain issues, including ERA and freedom of reproductive choice, are supported by some, but not all, Coalition affiliates.

Events of 1978

In January 1978 an interim slate of officers was elected, all but one returning to posts they had held previously: Julia Golden, President; Dolly Packard, Vice President; Mary Jo Strauss, Treasurer; and Linda Fihelly, Recording Secretary.

Throughout the fall a committee worked actively to carry out

plans for a Women's Fair, to be held on the campus of the University of Maryland in early April. But at the February Coalition meeting, Linda Fihelly reported for the Fair's Steering Committee their recommendation to postpone the event. (In fact, the first Women's Fair for Prince George's County was not held until April 1980.)

In the meantime, the Coalition continued to monitor services available in the county for day care for children, with Julia Golden taking an active role. She had coordinated the January meeting of the Prince George's 4-C's (Community Coordinated Child Care) and would continue to participate as WAC liaison.

Then in April, at the beginning of a new fiscal year (as had been established through a change in the bylaws), new officers were unanimously elected: Dolly Packard (Southern Prince George's NOW), President; Linda Fihelly (Women's Center and Referral Service), Vice President; Jane Page (Women's Club of College Park), Secretary; and Mary Jo Strauss (Oxon Hill AAUW), Treasurer.

Dolly Packard was also serving as a member of the Board of Directors of the Family Abuse Center sponsored by the Commission for Women. The first priority of this group, she reported, was to investigate whether money budgeted by Social Services to provide emergency shelter was being diverted to other uses. But in May Betty Turnbull addressed WAC members on plans for the Family Abuse Center, for which \$2500 in seed money was to become available in July. Members were asked to try to locate volunteers to help in the center. At the June 21 meeting, Betty Turnbull reported that a grant of \$200,000 was expected in the fall. On August 30 representatives of 13 county women's groups met to organize support for a shelter, which was later to open in Mount Rainier as Assissi, Inc.

In November Jill Moss Greenberg spoke to Coalition delegates concerning the county school system's delay in implementing Title IX. She had been WAC's representative on a Title IX Advisory Committee, which was re-established in the fall of 1977, because of pressure from women's groups, to work with the Human Relations Officer for the school system. In a letter to the Superintendent of the Prince George's County Public Schools, Ms. Greenberg charged the committee with being merely "a placebo." She asked instead for support of real substance.

Events in 1979

In January and February 1979 special training sessions on Title IX were held for WAC members and area women, and Mary Jo

Strauss headed a committee requesting data on Title IX compliance from the office of the Superintendent of the Prince George's County Schools. These sessions were conducted as a national pilot project of PEER, Project on Equal Educational Rights, to field test materials for use by community groups in monitoring Title IX compliance. PEER is a private national advocacy group.

In a May 21 letter from WAC President Dolly Packard, information was requested concerning the status of female and minority students, faculty members, and employees. These data were to be sent in three formats--statistical, narrative, and in printed institutional forms. Special areas of concern to WAC were athletics and physical education, counseling and pregnant students, employment policies and grievance procedures, vocational education, general curriculum, and clubs and extracurricular activities. WAC representatives stressed to school officials that they hoped to work together, that the relationship should not be considered adversarial.

In the meantime, the Coalition inaugurated a campaign by letter and phone in response to a request to the County Council by the new County Executive, Larry Hogan, to eliminate the Commission for Women. An alternative action--to merge the Women's Commission with the Human Relations Commission--was felt also to be unsatisfactory, since women's issues would be subordinated to those of race. Both were felt to be vital and to need separate forums. In fact, the Commission for Women was continued, with Susan Helfrich appointed by Hogan to be the new Executive Director.

In June a new slate of officers was elected for WAC: Linda Fihelly, President; Janet Burdick (College Park Branch of AAUW), Vice President; Katharine Garnett (Federation of Republican Women), Secretary; and Mary Jo Strauss, Treasurer. Thirteen member organizations were now represented.

In the fall Mary Jo Strauss testified for WAC in support of establishing an extended day care program for school children utilizing school facilities. As a result of the hearing, held by the School Board, two schools were set up to function as pilot programs. Other issues listed as priorities by the WAC membership were: family violence, pension equity, rape and related offenses, marital property law, recognition of volunteers, child care, women in state employment, and increased aid for families with dependent children.

Events of 1980

As the new year began, cooperation between WAC's Title IX

Committee and the public school system took a new turn with the appointment of a new Human Relations Officer for the public schools--Martha Aly. She spoke at the January meeting of WAC, especially crediting Jill Moss Greenberg and Mary Jo Strauss for their help in setting up in-service training programs for school staff representatives.

Another forward step was completion of plans for the long-anticipated Women's Fair. This was to be held on April 26 in the Largo High School. Since the Coalition's major goal from the beginning was to address needs of all women in the county, irrespective of minority, ethnic, or socio-economic background, the Coalition began to take steps to increase minority membership. Jill Moss Greenberg and Warlene Gary worked to identify black and ethnic women's groups to receive special invitations for participation in the fair. Workshops were also included at the fair on black and hispanic women's concerns.

Eleven organizations worked together as sponsors of the Fair: the Women's Action Coalition, Southern Prince George's BPW, John Hanson Women's Democratic Club, Prince George's Women's Political Caucus, the Women's Center and Referral Service, Northern Prince George's NOW, Southern Prince George's NOW, College Park Women's Club, the Prince George's Extension Homemakers Council, the County's Commission for Women, the Laurel BPW, and the Oxon Hill AAUW. Linda Fihelly, Susan Helfrich, and Latrelle Jones were the primary workers for WAC on the fair committee.

News from Assissi, Inc. was less favorable, however, since assistance from the state had not materialized as expected and a heating bill of \$3,000--later increased to \$8,000--was due. Pending also were plans for a White House Conference on Families, called by President Jimmy Carter. Linda Fihelly agreed to testify for WAC on child care and Title IX at a preliminary hearing to set an agenda for the conference.

At the June meeting members heard Walteen Grady, President of the Washington chapter of Women for Racial and Economic Equality, discuss plans with Jill Moss Greenberg (representing the Maryland State Commission for Women) and Patricia Fenn (of the County's Human Relations Commission) to recruit and include women of all races into WAC. Following the talk, participants worked in small groups to formulate an agenda for increasing minority involvement. This was the first formal step in a continuing effort since that time to create a truly multicultural organization.

Following both presentations, a motion was passed

unanimously to form a committee to "address the issue of increasing membership of organizations which are composed of minority women, and . . . to outline a plan for addressing . . . the concerns of minorities." An ad hoc committee, consisting of Nadine Stephens, Walteen Grady, Jill Moss Greenberg, Patricia Fenn, Dolly Packard, and Isabel Payton, was then organized.

During a summer meeting, the board emphasized the importance of continued monitoring of legislation at all levels of government, but especially among the State Legislators. "We should continue to give testimony on matters of concern but on a more regular basis," the minutes read.

Working on Multicultural Issues

From the beginning, one organization of black women--Delta Sigma Theta--had been a member of the Coalition. Then in September 1980 a new organization, the National Hook-up of Black Women, represented by Tanya Hawkins, responded to the initiative taken by WAC to increase the membership of organizations of minority women. At the September meeting also, Vice President Janet Burdick read a policy statement on the issue of minority women:

We want to extend our interaction with all women in the community and increase participation of minority women in the Coalition and the organizations.

To this statement Latrelle Jones, Secretary, commented: "It is one of our priorities to increase our membership in order to vigorously pursue our significance as a viable coalition of women's groups."

At the June meeting Virginia W. Beauchamp of the University of Maryland's Women's Studies Program had invited WAC participation in a regional conference of the National Women's Studies Association she was co-chairing in October on the subject of "Minority Women." In response to this invitation, a panel of WAC members was put together, with Mary Jo Strauss as moderator, with the title "Community Action and Minority Women's Organizations in Prince George's County." Panelists were Linda Fihelly, WAC President, and the presidents of three county organizations of black women: Donna Crocker, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority; Kathy S. Smith, National Council of Negro Women; and Cherry Moore, National Hook-up of Black Women. The program helped to increase understanding about the history and goals of the black organizations and to show similarities with and differences from white women's groups.

Under the co-sponsorship of WAC and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, a forum on black women's employment was held on May 16, 1981, at the Seat Pleasant Elementary School. Six workshops were scheduled: skills identification, resume writing and job interview techniques, job research strategies, coping with job-related problems, climbing the ladder to success, and starting your own business.

Educational Equity

With the beginning of the academic year 1980-81, Mary Jo Strauss called for changing the name of the Title IX committee to Educational Equity in order to incorporate issues relating as well to Title VI (race equity) and to disability issues. She outlined the following concerns: 1) encouraging girls to pursue courses in math and sciences, 2) surveying students about their interests in specific sports, 3) promoting March 1981 as Women's History Month in the county schools, and 4) providing staff in-service training on Title IX. By the June 1981 meeting, Ms. Strauss was able to report the county's agreement to initiate a program for studying sex equity in mathematics and to direct academic counselors to encourage girls to enter the fields of math and science.

In order to focus on women's history, Professor Hilda Smith of the University of Maryland's Department of History was invited to address the WAC meeting of February 1981 on women's contributions to the history of the state and the nation. Jill Moss Greenberg, founder of Maryland Women's History Week, showed a Women's History Week packet, 2100 of which had been prepared for the state's elementary schools and libraries by the office of Equal Opportunity of the Maryland State Department of Education in cooperation with the state's Commission for Women. Interest in the subject was growing, she reported: the county's board of education had adopted a resolution and Governor Harry Hughes and the state legislature were to issue a proclamation establishing Women's History Week.

Involvement in Political Action

In January 1981 WAC collaborated with the Commission for Women and the Prince George's County unit of the National Women's Political Caucus to sponsor a day-long legislative briefing for county women. The event was held at the newly opened County Administration Building in Upper Marlboro. Among state legislators who participated were Delegates Pauline Menes, Joan Pitkin, and Kay Bienen and Senators Tommy Broadwater and Arthur Dorman. Ann Hull from the office of the governor and county officials Ella Ennis and Royal Hart also appeared as panelists. The planning committee consisted of Susan Helfrich, Executive

Director of the Commission; Mary Ellen Jenkins of Prince George's Women's Political Caucus; and Mary Jo Strauss of WAC. So successful was this event that it became the forerunner of annual legislative briefings. In later years these included Montgomery County women as well.

On March 18, in cooperation with the Women's Political Caucus of Prince George's County, WAC sponsored a forum on women's issues, held at the Greenbelt Library, at which candidates for the 5th Congressional District seat, vacated through the illness of Representative Gladys Noon Spellman, were invited to speak.

At the June meeting of WAC, interest in political action by and for women was stressed again when Congresswoman Marjorie Holt addressed the group and Mary Ellen Jenkins, president of the Women's Political Caucus, invited additional joint projects with her group and WAC.

In October State Delegate Joan Pitkin from the Maryland General Assembly spoke about priorities in the 1981 legislative session. WAC also sought input from member organizations in the form of a Legislative Issues Survey in order to mobilize action quickly on issues where there was a consensus.

During the fall President Linda Fihelly, speaking on behalf of WAC, testified on three different occasions. The first was at a public hearing concerning nominations by County Executive Larry Hogan to the Commission for Women. Of those named, WAC supported all but two. WAC's recommendations were later approved by County Council action. President Fihelly also testified at a public hearing concerning a councilmanic redistricting plan. Although the plan WAC opposed was later passed, it was partially modified to make it more acceptable to its critics. Ms. Fihelly also attended hearings of the Prince George's Legislative Delegation, at which she spoke in favor of increasing the marriage license tax in the county to provide extra funds for county uses.

A new member organization joined WAC in June, the Southern Prince George's Church Women United. A new slate of officers was also elected: Linda Fihelly, president; Latrelle Jones, vice president; Colette Zeiders, secretary; and Phyllis Schultz, treasurer.

Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence

At long last a nonprofit corporation was chartered to open a family crisis center in Prince George's County. Bylaws for the shelter, which were adopted on January 6, 1982, established a

position on its board of directors for the president of WAC. Other members were the Director of the County's Department of Social Services, the chair of the Commission for Women, the president of the Prince George's Mental Health Association, and a designee of the court. The shelter corporation immediately began the process of looking for suitable housing. It also hired a grant consultant, Linda Lynch, to seek further funding. (Her own position had been funded by a \$10,000 grant from the State.) From other fund-raising activities, another \$6,000 was provided.

Late in April Linda Fihelly and other members of the shelter's board of directors participated in an informational program sponsored by the National Hook-up of Black Women concerning the Family Crisis Center of Prince George's County.

In June 1982 the county council passed an enabling resolution making available \$15 from the marriage license fee, effective July 1, to help support a crisis center. Negotiations were also underway to locate the center in the former Brentwood Elementary School, with renovations expected to be funded with Community Development Block Grant money if the county council authorized the \$280,000 expenditure.

Other Events of 1982

At the beginning of 1982 another organization joined WAC--the Bowie-Crofton Business and Professional Women's Club, represented by delegate Elsie Forbes. At the June meeting the Surratts Republican Club also joined, with Ella Ennis as delegate. Another new member was New Ventures, an organization located in Bowie that presents workshops and other programs of interest to women. Their delegate was Mabry McCloud. By September, 22 organizations were members of WAC.

In the spring changes in WAC's bylaws were introduced to raise the annual membership fee from \$15 to \$20 and to change the definition of a quorum. Previously a majority of the delegates and a majority of the executive board, including three officers, constituted a quorum. Under the new provision a quorum was defined as "a majority of the delegates present including two officers." These bylaw changes were adopted at the April meeting.

The new slate of officers, elected at the April meeting, were: Latrelle Jones (John Hanson Women's Democratic Club), president; Colette Zeiders (Prince George's Federation of Republican Women), vice president; Dorothy Thomas (Central Prince George's BPW), secretary; and Phyllis Schultz (Prince George's Women's Political Caucus), treasurer.

Annette Funn, WAC's legislative chair, arranged a forum for the October meeting featuring women members of the State legislature. Speakers included Prince George's Delegates Kay Bienen, Christine Jones, Pauline Menes, Joan Pitkin, and Lorraine Sheehan. Member organizations were also encouraged to send in their legislative priorities for inclusion in a legislative platform to be voted on at the same meeting. Members of the WAC legislative committee were: Annette Funn, chair, Donna Crocker, Barbara Brandt, Colette Zeiders, Audrey Marra, and Latrelle Jones.

The Annual Women's Fair was held on Sunday, November 14, at the Prince George's Community College. Linda Fihelly chaired the planning committee.

Making a Difference in the State

On January 22, 1982, WAC participated with 30 other women's organizations from Montgomery and Prince George's counties in holding a legislative briefing for area women. This was the second such workshop, now expanded for the first time beyond Prince George's County. Joint briefings, of which the first was held in Silver Spring, were to become annual events. The program featured Carmen Delgado Votaw, Co-chair of the National Women's Conference Committee, as keynote speaker. Afternoon workshops dealt with issues of health, family law, violence within the family, employment and insurance discrimination, child care, and educational concerns affecting women.

At the January WAC meeting, Mary Jo Strauss was able to report on an important step forward in Title IX enforcement. This was a county-wide all-day training session, called "Math Equals," which was held on December 9. One mathematics teacher and one counselor from each of the 32 middle and junior high schools participated. The workshop focused on the problem of math avoidance by girls and women and on the variety of careers that require training in math. Some school administrators and school board members also attended. Ms. Strauss, representing WAC, was moderator of a panel of community women who use mathematics in their own employment.

Annette Funn, speaking for WAC's committee on legislation, presented a legislative platform drawn from the earlier survey of member organizations. Issues which the platform highlighted were: legislation on family violence, equal pay for work of comparable value, increased hiring of female workers, before- and after-school child care programs in the public schools, educational equity, and pension and social security reform.

The featured speaker at the January meeting, U.S. Representative Steny Hoyer, gave further attention to the latter issue when he discussed "Economic Equity at the Federal Level."

Start of the 1983 Fiscal Year

As in the past, the election of officers occurred at the April meeting. Latrelle Jones, Colette Zeiders, and Dorothy Thomas continued in their respective posts as president, vice president, and secretary; but Rita Bastek for the first time assumed the position of treasurer. As in the past also, the organization was well along with plans for the next annual Women's Fair, with Colette Zeiders as chair. A new collaboration was also developing as WAC agreed to cosponsor a Health Fair, to be held in July at Landover Mall. Other sponsors were the county Health Department, United Communities Against Poverty, the Glenarden Community Center, the Cooperative Extension Services and 4-H Clubs of the county, and the Commission for Women, coordinator of the event.

Two WAC members were especially honored in June when the Mid-Atlantic Center for Sex Equity, located at American University, presented regional awards for outstanding achievements in sex equity. Dr. Mary Jo Strauss received recognition for her work on the national level as co-author of Everywoman's Guide to Colleges and Universities; and Jill Moss Greenberg, who was minority equity specialist with the Maryland State Department of Education, was recognized for her work at the state level. Former member Marie (Tarbell) Mayor was also honored.

Membership Update

Each fall Linda Fihelly prepared a list of WAC member organizations, including the names of their respective presidents, WAC delegates and alternates, and Women's Fair representatives. In September 1983 the following organizations were listed as members: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Prince George's Graduate Chapter; AAUW, College Park Branch; AAUW, Lanham/Bowie Branch; AAUW, Oxon Hill Branch; Bowie-Crofton BPW; Central Prince George's BPW; College Park BPW; Southern Prince George's BPW; Church Women United in Southern Prince George's County; Delta Sigma Theta, Prince George's Alumnae Chapter; John Hanson Women's Democratic Club; Displaced Homemakers Program (UCAP); Prince George's Extension Homemakers Council; Las Amigas, Seat Pleasant Chapter; National Council of Negro Women, Prince George's County Section; National Hook-up of Black Women, Prince George's County Chapter; NOW, Northern Prince George's Chapter; NOW, Southern Prince George's Chapter; New Ventures; Planned

Parenthood of Prince George's County; Prince George's County Federation of Republican Women; Henson Valley Republican Women's Club; Surratts Republican Women's Club; Women's Center of the Prince George's Community College; Women's Center and Referral Service; and the Women's Political Caucus, Prince George's County. Later a new organization, Mothers Without Custody, also joined.

Special projects of Alpha Kappa Alpha, one of the newest members, were voter education and registration, educational opportunities projects, and community social action projects. Las Amigas, affiliated with the National Council of Negro Women, engaged in projects with youth conservation, programs for the elderly, and political action at the local level.

Continuing Projects

By the fall of 1983 WAC seemed to have established a rhythm of special projects that continued every year. The most important was the annual Women's Fair, held in November at the Prince George's Community College. In 1983 Audrey Marra was general chair. This time five chapters of traditionally black women's organizations were among the 26 Coalition member organizations involved in the Fair.

Each January WAC also co-sponsored with the county Commission for Women and the Maryland State Women's Commission a day-long Legislative Briefing. In 1984 over 40 women's organizations from six counties were represented.

Also of continuing concern to WAC was its direct involvement with the Family Crisis Center, now operating on a 24-hour basis in the Mount Rainier facility. As WAC president, Linda Fihelly continued in her position as a member of the board; but she urged WAC as an organization also to become a dues-paying member of the Center.

Annette Funn continued too in her role as chair of the Legislative Committee, monitoring specific legislative interests of member organizations. The October newsletter listed the same five legislative priorities that had been highlighted in the previous year: 1) family violence; 2) equal pay for work of comparable value, the hiring of female workers, and advancement based on merit rather than seniority; 3) before and after school child care programs; 4) implementation of educational equity; 5) insurance equity and social security reform. At the January 1984 meeting, five Prince George's women-- delegates Pauline Menes, "Midge" Patterson, Christine Jones, Jerry Perry, and Joan Pitkin--discussed these and other issues in a briefing for WAC

members. Four of them returned in April, after the legislative session ended, to give WAC members a run-down on what had happened.

Honored by Governor

On December 1, 1983, the Women's Action Coalition as an organization and three of its members as individuals were honored at a reception in the state capital for their contributions to the implementation of Title IX. Among the honorees who were presented with the Governor's Citation by Governor Harry Hughes were Jill Moss Greenberg and Mary Jo Strauss, WAC representatives to the county school system's Title IX Advisory Committee, and Virginia W. Beauchamp, member of the Maryland Women's History Coordinating Committee.

Mary Jo Strauss, in her role on the Title IX Advisory Committee, together with Dolly Packard, representing NOW, testified a month earlier before the county's Board of Education concerning the failure of most schools to schedule girls interscholastic basketball games preceding those scheduled for boys. Many coaches were found to be disobeying this directive by preempting the courts for boys' junior varsity games. Members of the school board, of whom seven of the ten were women, strongly endorsed the policy, whose intent was to provide greater visibility for girls' sports activities. WAC provided technical assistance to female coaches and athletes. "WAC has made a difference," Ms. Strauss wrote in the January newsletter, "and must continue to do so on this issue."

WAC Joins League on New Issue

In January 1984 WAC delegates voted unanimously to support a position taken by the League of Women Voters in a drive to amend the Prince George's Charter. The amendment would require that vacancies in the offices of Prince George's County Executive and County Council members be filled through an election. In addition, WAC delegates specifically favored the use of the national Presidential election as the best way to ensure maximum voter participation. Letters from WAC and member organizations were sent to appropriate officials.

WAC members also participated in a farewell reception for Susan Helfrich, Executive Director of the Commission for Women, who was leaving her post to accept another opportunity.

The new slate of officers were elected at the April meeting. Latrelle Jones (John Hanson Women's Democratic Club) was president; Lynn Tucci (New Ventures, Inc.), vice president; Carol

Chaney (Southern Prince George's NOW), secretary; and Rita Bastek (Prince George's Extension Homemakers Council), treasurer. Audrey Marra chaired the Women's Fair committee. At the same time a new organization joined the coalition--the Prince George's chapter of Zeta Phi Beta, a national sorority founded in 1920 as a service organization dedicated to sisterhood, development of finer qualities of women, and fund raising for scholarships.

Building Bridges

The keynote address by Warlene Gary at the 1983 Women's Fair, "Women of Color: Building Bridges," was still being talked about the following spring. Her idea of exploring ways for women of all colors in Prince George's County to develop a "women's agenda" inspired the Commission for Women to initiate a first effort to make possible an inter-racial dialogue. WAC soon agreed to serve as co-sponsor for the project that, from Warlene Gary's phrase, came to be known as "Building Bridges."

During the year required to develop the first major activity in the Building Bridges project, the initial idea evolved from what was first conceived of as a trickle-down process involving the presidents of county women's organizations, who would be expected to carry back to their respective groups and to implement a message of inter-racial cooperation. Since it seemed unfortunate to exclude from participation any woman who shared a commitment to improving understanding among diverse women, the concept soon began to change. At the same time, it was clear that not all organizational presidents held equal commitments nor had the skills or knowledge required to carry out the project's mission.

Eventually a five-hour workshop was chosen as the best format for involving as many county women as possible. To make costs low, so that no one should feel excluded, the workshop was scheduled at the Prince George's Community College, which co-hosted the event. Lunch was a bring-your-own, brown bag affair, where participants could socialize together.

For publicity, flyers were passed out at the Women's Fair in November, and a special workshop at the Fair on building inter-racial understanding served as a warm-up. In the few weeks immediately preceding the event--now called "Building Bridges: Who Said it Would Be Simple?"--a special mailing of flyers and cover letters, coordinated by the Commission for Women, went out to women's organizations and women elected officials. Radio and TV spots were also aired.

At the February 1985 WAC meeting, some 40 delegates, alternate delegates, and officers of member organizations

attended an awareness session called "Breaking Ground for Building Bridges." Under the leadership of Jill Moss Greenberg, Mary Jo Strauss, and Donna Crocker, those participating went through a consciousness-raising experience in myths and realities about racial stereotypes.

Finally on March 9, over 125 women, about half of them white and about half women of color, hispanic, Asian, and Native American, showed up for what was described on the promotional flyer as a coming together of women of all races--white, black, Hispanic, Indian, Asian--in Prince George's County, so that we can understand one another better. In a panel discussion with personal stories of invisibility, pain, and triumph, Sue Ward, Jackie Brown, and Marina Herrera opened up the subject of racism and sexism. From this general session, participants formed into groups of eight, each with a facilitator, to explore their own stereotypes. Facilitators, all volunteers from various organizations, the University of Maryland, and the Maryland State Department of Education, had received prior training by Jill Moss Greenberg and Donna Crocker. Participants were assigned to groups by their ethnic self-definition--first in homogeneous groups and later in racially mixed groups. When the wrap-up session was held at the end of the day, participants expressed overwhelming enthusiasm for continuing the Building Bridges process.

A dinner meeting was the second event in Building Bridges. This was held at the NCO Club at Andrews Air Force Base on June 4. It was attended by 80 women, about half of them newcomers to the project. All were assigned to tables in such a way as to ensure a racial and ethnic intermixture. Again the panelists--Sue Ward, Marina Herrera, and Donna Crocker--explored issues of racial understanding. The formal presentation was followed by a lively discussion which turned into a "speak-out." Participants voiced frank concerns about attitudes and behaviors in all aspects of life in Prince George's County.

In order to create a more informal environment, the third project in the Building Bridges series was a potluck picnic, held on August 21, 1985, at the Newton White Mansion on Enterprise Rd. About 75 participated--again with many newcomers to the project. Over their meal at tables of eight, again with facilitators and racially diverse, participants discussed how the agendas for white and black women might differ or might agree. Hispanic women were more vocal at this meeting, asking that their concerns--different from those initiated by the structure of the meal-time discussions--might also be addressed. The mood of this function resonated with camaraderie and friendship, although discussion was serious and prolonged.

Building Bridges IV occurred on October 5, 1985, at the Community College. Two county leaders with expertise on racial issues, Whitty Bass, Director of Community Ministry for Prince George's County, and Bonnie Johns, former chair of the county's Board of Education, served as keynote speakers. They also provided questions for small-group discussions on the topic "Confronting our Racism." About 50 women participated--a reduced number because of scheduling conflicts. At the 1985 Women's Fair on November 3, the topic was further pursued in a workshop on ethnic differences in the workplace.

Committee members, who met monthly from July 1984 to February 1985 to set up the first program, and then again to arrange the succeeding programs, were representatives of WAC organizations or members or staff of the Commission for Women. They were: Emma Andrews, Ches Applewhite, Erma Barron, Virginia W. Beauchamp, Elsie Conway, Donna Crocker, Beverly Diggs, Sol del Ande Eaton, Carol Fields, Linda Fihelly, Lona Florence, Jill Moss Greenberg, Bettie Hudson, Delorah Jackson, Mary Ellen Jenkins, Betty Johnson, Latrelle Jones, Audrey Marra, Nay Miles, Barbara Miller, Geraldine Noble, Julie Rich, Marilyn Shertzer, Mary Jo Strauss, and Sue Ward.

Other Issues in 1984-85

In order for members to better understand the State's budgetary process, so that institutions of concern to women could make timely applications for financial support, the invited speaker for the September 1984 meeting was Delegate Gary Alexander of the House Appropriations Committee. He described the procedures in both House and Senate in creating a budget. At the same meeting Linda Fihelly described an on-going fundraising endeavor for the Family Crisis Center, for which \$60,000 was needed above funds previously allocated. In October WAC members focused on County finances, with speakers both for and against changes in the TRIM charter provision, which was to be on the ballot in the November election.

In January 1985, as in previous years, women State legislators of Prince George's County were invited to give an overview of issues expected to come up during the forthcoming legislative session. Susan Buswell, Christine Jones, Pauline Menes, Marion Patterson, Jerry Berry, and Joan Pitkin attended. They discussed legislation to enforce child support, end discrimination against women in insurance, and deal with sexual abuse of children. In the June WAC newsletter, the editor could report the enactment of a child support enforcement bill.

The February WAC newsletter, reporting on Women's History

Week, showed that public consciousness had changed over the four years since the State project began. County Executive Parris Glendening and the County Council were to issue a proclamation and to open an exhibit in the County Administration Building of panels depicting black women in history, which had been purchased by Northern Prince George's NOW for use by the county. Although WAC no longer took a role in this particular project, the Coalition continued to monitor issues of educational equity. At the April meeting, Linda Shevitz, Sex Equity Specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education, spoke on the current status of equity for girls, including female students from minority and disabled populations.

For the first time, a truly integrated slate of officers for WAC was elected, reflecting a stipulation in the revised organizational by-laws, also adopted at the April meeting, that "Delegates who are nominated for office shall represent a broad spectrum of member organizations." New officers were: Rita Bastek (Prince George's County Extension Homemakers), president; Lona Florence (Las Amigas), vice president; Carol Chaney (Southern Prince George's NOW), secretary; and Joan Brown (Prince George's County Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta), treasurer. The nominating committee were Donna Crocker, Linda Fihelly, Lona Florence, and Mary Jo Strauss.

By-law changes clarified procedures concerning responsibilities of officers and the executive board, election procedures, and committee membership. New standing rules indicated also how certain projects of WAC had now become traditions: that a legislative briefing be held each January, that a Women's Fair be held in November, that a WAC member represent the Coalition at meetings of the Commission for Women, that the president or another delegate represent WAC on the board of the Family Crisis Center.

An agenda for the April meeting listed operating committees and their respective chairs: Audit, Sylvia Green; Building Bridges, Mary Jo Strauss and Linda Fihelly; Communications, Audrey Marra; Educational Equity and Title IX Advisory, Mary Jo Strauss; Family Crisis Center, Latrelle Jones and Rita Bastek; Legislation, Barbara Brandt and Audrey Marra; Media and Membership, Latrelle Jones; Program, Lona Florence; Women's Fair, Elsie Conway; and representative to the Commission for Women, Emma L. Andrews.

As June 1985 came around, the anniversary of the IWY breakfast that began the Coalition, members reflected that the organization would be holding its 10th anniversary in 1986. It seemed a time to celebrate!

Recalling Our History

Another regional conference of the National Women's Studies Association was held in October 1985--this time at George Washington University. Again the Women's Action Coalition presented a panel describing its own history, but with special emphasis on the Building Bridges project and the Coalition's efforts to create a truly integrated network of women. The panel was entitled "An Interracial Coalition of Women's Groups: The Women's Action Coalition of Prince George's County, Maryland." Participants were Mary Jo Strauss (Oxon Hill AAUW), Linda Fihelly (Women's Center and Referral Service), Donna Crocker (Delta Sigma Theta), and Lona Florence (Las Amigas). Virginia W. Beauchamp (College Park AAUW) was moderator. An enthusiastic audience, including the Executive Director of NWSA, asked many questions and carried on a lively exchange with the panelists.

Fall and Winter Programs

For many years WAC meetings had been held in facilities made available by the Prince George's Community College. The College had also co-hosted the annual Women's Fair and two of the Building Bridges events. So it seemed appropriate to invite as speaker for the September meeting Julie Rich, Admission Marketing Representative for the College. She showed a recruitment film and described the various academic and public-service components of the College's program.

In October Marie Mayor, Vocational Equity Specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Vocational and Technical Education Program, discussed the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act and the funds it provides for training young adults to go into nontraditional fields. The act also helps single parents and displaced homemakers with child care and transportation while they attend training programs. Ms. Mayor presented the shocking statistics that Maryland is fourth highest among the states in teen-age pregnancy and Baltimore highest among all cities in the U.S.

The 1985 Women's Fair featured as keynote speaker Carmen Turner, General Manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. She is the first female general manager of a major transit system. Elsie Conway chaired the event.

On November 17 WAC co-sponsored with the National Committee on Pay Equity and other women's and labor groups in Maryland a one-day conference on pay equity, held at Montgomery Community College in Rockville. Topics covered legislation, litigation, collective bargaining, grass roots implementation, pay equity in

automation, and countering myths and arguments. Regina Humaine of Alpha Kappa Alpha was WAC representative on the planning committee.

As usual, WAC co-sponsored the January legislative briefing for women, in conjunction with the Commissions for Women of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. For the first time, the event was held on the College Park campus of the University of Maryland--a site that received much favorable comment.

Educational Equity

WAC was still strongly involved in educational equity issues. Lona Florence, WAC vice president, was appointed to the Title IX Committee of the public school system, joining other WAC representatives Mary Jo Strauss and Jill Moss Greenberg, who had served on the committee for many years. In addition, Ms. Greenberg was instrumental in helping to form a committee on educational equity in the Prince George's County Council of Parent Teacher Associations, of which she was its first chair.

In February Mary Jo Strauss enlisted members' support in requesting funding from the Board of Education for the Title IX Committee to continue its work. She circulated a letter that had been sent to school officials in which she described practices by many teachers that continued to segregate students by sex. Although many specific programs were now sensitive to equity issues, she wrote, a pervasive climate of sex role stereotyping still prevailed among many classroom teachers. To change such a climate would require additional financial resources, the letter claimed. Although the response from the president of the Board of Education indicated that the Title IX Committee does not receive a financial allocation, the letter affirmed for the first time that the committee has the right to recommend projects through regular budgetary channels.

Special Awards

As WAC approached its tenth birthday, the organization was privileged to receive a prestigious award for its work in improving inter-racial understanding, and especially for the Building Bridges programs. This was an annual award presented by the Prince George's County chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews for improving human relations within the county. The award was presented to President Rita Bastek on behalf of the Coalition at a banquet held at the Officers Club at Andrews Air Force Base.

President Bastek also accepted an award on behalf of WAC

from the Iota Gamma Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Called the Power Award for women involved in global concerns, it was given to WAC for the Building Bridges projects, "which increased understanding among women of various races and ethnic groups." The award was presented at a banquet on April 6, 1986, at the Prince George's Community College.

A third award was given to WAC at the annual Women's Fair in November "in recognition of leadership in initiating and continued commitment to the annual Prince George's County Women's Fair, 1979-1985." All three awards, which are framed, hang on the wall in the office of the Commission for Women, in what is referred to by the Commission staff as "the WAC corner."

Spring Program

Four county leaders addressed WAC at the final meetings of spring 1986. In March County Executive Parris Glendening spoke on his economic development program for the county and on the concerns of citizens about over-development. In April Secretary of State Lorraine Sheehan described the spirit at the 1985 international conference for women in Nairobi, Kenya, and its relationship to the women's agenda in Prince George's County. In May Dr. John Murphy, Superintendent of Schools, described new initiatives within the school system in recruitment of teachers, establishment of magnet schools, and in-service training for administrators. Finally, at the June meeting Benny Thayer, Chairman of the Prince George's Rainbow Coalition, discussed coalition building, issue selection, and other aspects of political campaigning.

The organization did not discontinue all activities during the summer, as members worked on committee tasks to insure a gala Tenth Anniversary celebration. This was a banquet, which was held on September 28 at the Andrews Air Force Base Officers Club. Present were representatives of state and county government--Maryland Secretary of State Lorraine Sheehan; County Executive Parris Glendening; County Council chair, Hilda Pemberton; chair of the county's Commission for Women, Mary Ellen Jenkins. The presence at the speaker's table of Betty Turnbull, chair of the 1975 Prince George's County International Year Task Force, reminded everyone of how the coalition had first begun; and Donna Crocker, as mistress of ceremonies, and Rita Bastek, speaking as the current president, also remembered the early days.

The Coalition was honored again at the 1986 Women's Fair--the seventh since the project was first conceived. A short written history of WAC was included in the fair booklet, and a

panel discussion at the noon general session focused on issues for women still unresolved--an agenda for the future. These included women and poverty, various forms of discrimination (racism, ageism, sexism, bias against persons with disabilities), and day care for dependents of working women. Many issues dealt specifically with employment--responsiveness to needs of women workers, such as flextime, maternity leave, job sharing; discrimination in hiring and promotion; and pay equity. But increasing the numbers of women in elected and appointive governmental positions seemed to be an ever more realistic goal, as was developing further the networking, mentoring, and support groups that can make these goals possible.

The three guest speakers--Doris Houdesheldt, state president of the Federation of Business and Professional Women; Marylouise Gilkesson, state chair of the Women's Political Caucus; and Freda Kurtz, national president of Federally Employed Women--representing among themselves more than 800,000 women, gave on behalf of the women gathered there that day new dimensions to what it can mean when women unite to build effective coalitions.