

OUTLINE OF TALK:

Where did it come from? What remained stable.

It had to have begun with a gleam in someone's eye, but as is the case for much of women's history, no one remembers who although some think it was longtime AAUW member and branch president Patti Soens. And probably it was also, as usual, a collaboration of a few women who wanted it to happen. But the idea took hold—let's get several prominent countywide women's organizations, Kenosha Women's Network (KWN) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the National Organization of Women (NOW), and Quota Club together to sponsor a "women's dinner." And so it came to pass. The event took place on March 11, 1985, almost 40 years ago, during Women's History Month. It was at Casa Capri, and Frances Weaver, a columnist and author who had returned to college at age 58 and become a motivational speaker for women in midlife, was the guest speaker. The cost was \$10 per person.

By the following year, March 10, 1986, the dinner was at the Holiday Inn in Kenosha, and the guest was Gerri Gribi a folk singer from Green Bay.

And then in the natural order of things, it evolved. By 1987, the idea had become to honor a woman who had contributed to the community, an unsung hero. It was now called the Susan B. Anthony dinner and the first honoree was Sandra "Saunnie" Yelton-Stanley, a social worker and activist. In addition to KWN, AAUW, and NOW, the event was sponsored by BPW, the Kenosha's Business and Professional Women. There were gaps between 1989-91 and 1992-4, along with 2021, but otherwise, the event was off and running.

Why Susan B. Anthony?

You might wonder why it was named after Susan B. Anthony. It was an obvious choice. Anthony was the preeminent organizer and strategist of the nineteenth-century agitation for women's enfranchisement. From 1851, when she met suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, until the end of her life in 1906, Anthony worked full-time to build a political movement among women and direct it toward gaining equal rights. Persistence and intensity made her the symbol of political equality; she inspired suffragists to coalesce for several decades until a mature political organization could grow. Her Quaker background and education

led her toward mobilizing public opinion behind abolition and temperance as well as women's rights.

The Evolution of SBA

Over time, the sponsoring organizations changed. While AAUW and KWN remained throughout, the other representative nonprofits came and went with local chapters of Business and Professional Women, Wisconsin Women Entrepreneurs, the National Organization for Women, Quota Club, the Mayor's Commission on Women's Issues, Women Working Together, and Tempo. Corporate sponsors included Bank One, SIENA Healthcare, Southport Bank, Chase Bank, Aurora Women's Health, Dental Associates, Balisteri & Associates, RE/MAX, the Kenosha News, the Women's Fund, and the Labor Times.

The organizing/planning committee was of various sizes, sometimes as many as 14 representatives of the three or four sponsoring women's groups; sometimes as few as 8, but consistency was provided by longtime AAUW members like Mary Jonker and Lois Fulton, with 27 and 19 years respectively on the planning committee.

The venue changed as well. Beginning with relatively small local restaurants like Casa Capri, The Station, and the Fireside, alternating with the Holiday Inn and Heritage House, it settled in 2003 at the Parkway Chateau, where it remained through 2016, when the event needed more space and moved to the Madrigano/Marina Shores. This year it has moved again, to an even larger space at UW-Parkside's Arena. Attendance, which had been modest in the early years and in the 100s during the early 90s, began to top 200 regularly during the 2000s, and was over 300 after 2017.

Over the years, a diverse array of guest speakers appeared to inspire and model women's achievements: from judges including those on the state Supreme Court, entrepreneurs, educators, scientists and politicians.

During those years, the Planning Committee began to rethink the concept of the award and ceremony, which had begun as a means to honor a single woman who had contributed significantly to the community. Starting in 1994 the profits from the awards dinner were generally split evenly among two or three women's organizations, usually Women's and Children's Horizons and one or two domestic violence/sexual assault nonprofits. In 2006, nonprofits were invited to submit

grant proposals specifying projects and budgets to be funded in the following year, and the Committee distributed the event's profits among those chosen.

In order to honor nontraditional women returning to complete their higher education goals, in 2004, \$2000 was reserved from the profits to be given as scholarships to two women in the following year, with the pattern continuing through the present.

And finally, in 2016, the Committee decided to seek nominations of several women who had made substantial impact on Kenosha and its people, rather than just one. The Susan B. Anthony Award became the Lifetime Achievement Award, complemented by awards for a Woman to Watch Under 40, Arts and Education, and Business/Nonprofit/Government. The response has been gratifying, and the awardees have made and will continue to make lasting impact on the community.

The Future?

So, what does the future hold for Kenosha's Susan B. Anthony Awards? Certainly, one would like to think that it will continue to fulfill its mission: honoring women who have in the past and will continue to contribute to the community and inspire others to do the same. But the event may not look the same, and the women honored may not look or behave like those who have come before them. Different times create different circumstances, and those who strive and achieve are answerable to their own times and places.

Ultimately, as has often been said, we all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.