

Women mayors tell of past, future battles

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SANTA CRUZ — An exclusive club that proves power has little to do with stature got together Wednesday afternoon to reminisce.

Its members are the five women who have been mayor of Santa Cruz. By coincidence, all are on the short side of the 5-foot range.

Not so strangely, the women have had their share of battles with a system that before 1967 was an only-males-need-apply institution.

"When I got on the council, the six other men didn't know what to do with me," said Lorette Wood, who was the first woman elected to the City Council, and was named mayor in 1970.

Following her were mayors Sally DiGirolamo (1974), Mardi Wormhoudt (1984, 1988 and 1989), Jane Weed (1986) and Jane Yokoyama (1990).

The five spoke to the UC Santa Cruz Women's Club, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

DiGirolamo remembered early in her term having a conversation with a male staff member about why pregnancies weren't covered in the health plan.

He said "pregnancy was an accident and therefore not covered," said DiGirolamo. "I said, 'I don't think your mother would feel that way — an accident card instead of a Mother's Day card.'"

DiGirolamo said she began networking with others in the state until women workers began getting health benefits for pregnan-



Lorette Wood was the city's first woman mayor in 1970.



Sally DiGirolamo pushed for parkland in the city.



Jane Yokoyama
Mayor's term ends Nov. 26



Mardi Wormhoudt
Left a 'balanced' council



Jane Weed
Activist for many causes

cies.

Wormhoudt, who labeled herself "the tall one" of the group, remembered watching the recent Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearing with what she called "14 bewildered, bemused white males sitting there" in judgment.

"Well, that's a little bit how I felt in 1980," said Wormhoudt about being elected to the again all-male council.

In 1981, said Wormhoudt, there were no women department heads in the city, few in management positions and only a handful on the council's advisory boards.

But in the decade since, she said, things have turned around for women.

"The legacy I leave is a council that is healthy, that is balanced," said Wormhoudt. "A council that, I hope, will never again be in a position of making decisions on women's issues without any women."

ment Center while the votes were being counted. Weed said one of the reasons she was encouraged to run despite plans for having another child was because it would force the "male-dominated council" to broaden their understanding of family needs.

An activist who has fought for environmental protection, alternative energy sources, recycling and peace, Weed said she also worked with other council members to stabilize funding for human services.

"My conscience would not be settled if I drove across the city on roads with no potholes ... if I knew people were going hungry," said Weed.

Yokoyama, who will end her year as mayor on Nov. 26, said she was the first person of color to be elected to the council.

The odds against her when she ran were so stiff that she decided not to go to the County Govern-

ment Center while the votes were being counted.

To her surprise, said Yokoyama, she was the highest vote-getter in the campaign.

Just two months after succeeding Wormhoudt as mayor, Yokoyama entertained a delegation of Rotarians from South Africa.

"They said they had a gift for the mayor," said Yokoyama. "They pulled out a neck tie and cuff links. ... We still have the whole world that's not quite there yet, and we have a lot of work to do."

Although more women are getting involved in local politics, Yokoyama said they still face a tough personal battle because many of them are supporting themselves.

"The challenges for women to be in office are so great that sometimes it's tempting not to run," she said.

Financial rewards for being a

council member have gotten better over the years.

Wood said she got \$5 a meeting. That's a far cry from the \$500 a month, plus \$350 for monthly expenses that council members get today. And the mayor receives \$1,000 a month.

To get her \$5 every two weeks, Wood squeaked by in her first election on a mere seven-vote cushion.

During that campaign, said Wood, she "heard one man say he didn't know why Mr. Wood let his wife run."

Although that attitude has changed, said Wood, other concerns around the city have not.

During her time on the council in the late 1960s and early '70s, the hot issues were traffic (including a proposed Broadway-Brommer extension), UCSC growth and the Neary Lagoon sewer-treatment plant.

DiGirolamo pushed for parkland throughout the city, fighting both City Hall and the Sentinel, which she said accused her of only wanting a park in her neighborhood because it would increase property value.

No one would use it, DiGirolamo said the newspaper predicted.

Today, she visits the widely used park with her granddaughter and namesake, Sally DiGirolamo, and loves to say, "See, there's our name."

But DiGirolamo said she doesn't think of her council years very often. "It's sort of like having a scarlet past that one likes to cover up."

Along with the parks, DiGirolamo pointed to another accomplishment that stands to this day: The city manager no longer sits next to the mayor during council meetings, but down to one side of the members.

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