

MEMBERSHIP AND PHILANTHROPY TRENDS

How the Alamo Women's Club approached fundraising, philanthropy, recruiting members and technology changed during its 106 years of existence. You may not know about these interesting membership and philanthropy changes. Let's explore:

Membership Trends: The process of accepting new members changed over time.

- At the Club's founding between 1916 and 1921, members were mothers of elementary school children. When AWC affiliated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1921 membership was expanded beyond mothers of school-aged children and included women of all ages.
- From 1921 until the late 1980's new members were juried, much like a sorority, and needed to be sponsored by another member.
- In the first half of the century, like other clubs, membership in AWC increased. Though Alamo was a small community until the 1970's, AWC membership was huge in comparison. Membership was capped at 200 in the 60's and there was a waiting list!
- At the same time the Club shifted away from being a mainly social club in that it awarded a few monetary donations and coordinated several hands-on projects which offered more community support. In fact, in 1968 AWC members actually eliminated the wording 'social club' from its Bylaws and stated, "*The purpose of this organization shall be to bring together people who are interested in public welfare, moral, philanthropic, and civic interests of the community...*"! This trend continues today as



many members join because of the Club's focus on supporting the community.



Demographically, too, the membership itself changed. It shifted from young mothers of elementary school-aged children to being open to all women. After WWII, women entered the workforce more frequently and many speculate it was a main reason for beginning civic disengagement in clubs nationwide. Others believe disenfranchisement of the Hippie Generation was responsible.

For AWC, when members aged during the 1980's and left the membership, no new members replaced them until later when women's free time became more abundant. This lack of new members combined with the national trends meant decreasing membership continued into the 1990's and 2000's. Membership in AWC was as low as 38 and the leaders in 2010 began actively recruiting new members including inviting friends and neighbors, advertising in local newspapers, displaying membership banners on Danville Boulevard, and inviting community leaders into membership. By 2014 membership grew to over 100 but has since stabilized at around 80.



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Philanthropy Trends: Pre-2000, the Club made donations to many philanthropic entities with widely different focuses. Monetary donations varied per philanthropy and were largely based upon specific requests from each philanthropy.

During WWII there were many hands-on participatory projects as members chose to routinely meet their war time 'Red Cross sewing quotas'. These quotas are often mentioned in newspaper articles in the Club's scrapbooks. In 1950, according to one article published after the war, it's noted the "*women were busy making glazed bean pots!*"



During this time period many social parties, teas, dinners, and card groups became the Club's main activities.

In the years following WWII, other than sending a check to a philanthropy when asked, there appears to be little dialogue between the Club and its philanthropies, and few hands-on projects for members. There are a couple of exceptions, like Hospice of the East Bay which the Club began supporting in 1984 with an annual tree lighting and remembrance ceremony. Until 2015, members reached out to the public to "sell lights" to remember loved



ones which raised funds for Hospice. Members sold to the community sitting at Richard's Crafts store in Alamo Plaza. When the craft store closed, AWC continued selling the lights, mostly to members, each December as is done to this day. The tree lighting is well-attended and has become a tradition for AWC.

2010 to 2015 a new system was put into place under the Philanthropy Chair by appointing a member Liaison to each charity. This was a big

change as it resulted in consolidating the philanthropy partners, improving communications with each partner, and having the Club's budget set aside specific annual donation dollars for each philanthropy. The philanthropy team targeted sectors members indicated wanting to help: hospice, animals, foster youth, etc. Then the Liaisons began to dialogue and work with the charity to coordinate hands-on projects for members. Today, AWC supports eight philanthropy partners, provides monetarily donations to each, and due to the Liaisons' diligent work since 2010 establishes hands-on events enjoyed by the membership.

AWC's Philanthropy Partners*

- ❖ Canine Companions for Independence
- ❖ Friday Night Out
- ❖ George Mark Children's House
- ❖ Hospice East Bay
- ❖ Penny Pines
- ❖ Volunteer and Emergency Services, Team in Action (VESTIA)
- ❖ We Care Services for Children
- ❖ Youth Homes

In Summary. AWC recognized declines in membership but through the years, found ways to adapt to keep the roster vibrant and viable. Similarly, philanthropy trends were recognized, and positive changes were made. Today the Club is well placed in welcoming new members with a varied menu of opportunity to donate time, gifts and dollars. As in the past AWC will undoubtedly adapt for the challenges and trends of the future.

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*Each philanthropy has a history of how it unified with AWC to help in the community. To learn more about philanthropy relationships and history, visit the AWC website in Philanthropy History articles of January and February 2019.