

Pacifica, CA

Incorporated November 22, 1957

Jean Fassler named City's First Mayor

Written by Jean Bartlett, March 29, 2019



Jean Fassler picks up one of the many Bay Area newspapers headlining her win.



Jean Fassler is sworn into office.

FASSLER, JEAN FRANCES (1919-2018)

In the September 25, 1973 *San Mateo Times* edition, historian Elizabeth St. Peter was given close to a page to present a special report on the City of Pacifica. The St. Peter story, quoted in part here, captures the time and place that provided the dedicated and caring Jean Frances Fassler a path to public service.

"What July 4 is to most Americans," St. Peter began, "Nov., 22, 1957 is to the citizens of Pacifica, California, San Mateo County, U.S.A.

"For on that day, Pacifica emerged from the rugged, beautiful coastline beside the Pacific Ocean as a 20th century city: possibly, the most fascinating in the County.

"In the 20th century which produced the women's liberation movement, Pacifica kept pace and even surged ahead.

"It elected its first mayor, a woman – Jean Fassler – who had the further distinction of being the first woman mayor of a new city in the United States. Pacifica and Mrs. Fassler made national headlines and both were besieged with a barrage of television, newspaper and radio coverage."

St. Peter goes on to discuss the nine separate coastline communities that became Pacifica in 1957: Edgemar, Pacific Manor, Westview, Sharp Park, Fairway Park, Vallemar, Rockaway Beach, Linda Mar and Pedro Point.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 2)

Author: Jean Bartlett. ©2019 (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

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She discusses Captain Gaspar de Portolá. Portolá and the members of his Spanish expedition – generously aided by the people from the Ohlone village Pruristac located at the Sanchez Adobe site in today's Pacifica – climbed up Pacifica's Sweeney Ridge and beheld the San Francisco Bay on November 4, 1769. The historian's article also references: Don Francisco Sanchez, the Ocean Shore Railroad, the attorney who built a castle on a bluff in Pacifica's Sharp Park, a gun fight at the Mori Point Restaurant in Sharp Park during Prohibition, the subdivision in Linda Mar built by Andy Oddstad, and that there were a number of "new city" name choices by residents of the nine coastline communities before "Pacifica" was given the green light. "SeaVue" suggested by Ray Logan, owner of the SeaVue Theater in Pacific Manor, won at early incorporation sessions. In addition, St. Peter explains that local residents were not happy that San Bruno had annexed Pacific Heights, had dreams of more annexations, and that Daly City wanted to use a ranch property in Linda Mar as a garbage dump.

"Among leaders in the incorporation were Jean and Joe Fassler and Carl and Grace McCarthy," St. Peter notes, "whose former summer residences had been converted into permanent year-round homes.

"Twenty-six candidates ran for City Council. Mrs. Jean Fassler, who became interested in incorporation through her work in PTA and the schools, was among them. Leaders in the incorporation struggle became the first councilmen — Harold Feyge, George Mason, Don Miller and Gerry Schumacher.

"Jean Fassler, who could be regarded as a spear bearer in women's liberation, said that the men encouraged her to run and were most generous to women in their support and appointments."



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

Pacifica's newly elected City Council: Back row, l to r: Councilmember-elect Don Miller, Councilmember-elect Gerry Schumacher, Councilmember-elect George Mason, Joe Fassler and Coastside Tribune publisher Lowell Blankfort. Front row, l to r: Marty Miller, Mayor-elect Jean Fassler, Connie Mason and Coastside Tribune co-publisher Alice Blankfort. (Not pictured Councilmember-elect Harold Feyge.)

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 3)

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Pacifica Historical Society file photo

Pacifica's City Council held its first official meeting on the stage of Vallemar School. Councilmembers, from left: George Mason, Don Miller, Gerry Schumacher, Jean Fassler and Harold Feyge.

In September of 2015, Pacifica's first mayor, Jean Fassler, and Pacifica's first city manager, Karl Baldwin, met at the Pacifica Historical Society's newly renovated Pacifica Coastside Museum at the Little Brown Church. I interviewed both for a *Pacifica Tribune* article and have excerpted some of that story, here.

Pacifica pioneers recall City's early days

By **JEAN BARTLETT** | Pacifica Tribune

PUBLISHED: September 22, 2015

...By the time locals were talking incorporation, Jean and Joe Fassler were the parents of three – two sons and a daughter. Joe worked for Chevron and Jean was PTA president of Linda Mar Elementary.

"I didn't decide to run for City Council on my own," Fassler said. "People really pushed me to do it."

The popular PTA president won the most votes making her mayor. Members of Pacifica's first City Council were: Fassler, George Mason, Don Miller, Gerry Schumacher and Harold Feyge. Having never run a City Council meeting, Fassler headed to another city to observe.

"Five men came in with their cigars and their nonchalant attitudes and took their seats on the stage," Fassler said. "They wouldn't let anyone speak. I said to myself, 'I'll never do that. That's no way to run a meeting.'"

Before the City Council hired Karl Baldwin as city manager, the Council brought in Jane Hicks as acting city manager. At the time, the Council was using a former tiny real estate office, donated by Sharp Park developer Ray Higgins, as the first City Hall.

"We put curtains up on those windows," Fassler said, "and were subsequently dubbed 'petticoat politics.'"

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 4)

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From early on, Fassler journeyed a trail of politeness and patience to get the job done. When the newly-elected mayor asked the county manager to go over the budget with her, she was told, "Don't worry your pretty little head, I'll take care of it." But Fassler continued to stand next to him, noting she was ready to begin learning. "What could he do?" Fassler laughed. "He began to explain things." "I did my homework," Fassler said. "I had to keep the people informed that I represented and make decisions based on facts." Fassler served on City Council for seven years and was mayor three times.

..."It was such an interesting time," Baldwin said of Pacifica in its earliest days. "So much had to be brought together so we could function as a city. Everything was operating as districts. We had a lighting district, a fire district, a sanitation district and so forth. I had a bit of municipal experience in both San Mateo and Los Gatos, but the Council came in without municipal experience. However, they picked it up pretty quickly and Mayor Jean Fassler was exceptional at working well with others and taking charge. This new city was lucky to have her."



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

The Mayor of Pacifica, along with Acting City Manager Jane Hicks, gets immediately to work on City business.

The *San Mateo Times* reported the new city had a population of 20,000. A *Santa Cruz Sentinel* article broke down the vote count that won Pacifica's five City Council seats.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 5)

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"Mrs. Jean Fassler, Pedro Valley housewife, 1,710; George Mason, Linda Mar insurance adjuster, 1,522; Don Miller, Vallemar loan officer, 1,520; Gerald C. Schumacher, Linda Mar office manager, 1,005; and Harold Feyge of Rockaway Beach, 939. Close behind Feyge were B. D. Hembree, Linda Mar insurance broker, with 919 votes, and Charles S. Bublak, Sharp Park butcher, with 915."

Jean was surprised she received the most votes. But that count put the 38-year-old in the mayor's seat.

"What makes this story a little unusual was that for one thing, she was female," Jean's son Greg Fassler said at a memorial for his mother in Nevada City. "Keep in mind this was 1957 when many women were stay-at-home moms. She was not college educated, she did not have a career, she had no experience in local government and she did not drink or smoke!"

"The news of a female mayor, and a housewife at that, spread far and wide," Greg went on to say. "LIFE Magazine, as well as other newspapers, showed up at our home to take photos of my mom and the family – usually performing various 'homemaker' tasks."



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

Jean on the "office" phone with her children Lynn and Greg. (Joe and Jean's eldest, Wally, was a teen during this time and preferred a lower profile.)

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 6)

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Pacifica Historical Society file photo

Another publicity photo shows Jean at work while son Greg and daughter Lynn look on.

As Jean's son Greg noted, the kitchen quite literally was his mom's office as there was no "usable" Pacifica City Hall in his mom's earliest days as mayor.

In December of 1957, the newly elected members of the City of Pacifica's first City Council were given the oath of office by Northern District Municipal Judge Thomas Bocci. The Inaugural Ball took place in the auditorium of Vallemar School – then the largest auditorium in Pacifica – and had more than 500 in attendance. This included a long list of local leaders and representatives, a number of whom are mentioned here: State Senator Richard Dolwig; State Assemblyman Louis Francis; San Francisco Mayor George Christopher; Mayor Guido Rozzi of South San Francisco; Mayor Emilio Massalo of Millbrae, Sheriff and Pacifica Police Chief Earl Whitmore; San Mateo Councilwoman Marian Hemingway (first woman to be elected to San Mateo City Council); San Mateo County Board of Supervisors Chairman Edward McDonald; San Mateo County Supervisors Thomas Callan, Alvin Hatch and Martin Poss; Superior Court Judges Edmund Scott, Wayne Millington, Louis Dematteis and Frank Blum; County Clerk John Bruning; County Superintendent of Schools James Tormey; County Recorder Ruth Kirste; College of San Mateo President Julio Bortolazzo; and Jefferson High School Superintendent Edward Morgan. Businessman Richard Mazzetti was Master of Ceremonies.

Mayor George Christopher congratulated Pacifica's new mayor and councilmembers, and wished them all smooth sailing. He also advised them that while "Pacifica" means peace and tranquility, "Don't let it delude you. Sometimes the going will be rough."

Following the mayor's official installation she addressed her community.

"We must work with all our strength to make this a good city. I am justifiably confident that we will have a secure and prosperous community. We need your help. Let us all work to make Pacifica the best city in California."

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 7)

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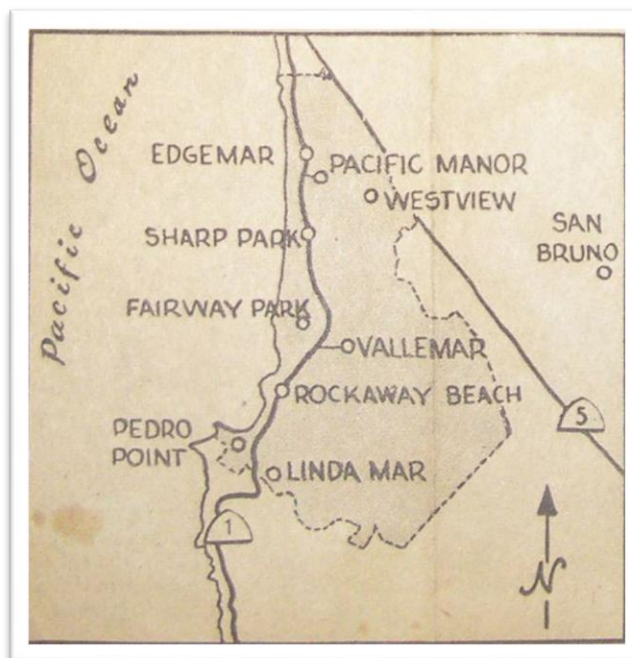
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A dance held at Nick Gust's Rockaway Beach restaurant, which was additionally celebrating its new \$110,000 addition, concluded the evening.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

San Francisco Mayor George Christopher presented Mayor Jean Fassler with an engraved City Council gavel, which is now part of the Pacifica Historical Society's Jean Fassler Collection.



Drawn from the official map prepared by Civil Engineers Wilsey and Ham of Millbrae, CA, this map ran in many Bay Area newspapers to introduce San Mateo County's newest city, Pacifica.

In a late December, 1957 interview at her home on the beach with writer Mollie Dee Morris, the new mayor was asked:

"Had she imagined a year ago that not only would this same Pedro Point dwelling be located in a city named Pacifica, but that she would head the government of this as yet unborn city?"

"A year ago!" echoed the mayor, mildly astonished. "'Why a month ago I would hardly have believed it. When I first heard the returns I just kept wondering if the votes weren't counted wrong."

Jean explained to the reporter that her husband was taking her win in his stride but he had never really dreamed it would happen.

"Joe used to kid the fellows at work that they had better watch how they treated him because his wife was going to be a mayor!"

As to their three children – Wally, Greg and Lynn – the mayor noted that their reaction was "unimpressed calm."

Morris went on to note, "The mayor denies an interest in politics, per se — 'titles never impressed me' and 'I've never been in and around politics before.' Still digesting all the implications of her new responsibility, she admitted that 'I'm a little afraid of what all those men will think,' in reference to the four males who form her City Council. But beneath the modest and unassuming manner one detects a sharp sense of responsibility as she discusses her new office."

The new mayor would go on to tell Morris about how she and her husband and their young son, Wally, had moved from San Francisco to a "two-room shack" on the County coastline in Pedro Valley in 1945. What was a booming housing development in Linda Mar in 1957 had back then been "beautiful green artichoke fields." By 1957, the couple had turned their two-room shack into a five-room home. Just like then as now, Jean's husband Joe commuted to his San Francisco job with Standard Oil Company.

Jean got involved with her local community early on. She and her son would head over to the neighboring hamlet of Rockaway Beach daily. She chatted with locals and decided to form a Mothers Club so she and other locals could discuss, and solve, common needs. What was becoming evident was the need for "centralization and unity among the small coastal towns."

That need for centralization really double-downed for Jean when she became president of the County's second largest PTA unit – it incorporated three Coastside schools – in 1956.

"Persons from all over the area would come to the PTA with local problems which weren't under the Association's jurisdiction," Jean told Morris. "However this seemed the only place to bring them."

Resolving issues took many trips to Redwood City and many issues were not resolved. The Mayor told Morris there was a "lot of wasted time and red tape" involved and that among the major "unresolved" problems for Coastside residents were "transportation and recreational facilities for the area's children."

These major concerns coupled with incorporation providing lower tax rates, really drove the creation of Pacifica. (The vote was 2,603 to 2,113 in favor of incorporation.) However, there remained a genuine concern among many residents about what an unchecked building boom would do to their coastal Shangri-La.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 9)

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"I want to preserve our rural and picturesque atmosphere," Jean told Morris. "The family is the heart of our community and I think all of us feel strongly that it was the rustic environment that first drew us here. I think with the common interest and unity which we have won, we will be able to keep Pacifica's individual personality along with any progressive steps we must take."



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

In 1958, Laguna Salada Unified School District (now the Pacifica School District) Superintendent Fred Lucas and Mayor Fassler pose at a School District event. The popular Lucas was a vocal champion of the City's incorporation.

On September 22, 1958, a dedication was held for Pacifica's new City Hall.

"Ray Higgins gave the City the old San Pedro School House at 170 Santa Maria Avenue in Sharp Park," first City Manager Baldwin said in a *Bartlett's Biography* interview in 2017. "The City paid nothing for it. Ray was primarily a realtor. He owned most of Sharp Park. At one point he said to me, 'When I look out over Sharp Park, I own almost all of it.' And he did. Over time, he dispensed a lot of his ownership.

"One of the first jobs I had was to get down to this new City Hall with a local contractor. The place had to be nearly rebuilt so that it was workable. We did everything, including: put in new ceilings, new flooring, new windows and new lavatories. The price was \$10,000 and that was it. That's our City Hall to this day and it is largely the same."

When interviewed in March of 1989 in honor of Women's National History Month, Jean was asked by *Pacifica Tribune* reporter Michelle Baker to name what she considered her most significant accomplishment during her reign as Pacifica Mayor and City Councilmember. Jean said, "I can't name one. Everything we did was significant, from setting ordinances to establishing boards and everything just came together."

Jean said one of her greatest tasks was to plan open space and to keep a balance with controlled building.

"It took a lot of planning to be sure family always came first," she also told Baker, noting that it was with the help of her husband Joe that she was able to juggle her political career, three children and housework.

"Jean valued family and she made us all feel that we were important," her daughter Lynn Fassler said at her mom's memorial. "No matter how busy she might be in the other parts of her life, she made a point of making sure that a nourishing dinner would always be on the table, even if she had worked all day in city or county government."



Joe and Jean Fassler, 1957, at a March of Dimes event.

Jean Frances Thomas was born on June 7, 1919 in Quincy, California. She was the second child and daughter of Della and Charlie Thomas. Due to family stresses, her folks divorced not long after she was born. A few years later, Jean's mom married Jerry Hironymous and it was a successful marriage. Jean's daughter Lynn also noted that her mom acquired a "truly wonderful stepfather."

When Jean was 4, her beautiful older sister and friend Nellie, 6, had an

accident and ended up with lockjaw. The new medicine to treat lockjaw had to be flown out from the East Coast to the West Coast. It arrived in Sacramento, two hours after little Nellie died. It was a very difficult time for the family but they got through it and Jean's mom and stepdad eventually became parents to two more children, Beverly and Zane. Jean was very proud to step into her role as "mom's best helper" to help care for her siblings.

Jean's stepdad was an excellent "be prepared" educator.

"From Jerry, Mom learned that before she was allowed to ride a horse, she better know how to feed and groom that horse and be able to shovel the manure," Lynn said. "Later this proved to be a useful tool when she was in politics."

"Jerry also taught her how to drive a car," Lynn continued. "She had to learn how to pump the gas, change the oil, change a tire, empty out the radiator during winter nights, and put the water back in. The latter was no small feat because she had to crawl under the car, take out a pin and then put the pin back in while lying on freezing ground."

Jean's parents taught her the importance of working hard. When she was a teen she worked at a local bakery and if she wanted some store-bought clothes – both Jean and her mom were terrific seamstresses – she had to put in extra hours and save up. One of the lessons Jean learned early on, which she definitely shared with her children, is unexpected things frequently happen.

"There was this suede jacket," Lynn said. "It was her first big purchase and she had saved for it for months – and it was so beautiful!"

Jean bought it, brought it home and then this "critter," a skunk, managed to come through the front door and spray all over her new suede jacket.

"She often told us the story about the burial," Lynn continued, "the burial of her jacket."

When Jean was in her early 20s, she moved to San Francisco.

"My mother had aspirations to be a mortician," Lynn said. "She applied for a job at a mortuary but the undertaker wouldn't hire her to work in the back because he said she was too pretty. But she could have a reception job. She found she had a good head for numbers and learned to be a bookkeeper. She also had a job in San Francisco where she pounded the pavement as a private detective for an insurance company. She loved the intrigue of that job. She also worked in a dental office where she met Joseph Fassler, a very handsome, suave man with a twinkle in his eye that was ten years her senior. There was an immediate attraction between the two of them.

"When Joe asked Jean out on a trip to see his beach shack in Pedro Point, she wasn't sure she trusted him and so she invited her friend Mabel along, just to be safe. Turned out that Mabel thought that Joe was the bees' knees and Mom had to make a decision. I think she made a good decision."

The couple married in 1943. Joe was in the Navy and a bleeding ulcer sent him to a makeshift hospital in Yosemite. Lynn noted that both of her folks loved the outdoors and that her mom would take leave from her dental assisting job to go stay in a tent in Yosemite with her husband – and also sneak in with Joe to the Saturday night dances – hotel guests only (no military) – at the Ahwahnee Lodge. The latter involved hiking a tall fence and Jean putting on her nylons after clearing that hurdle. (There was a shortage of nylons during WWII. The material proved to be excellent for parachutes, ropes and other military essentials.)

When Joe got out of the service, the lease on the couple's apartment in San Francisco ended and they decided to move to their weekend getaway.

"It was such a shack originally that I didn't know what board to stand behind to change my clothes," Jean said with a laugh in her 2015 interview.

But with Joe's skills as a carpenter, they fixed that shack up into a very nice home. Eventually their home was bulldozed when Linda Mar Beach became a State park.

There are many wonderful stories regarding the Fasslers in their beach home, but this one, a long cherished family favorite, particularly highlights Jean's pioneer spirit.

"Living on the beach was always an interesting experience," Lynn noted. "My mom deeply appreciated the beauty and the closeness of nature, the ebb and flow of the ocean and the bounty that it provided. There was one birthday of Joe's where Jean bought him a rifle and he was quite impressed with the gift. After he went to work the next day, she looked over at the beach and saw there were two ducks, splashing around in a fresh water stream next to the house. She had always been a darn good shot. She realized she could probably secure those ducks and she went out on the front porch with Joe's new rifle and pop, pop, she got them both. She gathered them up, plucked all their feathers and put them in the oven in a nice sauce.

"When Joe came home, he was enticed by the aroma coming from the oven and he said, 'What are we having?' And she said, 'We're having ducks!' He said, 'Ducks? How did you get ducks?' And she said, 'With your new rifle.'"

While Joe was slightly disappointed that he was not the first to use his birthday present, it all worked out perfectly because not only was the future mayor "a darn good shot," she was also a fabulous cook.

Jean was very much there for her family. If one of her kids had a "play" or an "accordion concert," Jean was there.

"She skillfully juggled both family and civic responsibilities," her children said. "She also placed community service and mutual respect above ambition. She had a genuine interest in people and was always gracious – and somehow she always found time to study for an upcoming meeting."

"Mom was honored on many occasions during her political life but I think the turnout at her memorial was a testimony to her enduring legacy not only as a politician and a public servant, but also as a loving and caring person," Jean's son Greg said.



Jean Fassler, 43, San Mateo County Board of Supervisors candidate, May, 1963.

On May 20, 1963, Pacifica's first mayor announced she would be a candidate for county supervisor from the realigned Fifth District in the June, 1964 election. She decided to run for supervisor only after being assured by veteran North County supervisor Alvin Hatch, an octogenarian now serving in his 27th year as a San Mateo county supervisor, that he would not seek re-election. She announced more than a year before the election, "in order to make my position clear both in the county and in Pacifica."

At that point in time, three well-known Daly City figures had also indicated interest in a run: Daly City Mayor Joseph Verducci, Daly City/Colma Chamber of Commerce founder and CEO Peter Markovich; and the Honorable Thomas Bocci, who administered the oath of office to all the members of Pacifica's first City Council, including Mrs. Fassler.

"Mom was urged to run for the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors representing the unincorporated area that runs along the coastline from San Francisco to Santa Cruz," her son Greg said. "She was defeated. However, her opponent passed away before taking office and

Governor Edmund Brown, Sr., appointed her to the Board."

Her opponent was football player, coach, college athletics administrator and former Daly City mayor Joseph J. Verducci (November 11, 1910 – November 6, 1964).

"She would run for reelection in 1968 and again 1972, and win both elections before retiring in 1976," Greg said.

It has been long and honestly believed that Jean Fassler was San Mateo County's first female supervisor. This turns out not to be the case. In 1920, Rosalie M. Brown was appointed by Governor William Stephens to fill out the remainder of the term of her husband, William Brown, who was elected supervisor in 1910 and served until his death in 1920. Like her husband (and as also true for Jean), Rosalie was very

popular with constituents. On her own she ran twice more and was elected both times. She served from 1920 to 1932.

While it is possible to find Mrs. Brown's name in old newspaper clippings – for instance the *Coast Side Comet* reported on June 17, 1921 that Mrs. Rosalie M. Brown and her fellow San Mateo County supervisors John MacBain, Thomas L. Hickey, Manuel Francis and Dr. C.V. Thompson, presiding, met with a delegation of citizens from Santa Cruz County to discuss the much-needed improvement of the Coastsides road from Pescadero to the Santa Cruz County line – it is not an easy search. Women were often underrepresented as reporters, sources and the subject of a feature. A study as recent as 2012 notes that it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that women began to find surer equality footing in all areas of news media – though not yet the "same" footing as men, which the same report notes is still not equal in 2012. Certainly the diplomatic Fassler, who served as a supervisor when the only "supervisor" restroom available was for men – Jean placed a rose on the door to signal temporary conversion – was well aware there were "issues."

With Jean's death in November of 2018, local historian and writer Jim Clifford dug deeper to be sure that the very accomplished Pacifica mayor and San Mateo County supervisor was in fact the first woman to serve as a supervisor – and through his research he discovered Supervisor Rosalie Brown holds this distinction. (See Jim Clifford's February 25, 2019 *Daily Journal* story.) I believe Supervisor Fassler, in her true-to-herself-gracious-fashion, would not only celebrate Supervisor Brown but would recommend the County do so as well.

As both Pacifica's first mayor and San Mateo County's second female supervisor – who served on 18 committees during her tenure on the County Board (1965-1976) – Jean has a long list of "activities." Only a few are mentioned here with dates as known: held a midnight ceremony on Pacifica City Hall steps along with Chief Deputy Walter Moore of the sheriff's department and Pacifica's new police chief, Neil Tremaine, to mark the change-over from sheriff's patrol to city police – the new nine-man police force, equipped with brand new vehicles and uniforms, replaced the contract police protection of the sheriff's deputies from that moment (June 30, 1959); along with Pacifica Councilmember Harold Feyege, Mayor Fassler served as Council Liaison to the second Pacifica Founders' Day event, chaired by Mrs. Edna Laurel Calhan (1959); a member of the Federated Coastsides Women's Club, Mayor Jean Fassler was asked to participate and did participate in the filming of the CBS hour-long documentary "Are Women Losing Their Femininity?" (1959); along with her fellow Pacifica Councilmembers, presented a plan for a Pacifica freeway to county and state officials, and was personally instrumental in lobbying for the water district's state reimbursement on pipe-moving operations made necessary by highway construction (1959); spoke to the San Mateo County Historical Association on the problems encountered in launching a new city (March 2, 1961); joined in the celebration of Eureka Square's grand opening in Pacifica (May 18, 1962); the Councilwoman was a guest speaker at Sharp Park school to join in honoring "a record number of 520 eighth grade students receiving their diplomas in the six Laguna Salada elementary schools" (June 13, 1963); was appointed to the San Mateo County Democratic Central Committee's newly formed County Election Committee (1963); served as San Mateo County March of Dimes Chair (1967); served on the steering committee which was created to guide San Mateo County's "Year of Health" program, which called for a comprehensive program of screening residents for unsuspected disease and for an extensive program of inoculation (1968); was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to serve as a member of the President's Highway Beautification Commission (1966-1968); served on President Johnson's Citizens Advisory Committee on Recreation and Natural Beauty (multiple years, beginning in 1966); was a fighting force and the only San Mateo County supervisor committed from the get-go to reroute I-280 to protect thousands of acres in the Crystal Springs Watershed...which happened (1960s); Supervisor Fassler represented the County on the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) Board (1968); West Bay Rapid Transit Authority Director (1969); Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Pacifica Youth Service Bureau (1969); appointed by President Richard M. Nixon to serve on the Citizen's Advisory Committee on Environmental Equality (1969 and 1970); served on the Coastal Commission

(multiple years); served as the County Board of Supervisors representative on the Regional Planning Committee (RPC) (1969); San Mateo Supervisor Chairwoman Fassler and San Francisco County Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, accepted the leadership request of Congressman Leo J. Ryan (D.-San Mateo County), to establish and run a committee charged with solving mutual jail facility problems in San Mateo and San Francisco (1974); a member of the Board of Directors of the Bay Area Air Pollution Control District (1976); and the list goes on.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

May 18, 1962. Thousands attended the opening of the new Eureka Square \$1.3 million shopping complex. The three-day festive celebration began with a ribbon cutting. Pictured left to right: Center Manager Harry R. Mitchell; developer of the Center and president of Oddstad Homes, Andy Oddstad; Pacifica Mayor George Mason, Councilmember Jean Fassler; and Pacifica Chamber of Commerce President Lloyd Sitts.

On May 29, 1976, the *San Mateo Times* reported:

"San Mateo County voters on June 8 will choose a supervisor from the Fifth District to succeed Mrs. Jean Fassler who has decided not to seek re-election. Mrs. Fassler served with high distinction for 12 years in this position, and we join the many others in our community who have paid tribute to her outstanding and valuable service."

"Mom's accomplishments were many while serving on the Board of Supervisors," her son Greg concurred, "notably her commitment to ensure that the plan to construct Highway 280 that meanders along the Crystal Springs Reservoir from San Francisco through San Mateo County would be a scenic highway and not littered with businesses and billboards."

"Her work and interest in the environment were noticed on a National level and that is how in 1966, President Lyndon Johnson appointed her to the 12-member Citizens Advisory Committee on Recreation and Natural Beauty." (She served on the Committee under Johnson, Nixon and Ford.) "The Committee was developed to advise the President on matters related to local state and private recreation and natural beauty activities. The Committee was also charged with developing a national program to provide recreation areas."

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 15)

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In honor of Pacifica's 50th anniversary, on November 14, 2007, Congressman Tom Lantos, D-CA12, entered the following comments into the Congressional Record.

"Madam Speaker, those fiercely strong-minded Coastsiders held meetings, hired consultants, used graduate students to prepare surveys, canvass their neighbors, and, in short, did everything they could to assess the possibility of incorporating as a city. There was an active resistance, as well, with a strong contingent of people who wanted things to stay the same. Let me say, Madame Speaker, with no small amount of pride, that the people who live in this special area have long been known to be politically active, inquisitive and resourceful. It actually took two separate elections before a majority, of only about 500 votes to be precise, decided to incorporate. But once the decision was made, Madame Speaker, the people in this gorgeous geographical area of California embarked on a public adventure that created one of the truly unique cities in America, if not the world. Ahead of its time in many ways, the new city was christened 'Pacifica' to highlight the ocean next to it as well as the 80-foot statue by sculptor Ralph Stackpole, that represented the people of the Pacific Rim at the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island in 1939 and 1940. The very first mayor was a woman, Jean Fassler, starting a city tradition of politically active women sitting on the council. While Pacifica made international news in 1992 for having an All-Women City Council, it is often overlooked that the city has never actually had an All-Men elected body."

Upon learning the news of Jean Fassler's death, Congresswoman Jackie Speier, D-CA14, wrote Jean's children a heartfelt letter, some of it shared here.

"I was deeply saddened to learn that your mother passed away. The example she set on the Board of Supervisors meant that I could go to work with a 'femtor' to guide me.

In a 2007 article (which Rep. Speier enclosed), the writer noted your mother's essential role in the incorporation of Pacifica. As you know, she came in first amongst 26 candidates and thus earned the right to be the city's first mayor. She never lost sight of her community or her determination that local planning and service decisions are an important tool to boost the quality of life of everyone in a community.

If you look at the wall of pictures of members of the Board of Supervisors, there's a moment in time (1964) when your mother's picture suddenly jumps out and you want to say, 'Whoa – that's new!' As you know, she left the board three years before I joined but her encouragement was amazing. Many people thought I was a lightweight, but not your mother. Democracy isn't supposed to be a closed club and Jean knew that the men's club needed a full-throated dose of integration. Anna Eshoo soon followed and then excelled in Congress. Thanks to Jean Fassler, the integration of the Board of Supervisors furthered the integration of the Congress of the United States.

...She was a public servant who made a tremendous difference. She led by dignified and persistent example. It's appropriate that there is a long street in Pacifica that climbs to the stars and that it's named after your mother. No one would dare name a cul de sac after Jean Fassler."



Jean and Joe left their beach house in 1979 and retired to Roseville, California, later moving to Grass Valley, California. Jean participated at Hospice of the Foothills as a Respite volunteer and later served on the Board of Directors from 1998-2002.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 16)

Author: Jean Bartlett. ©2019 (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

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On September 7 of 2018, Jean asked her granddaughter's husband if she was 100 yet and he told her she would be in exactly nine months. Weary, but very much of sound mind, Jean told him that she had really wanted to make it to 100. He reminded her that she could count the nine months she was in her mother's womb. Jean responded with a smile and a "thumbs up!"

Jean is survived by her son Gregory and his wife Susan, her daughter Lynn Fassler and her husband Charles Sternberg, her daughter-in-law Vida Santos, five grandchildren and five great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband of 63 years, Joseph L. Fassler, and her eldest son, Walfred J. Fassler.

Her son Greg noted at her memorial that the late Bill Drake – the former owner, publisher and editor of the *Pacifica Tribune* from 1959 until 1989 – once wrote, "Mrs. Fassler never takes a bad picture." Here are just a few photo examples that verify Mr. Drake's observations, while also presenting a real view of Jean's extraordinary life.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

July, 1959. Mr. McCandless, Pacifica's city engineer, was one of the investors in the Japanese restaurant Sakura Gardens, located in Mountain View, and he hosted an event at the popular spot with a number of his City of Pacifica-involved buddies. Top row, left to right: George Mason, Joe Fassler, McCandless, Jean Fassler, Marty Miller, Harold Feyge and Dorothy Feyge. Middle row: Karl Baldwin and Connie Mason. Bottom row: Don Miller, Gerry Schumacher, Eileen Baldwin, Gerry Schumacher's mom and Jean McCandless.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 17)

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Pacifica Historical Society file photo

1960. Jean Fassler with Edmund Gerald "Pat" Brown Sr., Governor of California.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

1961. Jean Fassler and San Francisco/Daly City developer Henry Doelger.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 18)

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Pacifica Historical Society file photo
1962. Tribune publisher Bill Drake, Jean and Joe Fassler.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo
1964. U.S. Treasurer Libby Smith and Jean Fassler.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo
1966. Eleanor Nettle, Board of Trustees San Mateo County Community College District, Supervisor Jean Fassler and Pacifica City Manager Karl Baldwin at breakfast signing petition.



Photo courtesy of the Fassler family

May, 1968, the White House. San Mateo County Supervisor Jean Fassler, far left, shakes hands with President Lyndon Baines Johnson. Additionally pictured welcoming guests, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson.

The Citizens Advisory Committee on Recreation and Natural Beauty was established by Executive Order 11278, May 4, 1966. The Committee was Chaired by Laurance S. Rockefeller (New York, New York). Rockefeller was joined by appointed Committee Members: Edmund N. Bacon (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); Joseph H. Davis (Seattle, Washington); James H. Evans (New York, New York); Jean Fassler (Redwood City, California); Charles E. Fraser (Hilton Head Island, South Carolina); E. Genevieve Gillette (Ann Arbor, Michigan); Dewitt Greer (Austin, Texas); Grace Towns Hamilton (Atlanta, Georgia); R. E. Smith (Houston, Texas); Harry M. Weese (Chicago, Illinois); Gordon K. Zimmerman (Washington, D.C.); and Charles H. Stoddard, Executive Director (1700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington D.C.).

Laurance Rockefeller who chaired the New York State Council of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and its predecessor agency, the State Council of Parks for 10 years, beginning in 1963, noted that "land alone cannot fulfill recreation needs of people. Development of marinas, bathing beaches, picnic and camping areas, golf courses, multiple use areas and many other facilities are needed. Development costs money, indeed, often more than the land itself."

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 20)

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Photo courtesy of the Fassler family

May, 1968. San Mateo County Supervisor Jean Fassler, bottom right, meets in Washington D.C. with other members of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Recreation and Natural Beauty. Laurance Rockefeller is seated center at the far end of the conference table.



Photo courtesy of the Fassler family

Back in Pacifica, the house that Jean and Joe Fassler built waits on the beach.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 21)

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In its time, Jean and Joe Fassler's beach home weathered a few storms. And just like its owners, it handled life's surprises with sturdiness and grace. Both photos below, courtesy of the Fassler family, present the family home in 1973 during and after a major storm.



The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 22)

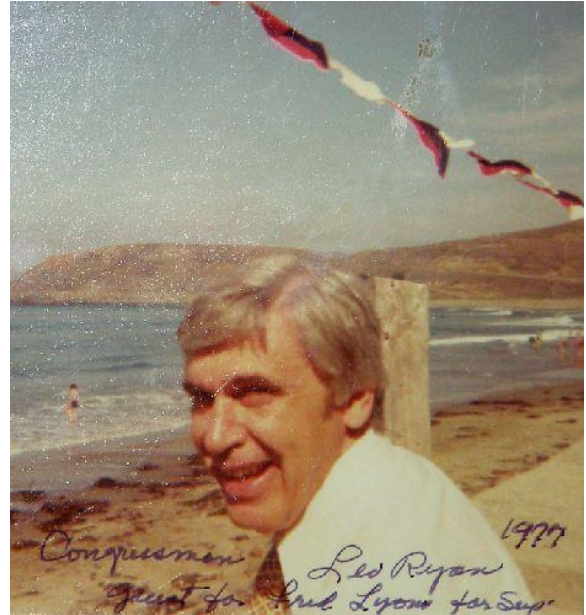
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Pacifica Historical Society file photo

1972. Jean Fassler and Congressman Pete McCloskey, R-CA11, meet at the Fassler home to discuss their respective campaigns. The Congressman ran for President in 1972.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

1977. Congressman Leo Ryan, D-CA11, attends a "Fred Lyons for Sup" party at the Fassler home.



Pacifica Historical Society file photo

Circa 1977. Great friends, Grace McCarthy and Jean Fassler each served as Mayor of Pacifica three times.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 23)

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Pacifica Historical Society file photo
March, 1989. In honor of Women's History Month, Jean Fassler and her story are celebrated in the *Pacifica Tribune*.



Photo courtesy of the Fassler family

Joe, Jean, Greg, Lynn and Wally Fassler at Greg's 1993 wedding in Switzerland.

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 24)

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Jean Bartlett photo

September, 2015. Pacifica's first mayor, Jean Fassler, 96, and first city manager, Karl Baldwin, 94, recall Pacifica's earliest days seated at the newly renovated Pacifica Coastside Museum at the Little Brown Church.



Jean Bartlett photo

September, 2015. Pacifica Mayor Pro Tem Sue Digre and Pacifica's First Mayor Jean Fassler, enjoy a visit in the Little Brown Church.

"I was always intrigued by Pacifica's incorporation and our first Mayor," said Pacifican Sue Digre. (Sue served 16 years on Pacifica's City Council including three terms as Mayor.) "She came back to Pacifica for two Community events and I was able to spend time with her. And she was as she was described: alert, smart, attentive, caring, dignified – and a proud Pacifican. I knew she was sensitive to environmental protections and progress for Pacifica and also very dedicated to her family as well. Jean Fassler was and is an admirable example of a community leader."

The story of Jean Fassler, Pacifica's first mayor (page 25)

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Pacifica Historical Society file photo

In 1961, Mayor Jean Fassler posed at the Pacifica street that bears her name.



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author.

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