

Nan Johnson Continues to Blaze New Trails at Villa Gardens



Nan Johnson, center, enjoys her work on the Pasadena Celebrates 2020 project with other Villa residents and staff.

There are some moments that change everything. For Nan Johnson that moment was in 1955, when the dean of a prestigious law school, to which she was considering applying, told her, “You do understand you won’t be arguing any cases. You will do the briefs and the men will argue the cases.”

Since that time, Nan has been an advocate for social change. She was the first woman to serve as Majority Leader of Monroe County, New York legislature and went on to become an associate professor of political science at the University of Rochester where she co-founded the Susan B. Anthony Center and introduced courses on “Women and Law” and “Women and Politics.”

So when this life-long East Coaster and her husband Bill, also a retired professor, landed at Villa Gardens, Nan did what she’s done all her adult life; she got to work, assembling a team of diverse women to help her spear-head her next project.

“Not long after I got to Villa Gardens, I began to think about the fact that the year 2020 would be the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment.” The amendment, which was ratified in 1920, guaranteed American women the right to vote.

“I didn’t know many people here at the time, but invited a few Villa Gardens residents and staff as well as volunteers from the Pasadena community who might be interested in planning a celebration. One of these savvy California women said ‘what if we put a float in the Rose Parade?’ I thought it

was a great idea.”

Pasadena Celebrates 2020, has expanded to a larger community project. They celebrated their float’s acceptance into the Rose Parade earlier this June. As Senior Advisor to Pasadena Celebrates 2020, Nan credits the Villa Gardens staff for helping with essential logistics every step of the way: including hosting meetings large and small.

“When I bring guests here to discuss the float, we meet at the Bistro,” Nan said. “The recent improvements are wonderful. Very tasteful. When we’ve had larger events, Villa sets up the room and provides refreshments.”

Nowadays, when she’s not lending her expertise to the float project, Nan takes advantage of outings to the opera, and the wide array of social and cultural activities that Villa hosts. Nan also enjoys her daily afternoon swim in the pool.

Naturally, she loves the fact that Villa Gardens is home to so many retired educators. When they walked into Villa and saw the newly renovated library just off to the side of the lobby, they knew they’d found “the one.”

Their children, who live 10 minutes away from Villa Gardens, have been encouraging Nan and Bill to move out west for years. It was a big cultural change, but Nan feels like they’ve finally found their tribe in sunny SoCal.

Looking out from their roomy fourth floor apartment with its breathtaking views of the San Gabriel Mountains, Nan says, “I’m proud to be in California. I think it’s ahead of things in many ways. I’m proud to be part of that.”

