

The History of Willamette View – 1955 - 1959

from the minutes of Resident Council

by Sandie Helmick, Resident Council Treasurer

To complement the four-part "How We Came to Be — the Story of Willamette View" by Director of Corporate Communications Joyce Allmon, Sandie Helmick has compiled a two-part history from Resident Council minutes.

Part 1. We should feel gratitude to the founders of Willamette View for initiating an active role for residents that continues 65 years later. They would be proud of us, as well, for continuing this tradition! What officially became Resident Council began on Nov. 29, 1955, at what was titled the "Starter Session."

What was the lifestyle of a 1955 resident of Willamette View? There were no televisions in the apartments, but each floor had a TV lounge. You were told to use only the lounge on your floor, and that the choice of channel would be by majority vote. (Were there only three to choose from, perhaps?)

There were telephones in apartments, but the connection was through a switchboard at the Manor front desk, rather than phone numbers for each apartment.

You could smoke in your apartment or in the lounges, although there were complaints about the smoke drifting into hallways. There was no air conditioning.

Apparently, there were no convenient ways to place a work order or a Speak Up message about food. Each concern (yes, complaint!) was brought to the Council meeting, where the dining manager and the head administrator were in attendance.

The auditorium was on the top floor of the Manor, with only one elevator. When the elevator was full, as often

happened when events were taking place, it stopped on every floor on its way to the top. It took a long time for everyone to make their way to the auditorium.

There was a trolley running on the Trolley Trail until 1958! A shuttle bus took residents to the Milwaukie station, although there was much dissension about the schedule, particularly on weekends.

There were two choices at dinner; one was always beef or pork, and the other was something other than beef or pork. Everyone was served at the same time, with a spiritual message given before food could be served. There were problems when the resident designated to say Grace showed up late, or not at all, while everyone waited to have their food served. Grace was limited to 30 seconds; if the speaker continued after 60 seconds, a designated resident was authorized to tell him to sit down.

At first, only men were saying Grace; then, by 1957, women said Grace at lunch, and men at dinner. There were other signs of gender differentiation. Only men operated the elevators and served on the Emergency Committee. Women volunteered in the infirmary, where they repaired linens, folded bandages and served as clerks. It was agreed that a man was better suited to the work required of the Council chair than a woman.

The servers were referred to as "boys" and the housekeepers as "girls." But there must have been females working in the dining room, because the manager was told that only the boys should carry the heavy trays; the girls should place the plates on the table.

The Council approved the dress code: "Dress as you would in any first-class hotel." There was a means of dealing with those who didn't. The minutes report that "Mr. ___ and Mrs. ___ should be admonished for going to get their mail in their pajamas." Women were not identified by name, but it was reported that "One or two women have been seen in the hallway in their kimonas (*sic*)." And, "Women need to be reminded that they must wear hose to the dining room."

Next installment: The challenges they had that we still face today.

In the fall of 2018, Joline Shroyer brought 45 rhizomes of bearded iris from her Canby home collection as a gift to Willamette View. Garden staff planted nine groupings — each marked with a blue garden flag — in the bed north of the Manor, between the rose gardens and the river. Another nine groups were planted in the oval bed between Riverview and the Court parking area.

Delighted with their new home, more than 120 shoots emerged in the spring of 2019, producing 35 flower stalks. With 15 - 20 varieties, this year may be even more successful. If you love blooms and beauty, walk by these beds during the month of May.



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This two-part history, compiled by Sandie Helmick from Resident Council minutes, complements the four-part "How We Came to Be — The Story of Willamette View." Part 1 is in the May 2020 issue.

Part 2. Some problems that challenged the first Resident Council are no longer a problem for us. For example, residents were told not to throw things out of their apartment windows. Residents asked that the window at the beauty parlor be removed so that a woman could have her hair done in private. On a more serious note, there was also the request for private rooms in the infirmary so that one could die in private.

Other matters that were discussed at Council meetings then can be seen on our agenda today. For example, diversity in religious services was worthy of attention. The Sunday Vespers Committee agreed in 1956 that denominations having few members among our residents should have an opportunity to hold service occasionally. Until that time, only churches participating in the Council of Churches had been given places in our Vespers program. Council agreed that there was no objection to having a Rabbi come to provide a service, but it was deemed not appropriate for it to be at the same time as Sunday evening services.

In the early years, the Council or the administration could designate a resident as a deputy to monitor compliance with established rules. It was agreed to have notices on the bulletin boards screened by a deputy because the boards were becoming too cluttered.

Parking was a frequent issue; in

1956, there were 289 residents with 95 personal cars. A deputy monitored parking compliance, and the names of those in violation were posted on the bulletin board.

After considerable discussion, it was agreed that the Council review and approval was required before hanging donated pictures in the hallways. Each item was displayed at a Council meeting and a vote taken to accept or reject it.

A problem addressed in 1957 as well as today is residents selling things to other residents. It was decided then that residents doing business of any kind for personal gain — such as repairing watches or selling greeting cards — must use their own apartment for sales space.

We are currently addressing rules regarding contributions and solicitation. In 1956, the Finance Committee reminded Council that "some residents have very limited means and it is particularly embarrassing to them to have repeated requests for collections and contributions."

The question of residents making comments from the floor during a Council meeting was a challenge. In 1957, the Council chair determined that written comments would be accepted and read "over the mic" with limited time for discussion.

It was agreed that any gathering scheduled for the auditorium with a general invitation to residents should be cleared through the Council and that meetings on controversial subjects should be barred.

In the early years, a medical examination was required before a resident moved in. Council minutes

in 1957 declared that administration has "waived this requirement as they look at the selling of apartments from the business standpoint only — making money for the Manor." A motion was passed that applications be more carefully screened.

A few problems were brought to the Council's attention in 1959 that reappeared in 2019. "Food Committee is having problems. They feel they are getting nowhere with suggestions. They are told they are advisors, but have no power."

And then there is the challenge of landscaping the grounds, which was brought to the Council in 2020. In 1959, ground maintenance was a resident volunteer activity. A contractor had been hired for the initial landscaping, but it was reported that a higher percentage of the plants placed by the hired contractor died than did those planted by residents. Council passed a motion that said, "Our more immediate pleasure and satisfaction in our home at our age is more important than any long-range view. The funds being used are from our hard-earned savings, and we believe we have a moral right, if not a legal one, to have them used in our interest, and economically so."

I learned a lot about life in the Fifties. I came across some words that were new to me. I'm sure there are residents here who could explain them to me — for example, chair doilies, drayage, kimona (not kimono) and mangle. In closing, a timeless thought from 1959: "Those unwilling to serve on committees should not criticize those who do give their time and do the best they can."