

New York, 1901- Social activist pioneer Mary Harriman and 19 of her friends began cultivating the Junior League so that women could enrich their lives by becoming involved in improving social conditions in their local community. “An organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers.” True to their mission, today 150,000 League members in 292 communities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Mexico - work at the forefront of social reform, tackling the toughest and most critical issues of the day—including childhood nutrition and obesity, human trafficking, foster care, juvenile justice, teen self-esteem, cybercrimes, literacy and the environment, among others—for the purpose of enhancing the social, cultural and political fabric of civil society.

Seven years ago, I learned about the JLGC through Sustaining Member Amy Brown, who I met when our first borns attended MDO in Clear Lake. I hadn’t heard of this service organization but recalled many years ago in NY, that I was invited by a work colleague to help rehabilitate an Upper East Side neighbor park. We painted, we laughed, we built, we planted, we got dirty- and if I remember correctly, I broke my sandal and had to ride the subway home with only one. That’s right, on the subway, dirty with only one shoe, so yes, I fit right in. A few years ago I got back in touch with her and learned that the volunteer event I attended was hosted by the Junior League of New York, NY. Of course, I had to find out what the JLGC was all about so I attended my first Provisional meeting. Through my League experiences both in the community and as a member in leadership roles, through the eyes of the children and women we reach, the development opportunities available to our members, the seeds of change we plant through our work in Galveston County, we continue to move the mission forward.

It’s an exciting time to be an active member in the Junior League of Galveston County. While many of our members’ wants and needs remain the same as they always were, some new and different wants are emerging. We want to continue to build relationships with like-minded women. We want to be changed by our hands-on experiences in the community. We want to make a difference for someone. We need for this League to be a safe space where we can learn from each other and develop. We want to create sustainable change. We need flexibility so that the League fits into our lifestyles. We want and need to leave the League and our communities better than we found them, every year.

Our focus is providing children with the tools they need to succeed in school. Through our programs, we provide thousands of weekend food bags to food insecure students, tutor reading to at-risk students, mentor adolescent girls through hands-on volunteer experiences, teach hundreds of children healthier habits, and award college scholarships to eligible high school graduates. These are simply outputs. Let me rephrase this for you in terms of outcomes: we are a premier women’s leadership development organization who communicates through our actions that women and children matter, that someone is listening and cares. We are a vessel of hope that can change a life. Hope can change everything. Let’s take this further.

I recently heard a story called Going Up the River. It goes like this. There was a small village alongside a river. One day a child came floating by, yelling for help, struggling. A villager waded out into the river, pulled the child to shore, and saved him. Then another child, and another- many children were floating down the river in various states. The village of men and

women waded into the river like a chain of daisies, catching the children, pulling them out, assessing them, and caring for their wounds. All day, all night, into the next day children came floating down that river. A woman let go of the chain and began to walk away. A villager said “but where are you going? We need you here.” She says, “Stay and care for the children. I’m going up the river to stop whomever is throwing them in.”

As a League, let’s keep caring for the children who need us because it’s necessary. Let’s also turn our attention upstream and figure out as a community partner what we can do to stop them from needing us altogether. This League has the passion, the talent, the skills, and the women who can build better communities.

I’m energized for the year ahead and the years to come. We’ll continue to honor the traditions and mission of the Junior League of Galveston County while we forge and strengthen roads to our membership and to our community. I am privileged to work closely with a brilliant group of women on the Board of Directors to carry our League strategy forward.

Heather Zgaljardic

President 2017-2018

Junior League of Galveston County, Inc.