

The Hollywood Women's Club— Nearly a Century of Raising Money, Lifting a Building, and Living the Volunteer Spirit

By [Robin Kerr Drulard](#) - April 25, 2019



The Hollywood women's club—nearly a century of raising money, lifting a building, and living the volunteer spirit

What Hollywood organization has been in Hollywood longer than the City itself?

Okay, the headline may have given it away! It's the Hollywood Women's Club. Founded in 1922, the Club is not only the first club to be organized in Hollywood but predates the official founding of the City of Hollywood, which occurred in 1925. The Club became a

member of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs in 1922 and of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1924.

The Hollywood Women's Club was originally created by The First Ladies of Hollywood. They were the wives of workers building the city under the employment of Hollywood founder, Joseph Young's construction companies. According to club president Mardi Podesta, the club was formed for the ladies to contribute to the new city, as well as provide camaraderie and activities for the ladies.

The clubhouse still stands on 14th Avenue across from the Hollywood Beach Golf Course on land donated by Young, where it was built in 1927 right after the big hurricane. The original plans called for it to be much more ornate, but the storm and its subsequent economic fallout led to the scaled-down design that remains today.



The Hollywood City Women's Club Clubhouse.

Between 2012 and 2014, the club raised \$300,000, from individuals, events, and a \$50,000 grant from the State of Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation, to build a new foundation and save the Clubhouse from sinking into the sand.

The building was successfully lifted, a new foundation installed, new siding installed where asbestos shingles had been removed, and a rear door relocated and reframed to address wood deterioration and a plan for a future ramp and handicap accessibility. Two new doors were installed and additional remedial work was performed on the walls to address wood rot and insufficient structural framing.

As part of the Art of Community Grant awarded to the City of Hollywood by the Community Foundation of Broward, the City of Hollywood installed a new sidewalk on 14th Avenue in front of the Clubhouse, incorporating custom mosaic tiles featuring a part of the Club logo.

The Club was awarded numerous recognitions for the massive historic restoration.

Now, said Podesta, as the Club approaches its 100th Anniversary, coming up in 2022, the focus is on the "Campaign for Tomorrow". Funds raised during this capital campaign will be used to increase handicap accessibility as well as upgrade the electrical system, the technology, and the catering kitchen in the Clubhouse. The goal is to make the Clubhouse 'more state of the art' for future rentals and ongoing Club and community activities.



Four past and current presidents with the picture of the first four presidents in front of the Historic clubhouse. Left to right are: Shelly deMarco, Isabel(Issie)Wise, current president Mardi Podesta, and Carol Fitzgerald.

“We realized how important accessibility is,” she explained, “because we have many members who are now in their 90s, long-time members, past presidents, who are experiencing mobility issues, who couldn’t navigate the steps — the problem is really right in our faces! If they are able to attend our meetings and our events, they are able to contribute. We can see our future, and if we want to continue to be as vibrant as these women are, we’re going to need a little assistance.”

But the clubhouse is only one thread in the tapestry that carries the Hollywood Women’s Club from its founding into the future. As it approaches its 100th anniversary, what perseveres are the goals and traditions and foundations upon which the Club was built.

“We are first and foremost a club built on the spirit of volunteerism,” said Podesta. “We want to continue to contribute to our community. Most of our members are also members of many other clubs that contribute to the community and together, as our motto says, we live the volunteer spirit.”

Among the earliest projects of the original Club members were:

- The donation of hundreds of books, which founded the first Hollywood Public library.
- Tag Day sales to obtain funds that were used to finance health screenings for local school children.
- Assisting migrating farmers with adequate housing and welfare.
- Getting the City of Hollywood its first telephone service.
- Running a War Bonds Drive netting over \$12,000, the largest amount collected by any agency participating in the drive.



The Hollywood Women's Club and partners volunteering together to aid the community.

The spirit of the Club hasn't changed much since the early days. Recent and current projects include:

- Support of literacy programs via the Born to Read Project.
- Youth Scholarship Fund in collaboration with the Hollywood Rotary Club.
- Participation in Hollywood Historical Society activities, such as hosting the Founders Day Celebrations and collaborating on the Historic Home Tours.
- Annually supporting the Neighborhood Crime Watch program and Night Out Against Crime in collaboration with the Hollywood Lakes Civic Association and the Hollywood Police Department.
- In 2011, the launch of significant fund-raising events such as the first annual Club Golf Tournament and Margaritas in Paradise for the restoration of the Clubhouse.
- On the state level, as member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the club supports Special Olympics, the Hacienda Girls Ranch, Canine Companions for Independence, Roc Camp for children with cancer, Sew Much Comfort, Heifer International, Operation Smile, and other causes.

The Hollywood Women's Club Community Service Programs and Special Projects combine the resources of more than 100 members, who spend over 5000 hours each year supporting women's health and home life issues, fighting domestic violence, helping the homeless transition to better lives, local arts, conservation, elementary education, literacy and equality, citizen advocacy and international outreach programs, and encouraging volunteer service throughout the community.

Other grateful local beneficiaries include the Broward Outreach Center, the Community Enhancement Collaboration, local Cancer Research Centers, Local Boys and Girls Clubs, Feeding South Florida, ChildNet, The Walk to End Alzheimer's, The Exceptional Theater Company, the Florida State Hospital Fashion Show, Henderson Behavioral Health, Local Schools, Holiday Bikes To Schools, the Brighter Future Foundation, the South Florida Wildlife Sanctuary, and the list just goes on and on.

And don't forget the Flockings. Every Holiday season, hundreds of pink flamingos suddenly appear all over Hollywood, compliments of the Club, leading residents to wonder what the Flock is going on!



“What the Flock is going on?”

Next up is the 8th annual golf tournament at the Hollywood Beach Gold Course on July 20th.

“It's always one of our most fun and most successful fundraisers,” noted Podesta.

Also known for its ability to react to community need quickly, the Hollywood Women's Club is truly living up to its mission statement:

The Hollywood Women's Club is dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through volunteer service. We are also dedicated to the preservation of our beloved historic 1927 Clubhouse.

To help achieve its goals, the club is always looking for new members, and the clubhouse is available for rentals for family or business parties, gatherings, baby and bridal showers, weddings, and other events.

Daytime meetings of the Club are held the first Thursday of each month in the afternoon. Evening meetings are on the second Wednesday of each month from 6:30-8:00 p.m. Since the summer social season is about to begin, meeting locations will change from their usual home at the Clubhouse. Be sure to check the website before heading out to a meeting.

“Today we are grateful to the First Ladies of Hollywood for their vision and fortitude. They have left us a legacy that we can build upon and leave for future generations,” is a quote on the Club’s website that sums up the mood at a recent Club meeting, and of the Club in general.

For information on joining, contributing, working with, flocking, or renting the clubhouse, contact the Hollywood Women’s Club at <http://hollywoodwomensclub.org>, (954)925-9394, or info@hollywoodwomensclub.org.



The historic clubhouse is located at 501 North 14 Avenue.