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THE HISTORY OF WAHHI
IS PART OF THE HISTORY OF
HILTON HEAD ISLAND

OUR BEGINNING

In the spring of 1960, seven friends gathered on the front porch of Nancy McBride's home in Sea Pines for afternoon tea. The conversation turned to Coligny Circle and how, with a little care, it could become a beautiful spot. The women went to work on beautifying the circle, grew their group to 23, and founded the Hilton Head Island Garden Club in January 1961.

Though much is different, the original goals of the group have not changed. WAHHI exists to:

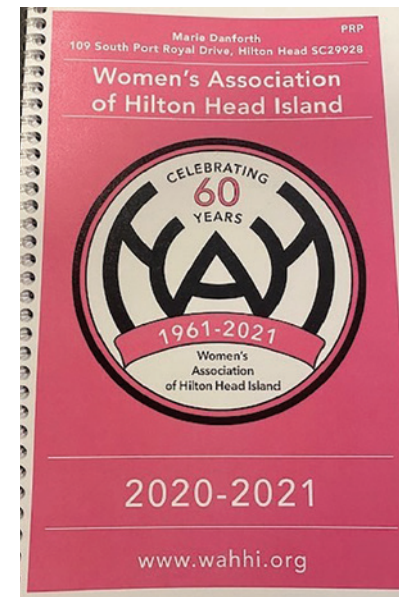
- Promote the natural and cultural beauty of the Island;
- Encourage projects which benefit the community; and
- Facilitate communication among the women of the Island.

Volunteers completed the project after four years of picking up debris, cutting back vines and undergrowth, having trees removed, and planting azaleas throughout the area. The group garnished support and assistance from the Hilton Head Company, Sea Pines Company, and Hilton Head Island Water Authority.

The Garden Club later partnered with the Hilton Head Island Historical Society to begin to restore the Zion Chapel of Ease Cemetery. The restoration started a partnership that flourished as each organization evolved and became established permanent organizations. By 1965 the Hilton Head Island Garden Club expanded to 56 members, and the organization's changed its name to the Women's Association of Hilton Head Island.



Coligny Circle, 2020



2020-21 Membership remains strong with over 600 members on Hilton Head Island, Bluffton and Daufuskie Island.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in WAHHI means that you are part of the largest local women's community. Membership today includes women residing on Hilton Head Island, Daufuskie Island, in the Town of Bluffton, and in those communities in Beaufort County that lie south and east of the intersection of Hwy 170 and Hwy 278 and that have direct access to Hwy 278 or access feeder roads that lie within the boundaries between the Okatie and May Rivers.

Beginning with the 23 founding members of The Garden Club in 1961, the number of members expanded as Hilton Head Island's population multiplied. By June of 1968, The Garden Club boasted 191 members, 64 of whom were new residents who had joined since October 1967.

By 1974 membership topped 400 women, even though membership dues had increased to \$5. In the early 1980s, there were about 600 members. During the Association's 25th Silver Anniversary year in 1985-86, Membership jumped to almost 1,000. WAHHI recorded record enrollment in 1996 when there were more than 1,300 members.

As Island neighborhoods grew in the 1990s, many formed their own Women's Clubs, causing WAHHI membership to decline. The 2001-2002 Membership Directory reported approximately 450 members. In 2021 during the COVID pandemic, membership has remained strong at over 625 members.

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

The cornerstone of WAHHI is the longstanding tradition of quarterly membership meetings over a luncheon, allowing members to meet, network, enjoy a meal, and form a community. Early meetings of WAHHI generally consisted of a business meeting where Committee Chairs (some Committees evolved into Interest Groups) reported on their progress and upcoming events. The first documented luncheon program was a lecture and slide show by Orion Hack on “Native Wild Flowers” presented at the Adventure Inn in June 1963.

Currently, the Association has records of 86 luncheons – occasionally, there were brunches and high teas – that took place from December 1983 to February 2020. Speakers have included authors, historians, local celebrities, chefs, and lecturers; performances from musicians, singers, storytellers; and fashion shows that were very popular during the first 50 years.

As expected in 60 years, traditions have evolved and now include: Interest Group sign up at the fall luncheon, the Annual Toy Drive for local children at the December luncheon; a community service project in conjunction with February luncheon, such as the Cookies for First Responders Drive; and the Youth Community Service Awards and WAHHI Charitable Fund grants.

In 2017 a new tradition was introduced to our luncheon programs – a WAHHI special cocktail. The addition added creativity and continues an early tradition of serving punch at WAHHI Christmas luncheons and welcoming coffees. The story goes that the punch recipe called for Sprite, however over time, there was speculation and rumor that Champagne was replacing the Sprite. Members hoping to get insight on the punch debate consulted the cookbook prepared by WAHHI for the 50th Anniversary Celebration, “Garnished with Gold.” Not lending any clarity to the question, the cookbook contains two punch recipes. One is the “WAHHI Welcoming Punch Recipe” which does not contain Champagne but does contain Sprite. The other is a recipe for “Christmas Punch” which does call for Champagne. The mystery remains!



September 2020 meeting and luncheon outside at the Coastal Discovery Museum



April 2018 Luncheon with Volunteer Appreciation Recognition

FACILITATING COMMUNICATION

Facilitating communication among women is an important component of the WAHHI mission. That facet of our mission is important because, in the beginning, WAHHI actually facilitated communication among all islanders.

Corinne Van Landingham, WAHHI President 1967-68 reported: “We all missed a local newspaper so much in the early years. The biggest news place in the 1960s was the very large bulletin board on the side of the Bank of Beaufort building at Coligny Plaza. Everyone was welcome to attach notices of things for sale, wanted notices, meeting announcements or rooms for rent, etc. I remember seeing one that said “Eddie sorry I couldn’t make it at 2 pm. See you Friday same place.”

Eventually, some of the WAHHI members typed up a sheet with Island news and distributed it. This informal Island newsletter was first published in January 1965, just before the Garden Club decided to become the Women’s Association. By 1967, the Island Bulletin was being produced and distributed weekly and mailed to subscribers for \$3.50 a year. A new interest group named Reporters was formed that year to facilitate the task.

When The Island Packet came to town and replaced the Bulletin in July 1970, The Packet’s first customers were the 362 newsletter subscribers on WAHHI’s mailing list. Editor Jonathan Daniels recruited Van Landingham to write a regular column, “Sand Dollars,” for the fledgling newspaper, a task she nervously took on and continued for 20 years. A collection of some of her columns, many of which highlighted Women’s Association activities, was later compiled into a book. Several other “alumnae” of the WAHHI newsletter were also contributors to The Packet through the years. The Pink Paper, the Women’s Association’s organizational newsletter today, was started in August 1999 as a four-page publication to replace the president’s letter, which had previously been mailed to members to tell them of the upcoming luncheon program.

WAHHI entered the age of technology in 2007 with the development of a website that enhanced communication possibilities. Today, communications include a robust website, eblasts delivered to emails, event publications (such as the Pink Ribbon), social media sites with Facebook and Instagram, public relations and other communications lead by talented, committed volunteer members.



William Hilton Inn was a frequent venue for early WAHHI gatherings

INTEREST GROUPS

Interest Groups are another cornerstone of WAHHI. They are one of the reasons for the diversity and camaraderie of the organization. In 1965, WAHHI originally formed nine Interest Groups, including Gardening, Flower Arranging, Arts and Crafts, Cooking, Literary Study, Bridge, Cultural Affairs, Welcoming Committee, and Civic Affairs. Through the years, WAHHI has offered hundreds of interest groups—in sciences, languages, arts, sports, self-improvement, music, exercise, home improvement, literature, history, games, gardening, women's issues, and food. As of September 2020, there are over 43 diverse interest groups for our Members to join. Due to the COVID pandemic, some groups continued to meet outside in parks, member's backyards or even on the beach. Some groups also adopted the use of Zoom video technology to stay connected.



Movies, Matinees and Munchies Interest Group



Golf Interest Group with both lessons and playing

Popular Interest Groups

The Out to Lunch Bunch has been active since 1991. Members visit local restaurants in Hilton Head and Bluffton for fellowship and fun. In 1993 it became so popular that it had to split into two groups! Attendance for this interest group is so high that frequently, the restaurants that only served dinner opened to accommodate attendees! As of September 2020, the Out to Lunch Bunch had 180 members.

Cultural Affairs was one of the original interest groups in 1965. Its founders' initial mission was to make Association members aware of cultural activities that were going on in the area. But by 1969, they changed their name to The Gadabouts and essentially became the WAHHI travel agent during the 1970s. Members took trips all over the region; one such trip included traveling to Savannah by limousine, purchasing a \$12.70 theater ticket, and dining at the famous Pink House Restaurant. They also visited the Georgia Governor's Mansion in 1972, where Lillian Carter, mother of then Gov. Jimmy Carter, welcomed them. They boarded the Nancy Hanks, a train that traveled between Savannah and Atlanta, for a two-day girls' trip to Atlanta for "dogwood blossom time." Later the Gadabouts became more adventurous, enjoying a train tour to see Blue Ridge autumn foliage, organizing a New York theater trip, cruising the Caribbean, and jaunting to New Orleans, London and Paris. WAHHI continues with travel-oriented groups today including Women Travelling Overseas Together or Women Traveling Together Abroad.

Some interest groups outgrew their WAHHI affiliation and became independent efforts. An early herb group, formed after a WAHHI program in 1974, branched out to create the Hilton Head Herb Society in 1978. One of the most notable groups that "moved up" from the Association was Genealogy. Starting as Finding Your Family Tree in 1972, its members later changed their name to Genealogy. They then became the independent Hilton Head Island Genealogy Society in 1983 when they partnered with what became the Heritage Library Foundation. This partnership is still strong today.

AMBASSADORS

Welcoming newcomers to Hilton Head Island is a longstanding WAHHi tradition. The first Welcoming Committee was formed in 1965 as an Interest Group with members calling on new residents to acquaint them with the services and information available on the Island. In the early days, the committee was the Island's "Welcome Wagon." Gatherings for new residents came in the form of Informational Coffees, Meet and Greets, etc. This tradition still stands today, and the Association generally hosts three to six events annually. In 1992 the Ambassadors purchased a silver teapot and punch bowl from a local jeweler and were used for many years at welcoming functions.

In 1990 WAHHi formed Newcomer's Club, and in 2002 a Newcomers Chairwoman was appointed to help assimilate new members into WAHHi. Today, our Hospitality Ambassadors represent our local neighborhoods to welcome new members and recruit prospective members. They also assist at WAHHi events, especially at quarterly membership meetings/luncheons.

The active Hospitality Ambassadors in 2020-21 had to get creative to stay connected. They conducted smaller neighborhood group "meet ups" outside in backyards or driveways versus more formal and larger programs. Our new member orientation program used Zoom technology to meet new members and welcome them to our Association.



Past President Annette Martino serving coffee to Patsy Scruggs.

WAHHi VOLUNTEERS

The Civic Affairs Interest Group was formed to organize community aid and volunteerism in the early years of the Association. In the late 60's, Members led a fundraiser for the Mental Health Association, sponsored a legislative seminar on South Carolina health and education problems, was involved in "The War on Hunger" led by Senator Fritz Hollings. In 1967, the Group, led by Billie Hack, was also instrumental in securing a building for the Island's daycare center for working parents that assured accessible and affordable services. The building is now known as the Children's Center.

The Difference Makers Interest Group was founded in 2014 by President Donna Manske. It offers members opportunities to volunteer for short-term community service projects that "make a difference in a day." In 2019-2020, Difference Makers had 172 members co-chaired by Connie Berding and Barb McGee. In the September 2019 Pink Paper, Barb McGee wrote, "each year, we meet in the fall to brainstorm for projects. Many look forward to continuing our past years' projects and finding new places to serve." That year the Difference Makers supported 16 different organizations amassing 547 volunteer hours by 287 members!

The Fun Raising Funds Interest Group was launched in 2018 by Tamra Avrit, WAHHi President 2020-2021. The group's goal is to raise funds to support the WAHHi Charitable Fund and the Youth Community Service Awards and have fun while doing it. The first year (2018-2019) was very successful - the group exceeded its goal of raising \$10,000 and raised \$16,000. The members spend their planning and implementing silent auctions, partnering with retailers for "Shop or Dine for a Cause" for our membership and the public, logo merchandise sales, raffles, golf tournament, dinners, and other events.



*Susan Flynn (left)
Difference Makers
Camelia Garden
caretakers, 2020 (right)*



*Difference Makers Kay Williams and Anne Marie Lauzon collect Holiday toys for needy children. (left)
Difference Makers volunteers made Valentine's Day tray favors for Meals on Wheels trays. (right)*

GIFTS, DONATIONS, AND THE CHARITABLE FUND

In 2016-2017, the WAHHI Charitable Fund was formed by President Kathy Reynolds as a method of providing funds to the community. The WAHHI Charitable Fund, administered by the Community Foundation of the Low Country, provides grants to community organizations which support the Association's mission.

The largest gift WAHHI made to the community was in 2011 in honor of its 50th Anniversary. Members raised funds, including developing and publishing "Garnished in Gold, a cookbook compilation of recipes by WAHHI members. With the proceeds, WAHHI renovated the Old Gabled Farmhouse, which is now called the Armstrong-Hack house, located on the 68-acre Coastal Discovery Museum at Honey Horn. Billie Hack, WAHHI's first President, and her husband Fred had owned and lived in the home for many years with their children. When their parents died, the Hack children sold the property to the Town of Hilton Head Island.

Additional notable gifts made by WAHHI include:

- Support for 28 Pathway Maps and Kiosks.
- Support for a study room at the newly built Hilton Head Branch of the Beaufort County Public Library.
- Gifting the Town with a bronze sculpture of a pelican reading a book titled "Tales of Hilton Head" and was created by Walter Palmer.
- Support for the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina.
- Support for the town of Hilton Head Island of Hilton Head to landscape the Town Center.
- Funded a \$500 Palmetto Award given to an exhibiting South Carolina artist at the first Art Market held at the Coastal Discovery Museum in 2003.

Over 60 years, many deserving organizations have benefitted from WAHHI financial support resulting in hundreds of projects that strengthen our community.



2018 WAHHI Charitable Fund grant recipients; Member Sara Richards having Fun Raising Funds at a luncheon; Members Linda Jackson and Jenny O'Toole shopping to support WAHHI's Charitable Fund with a participating retail partner.



From left to right: Bernadette Strong, Youth Community Service Awards Chair, Two Award Recipients, and Kathy Reynolds, WAHHI President 2016-17

YOUTH COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS

The Association's Youth Community Service Awards program began in 1980, under then-President Carol Wolf, who designed the program to reward Island students who, in those days, "had nothing much to do." The first award was a \$75 savings account earned by Peggy Carey, a junior at May River Academy. Every year since, WAHHI has presented cash awards to deserving students from area high schools who have demonstrated outstanding community service. Over one hundred students have been recognized since the program's inception 40 years ago, and thousands of dollars have been awarded.

MEN AND WAHHI

While generally an organization by and for women, WAHHI has included men in specific activities over the years. The first was the Dancing Interest Group formed in 1967 by Mr. and Mrs. Dave Sommers and Mrs. Dorothy Breen in the spirit of having fun and improving dance technique.

In 1985 Julie Whelan and Lea Weiner formed the Couples Gourmet, which continues today! Each year A menu committee chooses a theme and creates four elegant menus complete with suggested wines. In addition to the four hosted dinner parties each year, there are three annual events open to all Couples Gourmet members: a "Welcome" cocktail party in October, a formal Valentine's dinner event held in February, and a wrap-up Men's barbeque in May.

Over the first 50 years of WAHHI, fashion shows were also popular programs. In December 1985, there was a new twist on the traditional fashion shows bringing men and children in as models. This event was so popular that it had been held in two sessions, a luncheon for 600, and later in the day, a dinner for 400. In 2021, our program style show tradition continues with an "ath-leisure" show featuring active lifestyle fashions modeled by members and spouses.



Charlene Rabb and Sally Nicastre with the Couples Gourmet recruiting new Interest Group members

COVID-19

In March 2020, Hilton Head Island and the rest of the United States came to a halt as COVID-19 spread across the nation. Locally, officials asked Islanders to wear masks, practice social distancing, wash their hands, and to quarantine for 14 days if exposed to the virus. As the virus spread, schools and businesses closed, events were canceled, and Hilton Head Island and the country grappled with the severity of this pandemic.

Life within WAHHI changed. Some activities were suspended, and many activities moved to on-line platforms. Interest groups were smaller and conducted outside, and Members adapted to video conferencing as the Association held Zoom meetings. Groups like Golf Lessons, Tennis, and Pickle Ball were able to continue to meet in person. The September 2020 membership meeting was conducted outside at the Coastal Discovery Museum with only 125 members due to size capacity restrictions. The 60th anniversary program was conducted entirely on Zoom. New programming was introduced including a bestselling Author Series, Chef Series, and an Environmental/Cultural Speaker Series. All the meetings have been simulcast on Zoom and if conducted in person, had to comply with all COVID precautions.



Tamra Avrit, WAHHI President 2020-21, at the September 2020 luncheon at the Coastal Discovery Museum

MOVING FORWARD

Highlights in a year with a global pandemic are sometimes hard to come by, but our Members have much to celebrate. The country is now watching as vaccines are administered. We continue to hope that we will back together face to face and smiling as we work together to strengthen our community. WAHHI is resilient, and our activities took different forms but was still impactful.

Sixty years of Membership, service, and fellowship is an amazing milestone! All of us within WAHHI look forward to applauding our accomplishments as we continue to work toward our mission and grow our role within this wonderful women's community. Happy 60th Anniversary WAHHI!

WAHHI GIVES BACK

Throughout its 60 years, WAHHI has given back to the Hilton Head Island community, providing thousands of volunteer hours and monetary gifts, donations, gifts and grants. We take pride in providing extensive support to groups and activities that exemplify our mission, including protecting the Island's natural and cultural beauty and promoting our women's community.

CHARITABLE FUND GRANTEES

2016-2017

Bluffton Self Help
The Literacy Center
Neighborhood Outreach Connection
Second Helpings
Volunteers in Medicine

2017-2018

Children's Relief Fund
The Literacy Center
Special Olympics
The Children's Center
Volunteers in Medicine
Family Promise of Beaufort County

2018-2019

Arts Center for Coastal Carolina
Hilton Head Island Sea Turtle Protection Program
GTHS OUT initiative.
Hilton Head High School Parent Teacher Organization (PTSO)
Coastal Discovery Museum
The Outside Foundation
Gullah Museum of Hilton Head.
Family Promise of Beaufort County
The Sandbox
Special Olympics

2019-2020

The Heritage Library
Arts Center of Coastal Carolina
Hilton Head Island Sea Turtle Protection Project
Coastal Discovery Museum
The Outside Foundation
Gullah Museum of Hilton Head Island
The Children's Center
Hilton Head Audubon Society
Sandalwood Food Pantry
Family Promise
Beaufort County Sheriff's Office K-9 program
Hilton Head Island Fire and Rescue

2020-2021

The Heritage Library
Sea Turtle Patrol
The Children's Center
Family Promise of Beaufort County
Pregnancy Center and Clinic of the Low Country
Volunteers in Medicine
Sandalwood Community Food Pantry

HAPPY
60TH ANNIVERSARY
WAHHI

*Special thanks to the Author, Marie Danforth,
2020-21 WAHHI Historian and the many
Heritage Library volunteers supporting
WAHHI's 60th Anniversary History Project.
The Heritage Library supported the development
of this publication, scanned and digitized all
of WAHHI's historical records including photos
and researched our Past Presidents.
Thank You!*



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www.wahhi.org

PO Box 5105 • Hilton Head Island, SC 29938

Published February 2021