Critical Milestones In the Movement

1901- Junior League Founded
In 1901, Mary Harriman, a 19-year-old New York City debutante, forms The Junior League for the Promotion of Settlement Movements. Harriman mobilizes a group of 80 other young women, hence the name “Junior League,” to work to improve child health, nutrition and literacy among immigrants living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Inspired by her friend Mary, Eleanor Roosevelt joins the Junior League of the City of New York in 1903, teaching calisthenics and dancing to young girls at the College Settlement House.

1907-1920 - The Movement Expands
The second Junior League is formed in Boston, Mass. in 1907 and is soon followed by the founding of the Brooklyn, NY and Portland, OR.

Junior Leagues in the 1910s
In 1912, The Junior League of Montreal becomes the first League in Canada, while five other Junior Leagues are formed in Baltimore; Chicago; Cleveland; Philadelphia and San Francisco.

During this period, Junior Leagues shift their focus from settlement house work to social, health and educational issues that affect the community at large. The Junior League of Brooklyn successfully petitions the Board of Education to provide free lunches in city schools. In 1914, the founders of The Junior League of St. Louis march for women’s suffrage.

During World War I, Junior Leagues play an active role, selling bonds and working in Army hospitals. The San Francisco Junior League forms a motor delivery service that serves as a model for the nationwide Red Cross Motor Corps.

1920s-1930s
In 1921, approximately 30 Junior Leagues create The Association of Junior Leagues of America (AJLA) to provide professional support to the Leagues. Dorothy Whitney Straight becomes the first Association President.

During the 1920s, The Junior League of Chicago pioneers children’s theater, an idea that is subsequently taken up by more than 100 Leagues across the country.

In politics, Ruth Sears Baker Pratt, of the Junior League of the City of New York, becomes the first woman elected to Congress from New York in 1929. Later in 1933, Isabella Selmes Greenway, friend of the Eleanor Roosevelt and former New York City Junior League member, becomes the first woman elected to represent Arizona in the U.S. Congress.

Junior Leagues respond to the Depression by opening nutrition centers and milk stations. They operate baby clinics, day nurseries for working mothers, birth control clinics and training schools for nurses. Junior Leagues also establish volunteer bureaus to recruit, train and place much-needed volunteers in the community. Many Leagues create State Public Affairs Committees (SPACs) to influence public welfare policy.

Junior League of Hartford member, Katherine Hepburn, wins her first of four Academy Awards in 1933 for Morning Glory. With the 1939 release of The Wizard of Oz, Junior League of Cleveland member, Margaret Hamilton, creates one of cinema’s most memorable characters with her portrayal of the Wicked Witch of the West. The Junior League of Mexico City joins The Association in 1930, further expanding the international nature of the organization. By 1939, there are 144 Junior Leagues in existence.
**1940s**

During World War II, Junior League members play a major role in the war effort by chairing hundreds of war-related organizations in virtually every city where Junior Leagues operate. Canadian and U.S. League members serve overseas. Junior League of Nashville member, Cornelia Fort, becomes the first female pilot in American history to die on active duty while on a training mission with the WASPs (Women Airforce Service Pilots). Oveta Culp Hobby, a Houston League member, leads the Women’s Army Corps.

Margaret Chase Smith, of the Junior League of Bangor, becomes the first woman to serve in the both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, in 1940 and 1948 respectively. In Ohio, Frances P. Bolton of the Junior League of Cleveland becomes the first woman to be elected to Congress from Ohio, going on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives for a total of 15 terms.

In 1940, the first Junior League cookbook, a compilation of recipes by The Junior League of Augusta entitled Recipes from Southern Kitchens, appears and begins a tradition of fundraising through cookbook publishing.

**1950s**

By the 1950s, nearly 150 Junior Leagues are involved in remedial reading centers, diagnostic testing programs and programs for gifted and challenged children. Leagues collaborate in the development of educational television and are in the forefront of promoting quality programming for children. In 1952, the Mexico City League establishes the Comité Internacional Pro Ciegos, a comprehensive, international center for the blind.

By the end of the decade, Junior Leagues support over 300 arts projects and multiple partnerships in many cities to establish children’s museums. The 1950s also marks the growth of regional Junior League cookbooks as a key fundraising tool, spearheaded by the Charleston League, which aggressively and successfully markets its Charleston Receipts cookbook to food editors and critics around the U.S.

In 1950, two-time U.S. Tennis Champion and New York City Junior League Member, Sarah Palfrey Cooke Danzig, lobbies the United State Tennis Association to open the sport to all athletes by removing the color bar.

In 1953, Mary Pillsbury Lord of the Junior Leagues of Minneapolis and New York, succeeds Eleanor Roosevelt as U.S. Delegate to the United Nations.

**1960s**

In this period of great turbulence and social change, Junior Leagues rise to meet many challenges. As the decade progresses, nearly half the Leagues have health and welfare projects, including alcohol programs, adoption services, clinics, convalescent care and hospital services, and many Junior Leagues begin to add environmental issues to their agendas. The Junior League of Toledo produces the educational film, Fate of a River, a report on the devastating effects of water pollution. Leagues also establish programs addressing the education, housing, social services and employment needs of urban residents.

Meanwhile, in Canada, Margaret McTavish Konantz of the Junior League of Winnipeg becomes the first woman from Manitoba to serve in the Canadian House of Commons. In 1967, fellow Junior League of Winnipeg member and later Canadian Parliament member, Florence Bird, chairs the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission is convened to examine the status of women in Canada and develop recommendations for the
government to take to ensure equal opportunities for women in all aspects of society.

By now, more than 200 Leagues are part of the Association, which dedicates itself anew to building leadership skills and increasing membership diversity.

1970s
In 1971, the Association changes its name to The Association of Junior Leagues Inc. (AJLI). Throughout the 1970s, Leagues expand their participation in public affairs issues, especially in the areas of child health and juvenile justice. In 1973, almost 200 Leagues work with the National Commission on Crime and Delinquency and the U.S. Justice Department on a four-year program seeking to improve the criminal justice system. In Canada, the Canadian Federation is formed to promote public issues among the Canadian Leagues.

During this decade, Junior League women continue to impact the world of politics with the election of Florence Bird to Canada’s Parliament and Carole Keeton Strayhorn as the first woman mayor of Austin, TX. Former child actress and Junior League of Palo Alto • Mid-Peninsula member, Shirley Temple Black, is appointed by then President Nixon as the U.S. Representative to the United Nations. In 1973, Eudora Welty, of the Junior League of Jackson MS, wins the Pulitzer Prize for The Optimist’s Daughter.

1980s
In the early 1980s, 230 Leagues participate in a public awareness campaign to encourage early childhood immunization called “Don’t Wait to Vaccinate.” In 1998, Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker becomes the first Hispanic President of The Association.

During the 1980s, Junior Leagues in the U.S. gain recognition for advocacy efforts to improve the child welfare system. U.S. Leagues also help gain passage of the first federal legislation to address domestic violence. More than 100 Leagues develop the “Woman to Woman” campaign that actively and comprehensively tackles the impact of alcohol abuse on women. Junior League of Los Angeles Sustainer, and then First Lady, Nancy Reagan, launches the “Just Say No” campaign to address the growing issue of drug abuse.

The Canadian Federation holds its first national conference focusing on violence against women and the negative impact of pornography. The number of Leagues grows to 211.

In 1981, Junior League of Phoenix member, Sandra Day O’Connor, becomes the first woman to be appointed a Supreme Court Justice of the United States.

In 1985, the first Junior League outside North America, The Junior League of London, becomes a member of the Association.

In 1988, the Association officially becomes The Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc. (AJLI), better reflecting the international scope of member Leagues. In 1989, then First Lady and Junior League of Houston Sustainer, Barbara Bush, establishes the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy building upon a legacy of promoting literacy. Also in this year, AJLI is presented with the prestigious U.S. President’s Volunteer Action Award.

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Junior League members, Lee Clancey, Glenda Hood, and Willie Mount become the first women mayors of their hometowns, Cedar Rapids, IA, Orlando, FL, and Lake Charles, LA, respectively.

The Junior Leagues renew their dedication to The Junior League Mission. The Association’s Board adopts Goals to guide and position the
Association for its second century. The Goals stress the importance of the Association in helping Junior Leagues develop women for community leadership, achieve a shared, positive identity and function as strong, viable and healthy organizations, consistent with The Junior League Mission.

2000s - The Junior League’s Second Century
In 2001, Deborah Brittain, AJLI’s first African-American President, presides over The Junior League’s centennial celebration. Maya Angelou, Nane Annan, and Gloria Steinem, among others, address the members at the Association’s Annual Conference in New York City, home of the first Junior League.

AJLI co-chairs the U.S. Steering Committee for the United Nations’ International Year of the Volunteer (IYV) with the Points of Light Foundation. As part of IYV activities, President Vicente Fox recognizes The Junior League of Mexico City’s members for their “high level of social leadership and human quality.”

In 2002, AJLI launches The Junior League PR/Marketing Campaign, with the first brand logo and tagline, “Women Building Better Communities.” The Association’s Board of Directors also launches its “Healthy League Initiative,” a formal self-evaluation process designed to ensure that each League continues to achieve its full potential in its community by assessing its strengths and weaknesses.

Continuing a tradition of “firsts” in politics, Pat Evans of the Junior League of Plano becomes the first woman mayor of her city, going on to be re-elected another two terms.

In 2006, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, over 600 volunteers from Leagues across the Association joined The Junior League of New Orleans for the “Rebuilding a Better New Orleans” initiative. In 2006, 228 Junior Leagues participate in the launch of Junior Leagues’ Kids in the Kitchen, an AJLI initiative to address the problems associated with childhood obesity and poor nutrition.


In 2009, New York City Junior League member, Carolyn Maloney, introduces legislation to establish a National Women’s History Museum in Washington, D.C.

At Annual Conference 2009 The Association adopts a new Vision Statement to better reflect our aspirations for our future: The Junior League: Women Around the World as Catalysts for Lasting Community Change. Also in this year, a Steering Committee is appointed to lead the Association through a comprehensive strategic planning process designed to chart the future of The Junior League. Dubbed the Strategic Roadmap, the plan outlines the five strategic questions AJLI must answer to differentiate The Junior League in an increasingly crowded marketplace and better position the organization for success in its second century.

2010-Present
For the past several years AJLI has been engaged in a highly collaborative and strategic organizational transformation process designed to ensure the long-term health, vitality and viability of The Junior League for generations of civic leaders to come. This undertaking—a complex and thoughtful process—has involved hundreds of thousands of hours and thousands of members from Leagues across the Association all plotting a deliberate course toward relevance and meaning in the 21st century.
To learn more about our efforts, please visit the Transformation section in the Member Area of the AJLI website: 

The Junior League of Wilmington’s Elizabeth Redenbaugh is recognized for her efforts against segregation when she is honored with the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award.

Junior League members continue to impact their communities, tackling emerging issues such as human trafficking, cyber bullying and cyber crimes. Junior League Public Affairs Committees in Atlanta, Florida, New Jersey, and New York successfully advocate for legislation to provide support services to victims of human trafficking and The Junior League is honored by The United Nations Association of New York for its work on the issue. The Junior League of St. Louis advocates for legislation to keep children online.

The Association partners with the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, housed at Radcliffe College at Harvard University, to incorporate The Junior League Magazine archives into its collection, thereby making the information they contain available to the general public, both through the new public-facing AJLI website and through the Schlesinger Library’s online database.

To view The History of the Junior League Video visit http://bit.ly/WeAreJL