

*Current president Sue Dwyer with long-time members and past presidents Jeri Johns and Kay O'Rourke.*



*The free dental clinic at a local school in 1956.*



# women working together

*With a wide-ranging and energetic focus on living the volunteer spirit, the GFWC Woman's Club of Fernandina Beach celebrates 100 years of community service.*

BY KAREN MILLER • PHOTOS BY CHRISTY LE LAIT

In 1868, Jane Cunningham Croly, a professional journalist, attempted to attend a dinner at an all-male press club honoring British novelist Charles Dickens. Croly was denied admittance based upon her gender, and in response, formed a women's club called "Sorosis," the first professional women's club in the United States. In 1890, when 63 more clubs officially ratified the General Federation of Women's Clubs' constitution, the GFWC was born.

This year, the GFWC Woman's Club of Fernandina Beach is celebrating 100 years of community service since it was organized on November 3, 1920. Although the club began as the Ladies Civic League in 1913, the original and ongoing objective and aim of the club was to work to better the lives of others, make Fernandina Beach a better place to live, and extend the hand of friendship to anyone who was interested in joining. The ladies were and are a diverse group with talents, interests, and backgrounds united by a dedication to community improvement through volunteer service.

"From the very beginning, members involved themselves in ways to make things better," says current president Sue

Dwyer. "Trash cans were purchased and distributed on the main streets, books were obtained for the public school rooms for the start of a library, plans were made which resulted in a referendum to raise the millage tax to fund the building of a new school, now Fernandina Beach Middle School, and club women were instrumental in convincing Senator Duncan Fletcher to preserve Fort Clinch and eventually turn it into a state park."

Mary Powell, former president of the local club and former state president of the Florida GFWC, states that the focus of the Club has always been to serve the needs of the community at large. "In 1952, the Club sponsored a referendum for mosquito control, and in 1953, the dental clinic, which would last for 21 years, was begun with Dr. and Mrs. Bill Rodeffer donating one-half of their time to performing necessary dental work for underprivileged children," says Powell.

Also in 1952, the Club began sponsoring Little Women, a club for high school girls interested in being involved in community service. The Woman's Club has worked with and

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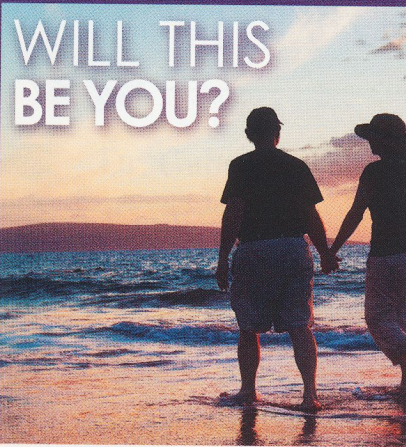


*Above: 2020 Womens Club Board members Sue Dwyer president, Judy Tipton 1st VP, Betsy Schoelen 2nd VP, Kim Lunt 3rd VP, Kim Holwell 4th VP, Susan Childers Secretary*  
*Right: 2020 Womens Club Scholarship Winners Ashley Thomas, Brita Bocian, and Avery Beverly*



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guided these young women in their club work for 68 years and provided scholarships in varying amounts to numerous young women. Little Women continues to be an ongoing project of the GFWC Woman's Club of Fernandina Beach."

In 1960, ground was broken for the clubhouse at 201 Jean LaFitte Boulevard, which is a classic Southern structure surrounded by live oak trees, with ample parking for Club and rental events. Over the years, upgrades have been made on the clubhouse to meet the needs of the community. "This year, our goal is to work on needed restoration of the clubhouse," says Dwyer. "In honor of our Club's 100th birthday celebration, we are beginning a new quarterly fundraising project called 'Dining Around the World,' and the Club will provide birthday bags for Meals on Wheels each month."

"GFWC is distinguished from other service organizations by the breadth of our outreach," states Powell. "Our community service programs span all areas of the lives of our members, their families, and communities, including arts and culture, civic engagement and outreach, education and libraries, the environment, and health and wellness."

The GFWC Woman's Club of Fernandina Beach has proven staying power and has made an impact on the community of Fernandina Beach for 100 years! If you are interested in learning more about the Club and would like to attend a meeting, contact the club at [fbflwomensclub@gmail.com](mailto:fbflwomensclub@gmail.com). For more information, you can visit their website at [fernandinabeachwomensclub.com](http://fernandinabeachwomensclub.com) or view their Facebook page.