

Brief History of NJSFWC Public Issues Day

Public Issues Day, originally known as Public Affairs Day, has its roots deep in the NJSFWC tradition of pro-activism in legislation, to better communities and society as a whole. The inception of the day was at the NJSFWC Board Meeting held in March 1908 at The Contemporary – Trenton’s club house.

The March 1908 day’s agenda included discussion on the establishment of a suitable memorial at the Palisades, in recognition of the NJSFWC’s preservation and the work of club women to establish national forests and parks east of the Mississippi River. Equal suffrage for women was also discussed. The Board Meeting produced a resolution in support of a reformatory for women and another resolution against vivisection. (Note: Vivisection refers to the dissection of, or any cutting or surgery upon, a living organism. More broadly, it is sometimes used to describe any invasive experiment upon living animals. For some, the word has a pejorative connotation, implying torture and suffering.)

Clubs were urged to hold a civic meeting on March 10 of each year. The idea was later expanded to include the recommendation that each district hold a Public Affairs/Legislative Day. Resources for these days, on the club and district level, were available through the State Legislative and Civic Department. This department worked for civic and social betterment through forum and panel discussions. The NJ Constitution and its possible revision were studied. The year, 1922, saw the birth of the “ClipSheet” which kept clubs informed of pending bills and activities in the NJ State Legislature. Clubs generously supported the Legislative Fund, which financed the assembly and distribution of information on pending legislation. (The panels and forums, as well as the Legislative Fund, occurred between 1941-1944.)

The 1940s saw a District Public Conference, held in Newark, at which eight districts participated. Participants studied a NJ Constitutional revision, labor legislation, merger of the Armed Forces and a panel discussion on present and post-war problems, relating to compulsory military training (1944-1947).

Club members participated in a two-day conference on Civic Rights (1947-1950) and a review conference on the United Nations Charter (1953-1956). A review of all resolutions adopted by the NJSFWC was completed by the State Resolutions Committee. During Mrs. Alton’s administration (1958 – 1960), the resolutions began being reviewed every 3 years for timeliness.

Between 1960–1964, the State Legislative Days were held in Trenton. The Legislative Day held in 1964 had its highest number in attendance. Governor Richard Hughes spoke at the morning session. Mrs. Lavenia Taylor, NJSFWC President, was given the privilege of the floor and allowed to speak to the NJ General Assembly and Senate. Afterwards, she was presented with an American flag.

The Governor and Mrs. Cahill congratulated a capacity crowd on the NJSFWC's Diamond Jubilee, at the Legislative Luncheon held in Trenton in 1969. The following year (1970), NJSFWC President Dorothy McGlade spoke before the NJ Assembly and Senate on Legislative Day.

The March 22, 1971 Legislative Luncheon was held at the Holiday Inn in Trenton. Governor Cahill and 18 legislators spoke on pending legislation to 600 interested club women. Later, clubwomen occupied reserved seats in the State House and viewed the Legislature in session. NJSFWC President Dorothy Weinheimer was presented in both the Senate and Assembly.

The 77th Annual NJSFWC Convention (1971) featured a Civics and Legislation Seminar at which State Senator Robert E. Kay was the main speaker. 500 club women attended the Legislative Luncheon held in Trenton on March 20, 1972. The guests of honor were Governor and Mrs. William T. Cahill.

A program of speeches pertaining to pending legislation attracted 340 club women to a Legislative Brunch held on March 3, 1975. Legislative Brunches were also held on April 3, 1978 and on March 29, 1982.

The long-standing tradition of holding Legislative Luncheons at the Battleground Country Club commenced on March 28, 1983. The event was billed as a Public Affairs Luncheon. 409 attendees listened to the guest speaker, U.S. Senator Bill Bradley. In 2003, then Senator Jon Corzine spoke at the day's event.

In 1994, held at The Contemporary - Trenton, Legislative Day was re-activated under the direction of Mary Lou Phifer, NJSFWC Legislation Chairman, giving women the opportunity to meet the legislators. Public Affairs and/or Legislative Days have continued since that time with interesting and informative speakers providing valuable resources to club women. In March 2007, NJSFWC club women traveled to Washington, D.C. After a briefing prepared by the NJSFWC Legislation/Resolutions Chairman on pending federal legislation, club women met with members of New Jersey Congressional Delegation.

The Contemporary – Trenton was the site of the 100th Anniversary NJSFWC Public Affairs Day held on March 17, 2008. During the morning session, club women were briefed on legislation important to the membership, including the Domestic Violence Health Care Response Act, Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act and a resolution to the Constitution which would create a stable source of income for the preservation of open space, drinking water resources, farmland and historic sites. During the lunch break, club women wrote letters to members of the NJ Legislature urging passage of legislation to establish the New Jersey Task Force on Domestic Violence and Abuse.

The legacy of Public Issues Days is the history of community advocacy, by informed women, through the legislative process.