

Today's **Charlotte Woman** MARCH 2003 FREE

Business/Lifestyle

Krista Tillman

2002 Charlotte
BusinessWoman
Of The Year



Women's History Month
Three Courageous Charlotteans

Crazy For Color
Fashion • Makeup • Interiors

A PIONEERING

Spirit

In celebration of Women's History Month, we spotlight three Charlotte women whose works and accomplishments have shown astounding courage, strength, and leadership.

By Diane Silcox-Jarret

"I would push my stroller around the neighborhood and give out information on every Democrat. But when I approached the party and asked them if I could work as a volunteer, they didn't welcome me because I was a woman." — Liz Hair

Liz Hair

Founder Of The Democratic Women's Club

A Female Perspective At The Right Time

AT 83 YEARS OF AGE, LIZ HAIR STILL HAS A LILT TO HER VOICE AS SHE tells of her days on the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners and being one of the first women in Charlotte to volunteer for the Democratic Party. "I never planned my life," Hair explains. "I really had no goals when I started out. I would just start doing something to learn and would end up loving it. Welcomed but unexpected opportunities presented themselves from there."

Growing up in a family where current events were a part of the dinner table conversation, Hair has had the impulse to stand up for her beliefs since she was young. "I was very shy as a young girl, a real shrinking violet," she explains. "When I was 8 years old, my father ran for Congress in St. Louis, Missouri. Even with my shyness, I got enough courage to hand out brochures for him. It was the year Herbert Hoover ran, and my father didn't have much of a chance, but that showed me how important it is to stand up for what you believe in. We always had exciting discussions about world affairs, police affairs, or who should be senator. It was just part of our lives."

The Great Depression also had a huge impact on Hair's early life. The despair of other people affected her so much she wrote about it in poems and drew pictures of what she saw. "They were gloomy pieces of art, but then again it was a gloomy time," she says. "I would write about seeing people standing in bread lines."

Hair moved to Charlotte in 1949 with her husband Sam, who was a Republican at the time, and their 3-year-old daughter Cammy. "My husband and I would always agree on issues, and after 10 years he became a Democrat," she laughs.

A Career Of Firsts

Just like when she was a little girl in Missouri, Hair started campaigning very informally. "I would push my stroller around the neighborhood and give out information on every Democrat. But when I approached the party and asked them if I could work as a volunteer, they didn't welcome me because I was a woman," she

says. Hair was undeterred. By 1954 she and several women had formed the Democratic Women's Club. "I would take my children to school in a station wagon with bumper stickers all over it," she remembers. "My children also

grew up in a very politically active family. They were hand-painting political posters at an early age."

Hair's persistence paid off in 1960, when the first door opened in her political career. "They needed a Democrat on the Board of Elections and asked me to take the seat," she says. "I did, and became the first woman to serve on the board." The Democrats also had the chairman's seat at the time. When he resigned, Hair became chairwoman of the Board of Elections.

In 1972, Hair set another first in Mecklenburg County politics. The Democratic Party chairman called Hair to help him find a man

to run for county commissioner. "I thought about it awhile, and after I talked to my husband and a reporter at the newspaper, I decided to file for the race myself," she says. "I got the most votes in the Democratic primary and the second-largest number of votes in the general election." As a result, Hair served four terms as a commissioner, eventually becoming that body's first woman chair.

Changing Times, Changing Needs

But Hair is most proud of her involvement with issues of importance to the people of Mecklenburg County, such as improving access to food through food stamps. "Many were opposed to any change in the system," she says. "At the time those who needed help with food went to Social Services to get commodities and supplies — cheese, flour, peanut butter, etc. A lot of the people who needed help were women who were working all day as domestics and then coming home to fix dinner for their family. It seemed to me that making dinner from scratch was an added burden."

Food stamps was one of the first issues that Hair undertook as a county commissioner. "You get a lot done the first year because you don't know what you can't do," she adds.

Another issue close to Hair's heart was the environment. In 1972 the planning commission put together a master plan through 1990. "I looked at it and realized there were no environmental standards set," she says. "There needed to be something in there for traffic count and measuring run-off in construction. There was a lot of flooding going on at the time, and it needed to be brought under control. Environment restrictions were not a part of the planning at the time, but gradually they have been inserted."

In addition to these causes, Hair was concerned about issues that directly affected women. In the early 1970s, as a county commissioner, she pushed for the establishment of a women's commission. "You can guess this was met with great resistance," she says.

Finally, the county commissioners agreed to the commission for women, but the first year they received no budget. After the new Women's Commission board presented a highly professional report to the commissioners concerning what they had accomplished the first year, the Board of County Commissioners gave them a budget. The Mecklenburg County Women's Commission now encompasses a range of domestic violence programs aimed at victims and batterers, including a Latin-speaking program known as "Programa Confianza." The commission also features an employment and training unit with a job bank

and a displaced homemaker program, which trains women to acquire the skills needed to get a job.

Looking back over the many causes Hair has championed and contributed to over the years — the food stamps, the environment, and domestic violence — she reminisces simply, "So many times what was needed was a female perspective." >



At age 83, Liz Hair still works quietly behind the city's political and cultural scenes.

Photo courtesy of the Mecklenburg County Women's Commission

Sue Myrick

Representative From The N.C. 9th
Congressional District To The U.S.
House Of Representatives

An Open-Door Policy From City Hall To The U.S. Capitol

US. CONGRESSWOMAN SUE MYRICK COMES home to her district every weekend not only to stay in contact with her constituents but also "to keep sane." Myrick laughs as she says this, and it is easy to tell that the high-powered excitement of Washington, D.C. is not what drew her to the U.S. House of Representatives. "I believe in public service and what we can do for people. Each day individuals come to our office with problems that need solving. It might be social security, veteran's benefits,

The reason I am here is to serve the people. I am their connection to places and people who are hard for them to get hold of." — Rep. Sue Myrick

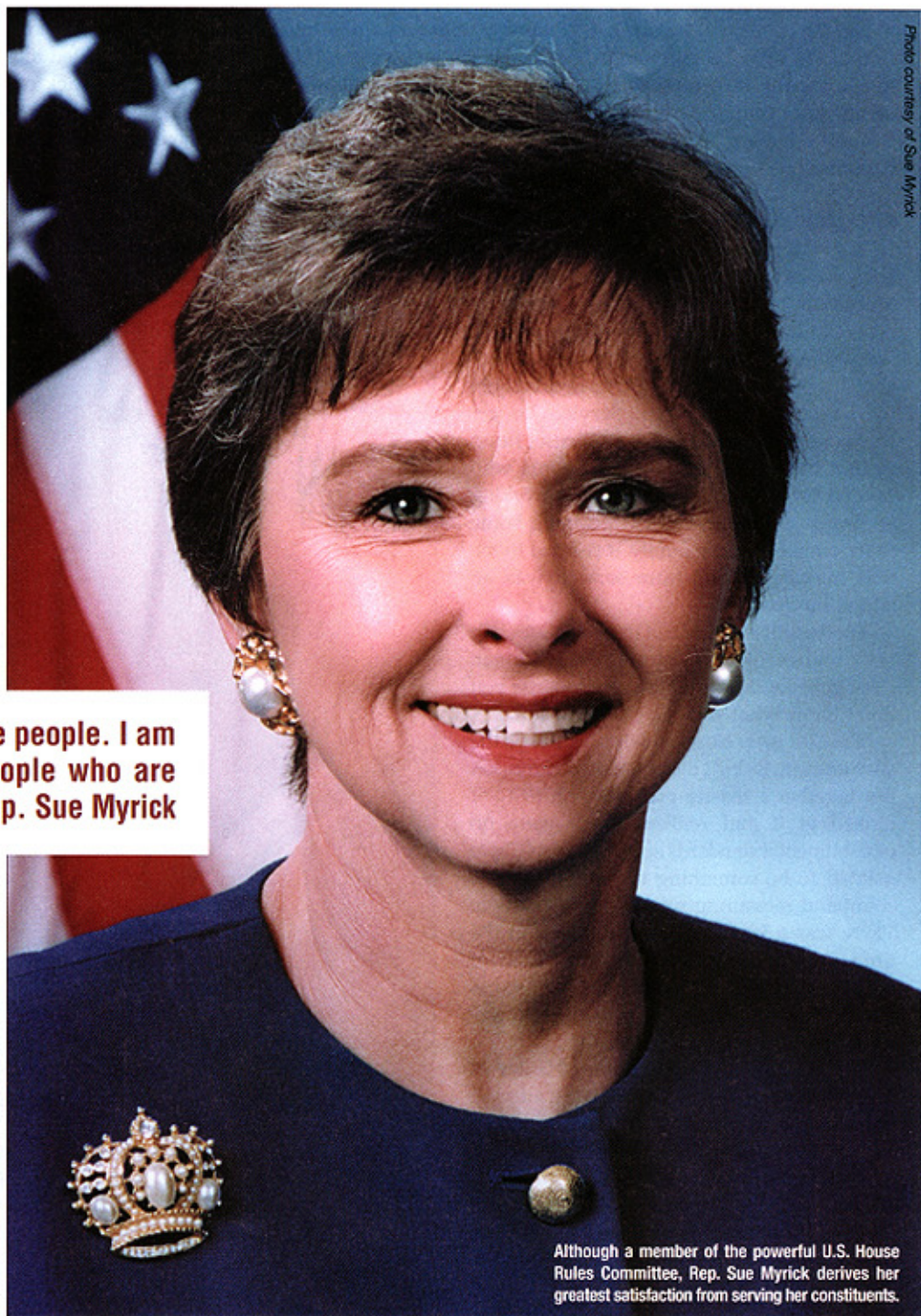
or medical help, but that is what we are here for," she says.

Myrick became interested in politics in Charlotte through the back door, so to speak. She and her husband were interested in buying some land that was for sale for redevelopment in the late 1970s. "I knew that a member of the city council also wanted the land, and even though we had made the highest bid the city council member was going to get it," she says.

Myrick remembers facing the council. "I had no idea you were supposed to call ahead and be scheduled to speak," she says. "Luckily, I knew the mayor from business, and he let me speak. We finally did get the land."

Understanding The Role Of Government

Myrick's experience with the land taught her two things: As a private citizen you don't always know what is going on with the government, and that you need an advocate in government. The experience also influenced her to run for a seat on the city council in 1981. Myrick lost her first race — a low-budget campaign — but by only 200 votes. "I knew then I could do this. I had learned the hard way how things got done, and I wanted to be there for the ordinary person seeking help," she explains.



Although a member of the powerful U.S. House Rules Committee, Rep. Sue Myrick derives her greatest satisfaction from serving her constituents.

Myrick grew up in a home where her parents set an example of helping others. "My parents were not politically active, but were always there when someone needed help," she says. "My father was a volunteer fireman, and if someone needed a washer or dryer fixed he would be the one they called. Our kitchen was the gathering place for our neighbors and friends. I learned then that we all have a certain responsibility to each other."

Myrick served as a city council member from 1983 to 1985 and then successfully ran for mayor in 1987 and 1989. As mayor, Myrick realized

she needed to tackle the road problems ahead of the fast-growing city. "There were terrible road problems facing us in Charlotte," she says. "Fortunately we were able to get a \$100 million bond referendum to build more roads without increasing taxes."

Myrick is also proud that during her two terms as mayor, the NFL's Carolina Panthers came to town. "Their facility was built through private money, and we didn't have to ask the tax payers to pay for it," she says. "The stadium is one of the few privately owned ones in the country."

But Myrick's favorite community achievement as mayor is the homeless shelter. "I am very proud of the homeless shelter that was built on North Tryon Street. It was very much needed in the area and has helped hundreds of people," she says.

Ms. Myrick Goes To Washington

Since 1994, when she was elected to her first term in Congress, Myrick has drawn on lessons learned both as a city council member and as mayor. "It was good that I served many of the people in my district closely before I went to Washington, D.C. I believe that has given me a better idea of what they want," she says.

Myrick's district spans not only the burgeoning city of Charlotte but also rural areas in Union and Gaston counties. Charlotte may be the second-largest banking center in the country, but these other areas have been suffering from unemployment due to the decline of the textile industry. "We have a plan in place for economic development which has included the citizens' involvement and feel it will bring results to the area," she says.

In addition to the challenges of representing such a diverse constituency, Myrick has also faced recent personal challenges. In 1999, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. "It was a very scary time in my life," she says. "After the surgery I did not have an easy time with the chemotherapy. Every time I had chemo, it would take me four days to get over it, and then it be would time to go back."

While she was receiving radiation, Myrick would show up for treatment at 7 a.m., fly to Washington to work during the day, and then go back to Charlotte at night. "The Lord gave me the strength to get through that time," she says. Through her experience Myrick has become an advocate for cancer research. "I know firsthand how hard the fight can be and what a toll it takes on the patient and the family," she adds.

Rep. Myrick Rules

Myrick is now a member of the powerful U.S. House Rules Committee. She is one of 13 members of Congress who determine the rules under which pieces of legislation go to the House floor to be debated. This area is where Myrick feels she can best help streamline the federal government and balance the federal budget.

Although Myrick holds this powerful position, you get the feeling that her greatest satisfaction in being a member of Congress comes from another source. "The reason I am here is to serve the people," Myrick says. "That is why I go home every weekend. The people in my district see me out grocery shopping and running around doing errands just like they are. I am their connection to places and people who are hard for them to get hold of. If they need something, my office is there to help them."

Those days of watching her parents help their friends and neighbors made a great impression on Myrick. Over the years she hasn't forgotten that we all have a responsibility to each other. >

Potion

RELIEF FOR MAKEUP JUNKIES

EXCLUSIVE COSMETICS • SKINCARE
BATH & BODY • FRAGRANCE
ACCESSORIES • MAKEUP APPLICATION
BRIDAL MAKEUP • AIRBRUSH FOUNDATION

1419 EAST BOULEVARD CHARLOTTE, NC 28203
TEL 704.347.6841 FAX 704.347.6857



FRESH
NEW
STYLE

COME
EXPERIENCE
THE NEWEST
EUROPEAN
SPRING
CLOTHING AND
ACCESSORIES

BELLE VILLE

AT BIRKDALE VILLAGE

16836 Birkdale Commons Parkway • Huntersville 28078

704.655.9506

I-77 at Exit 25, 1/2 mile on Highway 73W

Pat Grigg

Director of the Mecklenburg County
Women's Commission

A Strong, Steady Voice For The Women Of Mecklenburg County

JUST FROM TALKING TO PAT GRIGG, YOU CAN TELL SHE is the kind of person who would always be there if you needed her. She wouldn't be the type to leave you standing in the cold, and she would go the extra mile for you when the going got tough. Her voice is full of confidence, but at the same time she puts you at ease. As the director of the Mecklenburg County Women's Commission Grigg has used that voice to speak for many women who have been left standing in the cold and to calm frantic women and children who have been abused and needed help.

"So many women come to us and feel they are stuck in a situation and will never be able to get out of it. We are here to show them that it doesn't have to be that way. No one should have to live in an abusive situation." — Pat Grigg

Grigg has worked with the Women's Commission since December 1989, when she became the director. "I planned to remain in this position for only two years," she laughs. "But I saw the need was here, and it has kept growing." Grigg understands the needs of women in Mecklenburg County well. "Charlotte is my home," she says. "I grew up in the area and went to undergraduate school here."

Growing Up

Although she grew up in a depressed community in Charlotte, Grigg says she never felt like her family was poor. "My parents were hard-working people, and I never saw us as doing without. We always had sufficient food and clothes," she says.

As the oldest child, Grigg felt obligated to set an example for her younger siblings. "I knew I wanted to go to college and show my brothers and sisters that it could be done," she says. Grigg graduated from Johnson C. Smith University and worked full time at jobs such as waitress, domestic worker, and baby sitter in some of Charlotte's wealthier neighborhoods to help pay for college. Graduating with a degree in psychology, Grigg then received a full fellowship to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There a master's degree in public administration started Grigg toward a career of helping others. "If you have pursued advanced training in public administration, you have a pretty good idea you are going to work for a local government," she says.

Grigg returned to Charlotte and began working for the county's employment and training department. She later transferred to the county's human resources department, where she served as EEO/Affirmative

Action and Compliance administrator. Both of these jobs gave Grigg experience and insight that she would need when she began work with the Mecklenburg County Women's Commission. "When I was first offered the job by the county manager I requested a few days to think about it," she says. "The more I thought about it, the more I knew that this would give me the chance to really help a large number of people and be able to see the difference when their lives began to change."

"I saw a gap when I became employed with the Women's Commission in helping children living in homes of domestic violence," Grigg continues. "I wanted to gather as much information as possible on the subject so I sent out 250 letters across the country to women's commissions and services for women to find out what other agencies were doing." Grigg received numerous replies from agencies that were working with children who had experienced domestic violence. "I took the information and came up with a plan for Mecklenburg County and submitted it to the state for a grant," she says. "We received a rather small award, but it was a start."

Although Pat Grigg is in the midst of a battle with cancer, she remains true to her philosophy of helping others.



Working For Children

With one staff person funded by the grant, the Women's Commission began to help children who were victims of or had witnessed domestic violence. "Many of the children's names come from the school system. Teachers can really pick up on things in the classroom," she says. "We also get names from the courts. It's wonderful to see these children go through programs that help them and their families become healthy and prosperous."

The Mecklenburg County Domestic Violence Child Observer's Program is a program that works with children. This program helps child witnesses to domestic violence develop resiliency and coping skills to manage their daily lives and to break free from the cycle of violence when they grow up. "Some of the children who first entered the program fondly referred to it as the Hero Program, and that name stuck," says Grigg.

The Women's Commission also has been reaching out to the growing Latino population through "Programa Confianza," which helps serve Latino victims of domestic violence and their children. "The program is three years old and is in need of more funding and staff. As the Latin population increases so do the instances of domestic violence," Grigg explains.

Serving thousands of clients annually, the staff of the Women's Commission has increased from a mere four people in Dec. 1989 to a current staff of 26. Nearly 70 percent have direct service responsibilities to victims of domestic violence and their children (ages 5 to 18), Latino victims, and batterer education services. The remaining departmental components provide services to women and families seeking self-sufficiency. "We are immensely grateful for the continuing support of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners," says Grigg.

Helping By Example

Grigg is no stranger to facing problems head on. "I believe by growing up in a depressed community and having to work my way through college I understand what it takes to get ahead," she says. "So many women come to us and feel they are stuck in a situation and will never be able to get out of it. We are here to show them that it doesn't have to be that way. No one should have to live in an abusive situation."

"I understand what hard work is and the struggle of overcoming obstacles because I did it when I went to college. When other students would be discussing their extracurricular activities, I didn't comprehend the concept. I had to either study or work one of my jobs," she continues.

Grigg is now in the midst of facing another obstacle in her life having been diagnosed with colon cancer four months ago. After having discomfort for several months, she decided to check with a doctor in November and got the results back December 1, revealing the cancer had metastasized into other parts of her body. She has since had surgery and is undergoing chemotherapy. As in the past, Grigg is facing the cancer with quiet strength. "I feel the need to tell people to be sure and get your check-ups, be in tune to your body, and know your family's medical history. I had no idea there had been so much cancer in my family," she says.

Though there are months of chemotherapy ahead, Grigg doesn't ask, "Why me?" Instead her focus is on others. "I feel that we are allowed trials in our lives that strengthen us and bring us closer to the higher power, and then we are able to strengthen someone else," she says.

"We can't turn our backs on each other," she continues, discussing the need to assist those whose lives seem not to have answers. Grigg is a wonderful example for all of us and a strong steady voice for the women of Mecklenburg County. **TCW**

PAUL JENKINS *Paintings and Watercolors*



Phenomena Violet Watch Dog

Watercolor on Paper

On View Through March 29

ALICE BALLARD MUNN *Recent Sculpture*



Large Bud VI

Porcelain

JERALD MELBERG GALLERY

704-365-3000

nc@jeraldmelberg.com

www.jeraldmelberg.com

Morrocroft Village
Near SouthPark Mall
Mon-Sat 10am-6pm