



STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Leading the way

More women than ever before are at the helm of governments, businesses and nonprofits in the Stanwood-Camano area



“This is an exciting time, we are seeing those shifts — but that doesn’t mean they’re gone; those barriers are still there for us.”

— Janet St. Clair, Island County Commissioner on more women leaders in the area



Clockwise from top left: Kathy Moe, executive director of the Stanwood Camano Food Bank; Janet St. Clair, Island County commissioner; Jennifer Ferguson, Stanwood city administrator; Jean Shumate, Stanwood-Camano School District superintendent; and Jessica McCready, Camano Island Chamber of Commerce executive director. They are five of the many women leaders in the Stanwood-Camano area.

PHOTOS BY EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

By MAZEY SERVIN-OBERT
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Women in the Stanwood-Camano area have been breaking barriers and glass ceilings for decades. Women took the majority of local government leadership positions for the first time in 2018.

It’s a trend that’s been growing in the Stanwood-Camano area in recent

years, much faster than at the national level.

In 1980, women held two of the 18 combined local leadership positions in these groups: Stanwood-Camano School Board members, school superintendent, Stanwood City Council members, Stanwood mayor, Stanwood city administrator and Island County commissioners.

In 2000, four women were part of that 18-member group.

This year, women hold the majority at 61% — 11 of the 18 local government leadership positions.

For perspective, the U.S. population is 50.8% female, but women only make up about 25% of leadership positions in federal government. A quarter of U.S. senators are women now, compared to just 2% in 1991.

Locally, women also lead the two chambers of commerce, a growing number of businesses and several

large nonprofits.

“I find it to be very unique, especially because it’s such a small population — about 7,500 people in Stanwood and about 15,000 people on the island — that’s a pretty small community to have so many women leaders,” said Kathy Moe, executive director of the Stanwood Camano Food Bank.

■ SEE LEADING, A6

Island County scrambles to hire health staff replacements

Several health workers resigned

By PEGGY WENDEL
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Island County is looking to replace the public health officer, nursing director and three public health nurses who left during the COVID-19 holiday surge.

“This was an overwhelming year,”

Island County Commissioner Janet St. Clair said. “It was a significant loss of staffing.”

While the county advertises to replace the nurses, the state is providing a public health officer. The state started providing weekend case investigations on Dec. 7 and the whole program the following week, Public Health Director Keith Higman said.

“Since we passed off case investigation and contact tracing to (Department of Health), it doesn’t change the response capacity to conduct the

work. Our nursing corps are still responding to cases of other communicable diseases and they are participating in vaccine distribution planning,” Higman said.

Don Mason, Island County COVID response manager, said that Island County public health requested to fill two additional positions in November before the department lost staff. The county earlier advertised and is currently interviewing.

■ SEE HEALTH, A8


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► FROM A1

Women comprise 47% of the U.S. workforce, earn the majority of undergraduate degrees and hold about half the professional-level jobs, yet their numbers continue to be much smaller as government and business leaders across the nation.

What's different here? It's likely a mix of reasons, ranging from population to inspiration, said Janet St. Clair, who was elected as Island County commissioner in 2018, making an all-female three-member board. "There's a significant amount of women who are willing to start second careers and move into community or public service," said St. Clair, who noted the average age of a Camano Island resident is 55 — about 18 years older than the state average of 37.

She also credits local women such as former state Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen, who in 1980 was a school board member, for inspiring women to step up.

"I think it is because we are only now seeing ourselves in positions of power and seeing those opportunities open up as others go before us," St. Clair said.

Joining the ranks

After the Nov. 3 election, more women are joining the ranks statewide. In Washington, 41.5% of the representatives in the state Legislature are women, up from 32.7% in 2009.

"I would like it to not be remarkable that there are women leaders," said St. Clair. "I would like it to be just accepted. ... I hope that as my granddaughter grows that, that is the world that they get to live in and serve as leaders in." St. Clair still hears stories from women running for public office who are faced with questions like: "How are you going to do this job and to raise your children?"

"When do we ever ask men those questions?" St. Clair said.

It's been 100 years since the women's suffrage movement fought for voting rights and 55 years since the Voting Rights Act banned racial discrimination in voting practices.

Women still face a gender wage gap and represent smaller numbers in business and government leadership, though they make up nearly half of the U.S. labor force.

In 2018, women held only 10% of executive

positions, according to the Pew Research Institute. And in 2020, women only held 22.6% of community board seats across the country, according to the national advocacy group 2020 Women on Boards.

The road to equality here in Washington has been more advanced than the rest of the country, but it hasn't been easy.

"This is an exciting time, we are seeing those shifts — but that doesn't mean they're gone; those barriers are still there for us," St. Clair said.

Helen Price Johnson, who was elected the first female Island County commissioner in 2008 and who ran unsuccessfully for state Senate this year, believes having more women in leadership roles is long overdue and encourages younger women to seek those roles.

She brings up a quote from the documentary, *Becoming*, about former First Lady Michelle Obama being the nation's first Black first lady. In it, a little girl asked her if she always wanted to be first lady, and she said, "I didn't know I could be."

"That's where having role models helps younger women see they too have that capacity; that it is something they can do," Price Johnson said.

Four years after the Obamas left the White House, another woman of color, Kamala Harris, is set to become the first female vice president of the United States.

Jumping hurdles

Stanwood voters elected their first female mayor, Diane White, in 2006.

Then last year, voters elected Elizabeth Callaghan, who became the second female mayor.

"It is really a majority of women who are (working at City Hall)," said Callaghan, adding that she was encouraged as a young woman to go after whatever she wanted to do. Jennifer Ferguson, the Stanwood city administrator, and Patricia Love, the community development director, now work with Callaghan to help navigate the city through a period of unprecedented growth and a global pandemic.

Ferguson, who has been in public service for 30 years, said women still face plenty of hurdles in advancing into leadership positions.

"I had experienced (barriers) along the road because the glass ceiling is

real," she said.

Jean Shumate took over as Stanwood-Camano School District superintendent in 2001.

When she first came to the School District as a superintendent, a community member told her that women couldn't be superintendents.

"I didn't let that bother me. I've been in my career for 44 years. ... I just have learned to not get caught up in those types of comments and not let them bother me," Shumate said. "I just continue to do my job as best as I can and hope to always be recognized for that."

Now, women hold three of the five elected school board seats, including two newly elected in 2019 and board President Natalie Hagglund.

Leading in business

While political leadership has more women, female business leaders remain scarce across the nation. Just 5.1% of U.S. CEOs and 11.5% of top company executives are women, according to the Pew Research Center.

But there was recent advancement. In November, the Wall Street Journal reported that late 2020 saw a record 41 female CEOs running Fortune 500 companies.

The Stanwood-Camano area was already a trendsetter in business, too. According to U.S. Census data, there were 142 women-owned businesses in the Stanwood-Camano area in 2012.

Elaine Traversi, Stanwood Chamber of Commerce executive director, said Stanwood continues to see more women entrepreneurs.

"I definitely noticed a trend," Traversi said. "A lot of our business owners that are members of the chambers are women-owned businesses." Some women in Stanwood have long lines of female leaders in their families, such as Traci Smith, owner of Picnic Pantry. She has owned her business since the 1990s, and the entrepreneur lifestyle started with her grandmother.

"I feel like the Stanwood-Camano area has even more female business owners, leaders and people of influence in our area," Smith said. In 2017, 36% of all businesses in the U.S., from small ones to high-profile startups, were owned by women, according to the state Department

of Commerce.

Jessica McCready, executive director of the Camano Island Chamber of Commerce, remembers a time when, as one of the only women executives, she was often treated like an assistant.

"So I was often asked to go get coffee ... you look back on that just with a different perspective," she said. "I was young, and I was female and I did. I would go get coffee because I thought I was just being nice. But you look back at it and think 'why was I the one getting people coffee?'"

Now, McCready said women in the Stanwood-Camano area are increasingly taking charge.

"We have a lot of women business owners in the area that are obviously leaders in the community, as well," she said.

Changing times

In the Stanwood-Camano area, many nonprofits are led by women, such as the Camano Center, Stanwood-Camano Area Foundation and the Community Resource Center of Stanwood Camano.

While times are changing, Kathy Moe remembers when women didn't have as many options as men. A pregnant working woman did not have maternity leave or a guarantee she could return to her job after giving birth.

Moe, now 60, said she had to go back to work when her baby was three weeks old.

The Paid Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 gave women more protections.

"You have a lot more options at 20 now than I had at 20," Moe said.

While gender equality issues remain a concern in the U.S., the Stanwood-Camano area seems to be embracing women in leadership roles, those interviewed by the Stanwood Camano News said.

"I think there are negatives in any industry of being a woman — at a time where people don't think you are as competent as a male in that role. But I have not felt that here in the Stanwood-Camano area," said Bonnie Eckley, executive director of the Camano Center.

Eckley, also a small business owner, said she thinks women soon will step into even more leadership roles across the nation.

"It's just as we start breaking down barriers and having things such as a vice president that's a woman," Eckley said. "I think it helps our children learn: 'Hey I can do that.'"

OBITUARIES



KENNETH B. STENSEN
January 7, 1962 - December 25, 2020

Kenneth B. Stensen was born January 7, 1962 and passed away suddenly December 25, 2020.

Ken attended school in Stanwood and graduated from WSU in 1985 with a double major in finance and accounting. Ken worked for Twin City Foods in Lake Odessa, Mich., as Division Manager retiring in 2019 due to heart condition.

Growing up in Stanwood, Ken was a good son, brother and athlete with an abundance of friends.

He is survived by his parents Scott and Bernice Stensen of Stanwood, sister Shelly and Colin Kertson of Graham, Wash. He was a great father to his three daughters Lauren, Taylor and Nicole of Lansing Mich., and the girls' mother Kerry of Lansing Mich.

Any memorials may be given to the American Heart Association at www.heart.org



LORRAINE ROTTRUP ATKINSON
August 19, 1930 - December 19, 2020

On December 19, 2020, Lorraine Rottrup Atkinson went home to be with her Lord and Savior. Lorraine was born August 19, 1930 in Watertown, South Dakota to her Danish immigrant parents, Irvin and Elsie Rottrup. At age 14, Lorraine moved with her family to Washington State. She resided in Des Moines where she attended and graduated from Highline High School. Lorraine attended Seattle Pacific College where she met her husband, Donald V. Atkinson. She graduated from San Francisco State College with an education degree. Lorraine served as a pastor's wife for many years and was also a librarian in the Marysville School District and at Seattle Pacific University.

Lorraine and Don moved to the Warm Beach Senior Community in the early 1990s. They were active members in the Warm Beach Free Methodist Church.

Lorraine was preceded in death by her husband, Donald, her parents Irvin and Elsie Rottrup and her brother Stanley. She leaves behind her twin sister, Elaine Rottrup Reiff Andvik, her brother Lowell Rottrup and her two daughters, Christine (Greg) Shaw of Lapeer Mich., Karen (Robert) DeVries of Sultan, Wash., five grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.



LINDA MARIE UTGARD
September 2, 1952 - December 20, 2020

Linda Marie Utgard, 68, of Stanwood, Wash., passed away Sunday, December 20, 2020 from complications due to a fall in her home in early October.

Linda was the first born child to Irving B. Utgard and Margaret J. (Brovold) Utgard on September 02, 1952 in Mount Vernon, Wash. She grew up in the Cedarhome area, was confirmed at Zion Lutheran Church, was in Camp Fire Girls and graduated with the Stanwood High School Class of 1970.

Linda began her working career in 1970 as a checker at Thrifty Foods in Stanwood and worked there 17 years. She knew everyone and everyone knew her. She then worked briefly in Olympia for the Washington State House of Representatives as a committee clerk. She then moved on to the City of Everett where she worked as a Water Conservation Specialist. She also worked briefly for the City of Stanwood as a Secretary/Census Administrator.

Linda was currently working as a Natural Resource Technician processing Forest Practice Permits for the State of Washington, Department of Natural Resources in Sedro-Woolley where she had been employed for 25 years. She enjoyed her job there and her coworkers. Linda had served on the Stanwood City Council and currently served on the City of Stanwood Planning Commission. She enjoyed going to UW Husky football games for many years. She loved books and was an avid reader.

Linda is survived by her mother, Margaret Utgard, sisters, Janet (Scott Shroyer) Utgard and Barbara (Craig) Young, brother, Jeff Utgard, nieces, Melissa Young and Nicole (Josh) Erhman, great nieces and nephews, Jennifer, Kevin, Zoey, Ashley, Peyton and Ronon, great great nephew and niece, Austin and Eva, and cousins.

She was preceded in death by grandparents Dewey and Clara Utgard and John and Nora Brovold, father, Irving Utgard and aunts, uncles and cousins.

Memorials may be made in Linda's name to the Stanwood Area Historical Society, PO Box 69, Stanwood, WA 98292 or to a favorite charity.

Due to Covid restrictions a private family service will be held at Anderson Cemetery under the direction of Gilbertson Funeral Home.

OBITUARY NOTICES

Obituary notices may be sent by using an online form at scnews.com/obituaries, by email to obits@scnews.com along with a photo attached, or by mail to Stanwood Camano NEWS, P.O. Box 999, Stanwood, WA, 98292. The fee to print an obituary is \$10.90 per column inch, including the photo. A short death announcement the week prior to the full obituary will be printed at no charge. An obituary may be linked to an online guest book for an additional \$30 charge. For more information call 360-629-2155.

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