

# Working for Watsonville

## Community benefits from Soldo's success

By DIANE NOLAND  
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Personally, professionally and politically, Watsonville native Ann Matiasovich Soldo exemplifies success.

Awards fill a wall in her home attesting to her many achievements. Her resume of community affiliations and leadership roles in education and politics fill more than a typed single-spaced page. Twice breaking ground professionally and politically, Soldo was appointed the first woman principal at the junior high level in Watsonville and elected the city's first woman mayor.

"All of us (my brother and sisters) talk about it now — and we don't really know how she did it — but it was our mother who instilled in us the need and the self-confidence to succeed," Soldo said.

Soldo's mother, Lucy Matiasovich, raised her children as a single parent. Soldo's father, Nick Matiasovich, died one month before his fifth child, Ann, was born.

Educated at Pajaro School, Soldo returned there to do her student teaching while working on her bachelor's degree in elementary education at San Jose

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Michael McCollum

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# SOLDO

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State College. A few years later, she became a full-time teacher at Pajaro. She also studied summers at Stanford University, where she earned her master's degree in 1954.

"My teaching career was the highlight of my life," she said.

Her first teaching job was fifth and sixth grade at E.A. Hall School in 1942. Her salary: \$110 a month.

"I had no car. The principal picked me up every day. Then, shortly after the war broke out, all the men were drafted and they needed a bus driver. It was a 28-passenger bus — a little bus. It was great because I drove the bus home, and I had my own transportation. I got \$45 for the bus (driving job). That really made me feel great."

During the war, Soldo got the chance to coach seventh and eighth grade boys' athletics.

"We only had women teachers," she said. "After school, I was asked to coach football, baseball, basketball and track — and I loved it. My brothers played football, especially my brother, John. I asked John to give me some plays so I'd know what to do. He diagrammed end runs and told me all about what a quarterback does — and the rest of the positions. So, my first meeting, I put the diagrams up on the board and I said, 'This is the way we're going to play.' The kids already knew — but I had to let them know that I knew too."

"We were a strong, strong team," she said. The Pajaro team received a trophy, which is still on display at Pajaro School.

In 1950, Soldo went "overseas." She applied to teach two years in the U.S. Army Schools in Stuttgart, Germany.

Touring with other teachers or tour groups, Soldo saw Europe and even went to Algiers and the Atlas mountains, which are a chain near the Sahara Desert. Once she stayed in an Arab village, rode a camel and went to camel races.

She also traveled to the former Yugoslavia and visited the Konalve Valley, her father's birthplace, and her mother's family's home. It was a tearful reunion with her Croatian relatives. She returned there three times, once with her husband, Andrew, in 1971, who was born in Yugoslavia.

The Soldos were married in 1956, during the year Soldo was promoted to principal of McQuiddy School.

As with her profession, her marriage also offered opportunities to expand her repertoire of skills. Her husband hosted the Yugoslav Radio Hour on Station KOMY in Watsonville. Soldo earned a third-class radio

operator's license and became the show's DJ.

Meanwhile, her career in education expanded to include principal of the Tri-County School for the Deaf as well as principal of McQuiddy and eventually principal at Aptos Junior High in 1972.

"That was a challenge," she said. "It was a whole new view and a real job. I used to describe it to my husband (like this): On the way to school at 7:30, I felt like a chicken with all my feathers — ready to go. On the way home, I felt like I'd been plucked."

One nice thing was that her husband was not involved in education, so life after work was a complete respite, she said. He was a chef at the Resetar Hotel during their early years and opened Andy's Coffee Shop in East Lake Village Shopping Center about 1965.

When Soldo retired in 1978, she decided to run for City Council.

"I had a wonderful manager, Bridey Franich," Soldo said. "She had a lot of political know-how. I only spent \$1,200 (on the campaign) — for ads in the newspaper and cards that said 'Elect Ann Soldo, City Council' — no placards, no flyers, no TV or radio advertising."

Three new council members were voted in, and Soldo received the highest number of votes.

"A lot of people said, 'You had so many kids (former students) out there; that's why you won,'" she said.

While she doesn't heartily dispute the idea, she said expertise with budgets and good personnel skills along with a desire to make decisions that reflected the needs of residents were her political strengths.

Soldo had served on the city council five years when she won over five men, one a longtime councilman, Rex Clark, in the 1983 mayoral race.

"I feel women need to be involved in politics," Soldo said. "I would like to see more women on the City Council. We only have one (now). We should have at least three. I would love to have four — that's a majority vote," she quipped.

Retired now from teaching and from active political involvement, Soldo continues to work for the community.

She spent eight years helping to bring the Mello Center to fruition and continues to support "the jewel of this community."

She also serves on the advisory board of the Salvation Army's new program, Pros for Youth.

"The last six months I've been thinking I have to stop being chairman of these committees and then something like this comes along," Soldo said. "It's the story of my life."