

Our JWN President Emily is most appropriately, also President of the Jacksonville Historical Society. A most perfect placement. For as the President of the Historical Society, she is the archivist of Jacksonville History and as President of the JWN she is aware that this organization, the JWN has been, is currently, and will be one of the Historical Society's most valuable archival domains. For we are the history of our city.

The JWN is the "Center that holds" Over 150 years ago William Butler Yeats, an Irish poet wrote "Things fall apart, the center will not hold" Yet the JWN has proven Yeats wrong for the center has held and it has held because of each of our members, each of us. As a very recent example, remember the women two meetings ago who were both our guests and our members. Remember their stories of how in the midst of our city's civil rights battles, these women held their families and thus the core of the battle together. Because of these women, the center held.

For a brief moment, let us look back to the 80's. One of our members was the CEO of IBM, and as such she held the IBM membership to the River Club. At that time women were forbidden from holding such a membership in the River Club. In fact women were not even allowed in the main dining room until after 5:00. You will have to ask one of our long time members for the rest of that story.

To some in this room tonight the 70's and 80's are ancient history. To some of the others of us, we can look back at those long ago times. Women were excluded from the upper ranks of the ivy towers of our State Universities. Ahh, but that changed dramatically. Those of us remember our JWN member, a woman, Ann Hopkins, President of the University of North Florida.

How else have we changed the face of our city on the river? Look at our membership. Look at the caliber of women. Look at our titles. What about our Appeals Court Judge? Our County Judges? Our Circuit Court Judges? Our Physicians, our Presidents of businesses, Presidents of Corporations, business owners, executive directors, public relation directors, media women, oh I already mentioned college presidents, authors, athletes.., I didn't forget attorneys?

So we know how perfect and appropriate it is that our Emily is both President of the Network and our city's Historical Society. We take pride in her position and we take pride in our history. For we are indeed an archival treasure. And we are the center and we are the center that holds.

Tonight I will tell you the story of a letter. But let us begin with tonight. Once upon a time on a November evening in an ancient church several of the best, brightest, and most beautiful women in Jacksonville were taken on a brief journey back into a twenty-five year ago time that they were too young to remember. A time when a new organization came into being. A time 25 years ago in a city on the river.

Back to 1978, a time when women earned \$.57 for each \$1.00 men earned. Delores Pass (now Kessler) was the only local woman who was president of a large business. A little known fact about Delores is that ironically the banks had refused to loan her the money at that time. Two decades later she owned the banks.

Few women were member of the larger law firms since women had been admitted on an equal basis to the University of Florida Law School only during that decade. Previously, the male law students would loudly shuffle their feet when a woman entered the UF law library.

Were women allowed into the Civitan organizations? No! What about Rotarians? No!

In that city on the river 25 years ago, the University Club was the only private club to allow women full membership. IBM placed a woman as CEO in Jacksonville. With that title came full use of membership in the River Club. The River Club would not allow her to use it. She was still sent to the "Ladies Luncheon Room" and not permitted in the all-male main dinning room until after 6 p.m. Ultimately she turned over the membership to a male subordinate.

The "right to choose"... Woman's right to a legal abortion had become a choice only six years earlier with the Supreme Court's decision in 1973 on Roe v Wade.

And the big issue of the day... The one that precipitated the letter that began our Jacksonville Women's Network. The Equal Rights Amendment.

**Equality of rights under the law shall not
Be denied nor abridged by the United States
Or any other state on account of sex.**

So the call came “to draw together a group of women who are not considered radical feminists, who can discuss women’s issues with males without raising their hackles...”

Please understand that I considered myself one of those radical feminists; however, I was intrigued by the letter.

And so it began.

Pat Basford, Rosanne Hartwell, and I attended that meeting in Tampa and there met the women who were the statewide leaders in 1978—political leaders, businesswomen, well known women, women whose names were known statewide—all in the setting of a luncheon at the Tower Club of Tampa. The Tower Club, a place that only recently had allowed these Tampa women to become members.

After the meeting, one of the women (Linda Hanna remember her name from the letter) contacted Cecilia Bryant and invited her to participate; and now we became four. And the work started.

Of course there were multiple organizations attempting to pass the ERA in Florida—groups like the League of Women Voters, the National Organization for Women, Church Women United, Planned Parenthood. But success was not eminent.

So the call came when a letter was sent out to some women in that city on the river and also to a few women in each of the larger cities in Florida.

A letter from a private organization of social concerned and well placed women in Tampa. A group called the Athena Society. The letter was signed by State Senator Betty Castor who twenty-five years later is running for Bob Graham's U.S. Senate seat, and also signed by Nancy Ford a woman known statewide for her charitable accomplishments.

May I read you a part of that letter.

(In June of 1978 this letter, which ultimately led to the founding of the Jacksonville Women's Network was mailed to Pat Ashworth, Rosanne Hartwell, and Edna Saffy)

In a mood that surpasses anxiety but stops short of depression, the two of us have decided that it is high time measures are taken to elevate the status and visibility of responsible Florida women. Recent media coverage of women's causes and events has left our sex with a somewhat confused, even negative public image. Therefore, we wish to unite a group of female leaders in the State into an organization to address issues that concern women and to bring about change. Will you help us as we seek to form a Network of Florida Women?

We belong to an organization in Tampa called The Athena Society. A list of our members is attached. As one of its primary projects for 1978, Athena has elected to sponsor the network. Our goal is to draw together a group of women who are not considered radical feminists, who can discuss women's issues with males without raising their hackles and around whom other women will rally. Our invitation list represents a cross section of women who work at home and women who work away from home. We intend to be a coalition of responsible, reasonable, capable people whose opinions will be sought when major issues arise within the State and our communities. We believe all women want to ensure that succeeding generations have freedom of choice to devote themselves to being wives and mothers, to pursue a career, or to combine the two.

We hope you are as interested and as intrigued by this idea as we are. Our plan is to organize during a reception and luncheon at the Tower Club in downtown Tampa, 11:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., Saturday, July 29. Please reserve that date; we are eager for you to join us. Within two weeks we will send you additional information, along with registration forms.

Linda Hanna and Barbara Pankau have been designated information officers for this project. If you have questions, please call one of them at 813/223-7474 or write one of us in care of The Athena Society.

Yours most sincerely,

Elizabeth B. Castor
State Senator

Nancy Ford
Chairperson: Network Committee

Athena Society, inc
P.O. Box 1666
Tampa, Florida 33601

We stand three hundred and three proud women in our city on the river.

Tonight, almost twenty-five years later, in a new century, in a new time, in a very old and historic church we reach out and we welcome you into our Jacksonville Women's Network.

We needed to talk to women from the public sector, women from the home front, women in business, in banking, in politics. Have a cocktail party (you remember cocktail parties). What about money needed to put together an organization? What about all this paper work, What about all the time we have to commit. Which women do we ask? Who do you know that is an effective woman? A well known woman? A woman for women?

And she must be well thought of. She must be well placed. Must be successful. Not too radical, though. And she must be a woman "around whom other women rally".

The four of us, Pat Basford, Cecilia Bryant, Rosanne Hartwell, and Edna Saffy, we worked hard, we found the time, we did the paperwork, we underwrote the cost, we were committed, and we found the wonderful women.

Oh, but we made organizational mistakes early on. We thought the four of us could act as a group presidency. That didn't work. We were drowning in paperwork. Then we had a brilliant idea! Cecilia Bryant was the attorney for Voyage Insurance and she was the only one among the four of us who had a secretary; consequently the four of us decided Cecilia would become the first president of the Network.

At first, the four of us acted as an Executive Committee and one of our duties was membership. That didn't last long either. Now the women in the various membership classifications make those decisions. We learned and the Network grew and flourished.

Now twenty-two years later, ~~we now stand over 238 women strong:~~ Our membership includes county judges, circuit judges, U.S. Appeals judges, City councilwomen, congresswomen, attorneys, academics, physicians, stockbrokers (a.k.a. financial consultants), presidents of corporations, presidents of businesses, business owners, executive directors, public relations directors, media women, college presidents, authors, and athletes.

We met the call of the 1978 letter from Tampa. For we have created a network of Jacksonville women. We have united a group of women leaders. ~~And we welcome you—
this afternoon into that membership.~~

~~We met the call of the 1978 letter from Tampa, for we have created a network of
Jacksonville women.~~

~~We have united a group of women leaders. Cecilia Bryant, Pat Ashworth, Rosanne
Hartwell, and I, Edna Saffy.~~

~~And tonight we, the Women of the Jacksonville Women's Network, gather together 30
years later and share in the celebration of our founding and the celebration of the seasons.~~