

Villa Gardens Resident Continues to Blaze New Trails

In the 1960s and even into the 1970s, most people could not imagine a woman in a position of power outside of the home, much less as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies or as the vice president of the United States. Working women were routinely paid lower salaries than men and denied opportunities for advancement. These limitations inspired Villa Gardens resident Nan Johnson to work hard throughout her life and made her into the woman and activist she is today.



Villa Gardens resident, Nan Johnson

Nan's long history of activism stems from her family, who strongly believed service is the best way to help both community and country. As the first woman to serve as the majority leader of the Monroe County (New York) legislature in 1976, she anticipated there would be challenges.

"It was important to show that women could be elected for leadership positions in politics," Nan said.

Serving as the chief spokesperson for the majority party, Nan ensured the needs of constituents were being met. During caucuses, colleagues sometimes interrupted Nan while she was talking. Without hesitation, she would pound the table and say, "Let me finish!"

As the only woman in a male dominated environment, Nan did what she always did - stayed true to herself. She was educated, assertive, and knew she was an asset to the team. "Most of the men were not used to having a woman in charge," Nan said. Some of them dealt with it better than others. Despite all this, I always kept my head held high and never let anything get to me."

Later Nan went on to become an associate professor of political science at the University of Rochester. There, she co-founded the Susan B. Anthony Center to help young women in the community and introduced courses on "Women and Law" and "Women and Politics."

Nan continues to blaze new trails at Villa Gardens. "Now is the time to bring women together and work on issues we face. I am hopeful for the future of women and society overall," added Nan.

Last year, she organized "Pasadena 2020," a float in the Rose Parade celebrating the 100th

anniversary of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote. Now, she is connecting groups of people she has met and networked with over the years to work on issues of poverty, education, healthcare for all, and affordable housing, etc. "I will serve as a mentor to young people helping them to find their voices and encourage them to take leadership roles in the civic life of their community, nation and the world," Nan said.

Nan Johnson is a resident at Villa Gardens, a Front Porch retirement community in the heart of Pasadena, California.