

THE WESTFIELD SERVICE LEAGUE - HISTORY

The Westfield Service League (WSL) was born in the depths of the Great Depression, out of the desire of Westfield women to serve their community. On November 7, 1932, a group of 19 young women met at the home of Mrs. J.H. Verlenden, an advisor from the District Nursing Association, for the purpose of forming an organization to render volunteer service to Westfield charities. The group quickly grew and had 35 members just one month later. The Westfield Service League became recognized as a group of capable young women, ready to really work. Requests for aid of every description came pouring in. It was the task of the charter members to choose the most worthwhile projects — projects that would continue the League on the course originally set for it.

In March 1933, the young Service League was asked to take over the management of the District Nursing Association's Thrift Shop. The League also assumed the responsibility of collecting pennies for the Milk Fund, ran a lunchroom at the YMCA for 100 undernourished school children and began their long association with the Children's Country Home (now known as Children's Specialized Hospital) by transporting youngsters to and from the Orange Clinic.

In 1953, after years of renting space and moving when lease terms changed or more space was needed, the League bought a building on Westfield Avenue to house the Thrift Shop. On February 9, 1953, the Westfield Service League was formally incorporated in the state of New Jersey.

In 1962, the Associates had a dream of another shop and, through their efforts, the Consignment Shop came into being. In 1964, the Westfield Avenue property was sold, and the shops moved to 22 Elmer Street, where for the first time, both the Consignment and Thrift Shops were under the same roof. The most momentous move occurred in the spring of 1968, when the League purchased our present home at 114 Elmer Street. And, after a summer of hard work redecorating the new shops, the grand opening was held in September.

Today, in addition to running both the Thrift and Consignment Shops, League members also deliver weekly Mobile Meals, as well as staff the Food Pantry bimonthly. During 93 years of community service, the League has expanded and changed to meet the needs of both country and community. Our stated purpose of the nonprofit organization in 2025 is still closely aligned with the purpose of the original group of women: *to assist charitable, volunteer, civic and service organizations of Westfield and its environs by rendering efficient volunteer service and monetary contributions.*

Since 1932, the League has been proud of many outstanding achievements, including:

- Volunteering in wartime, when some 20 members cleaned hospital rooms and performed other needed services at Muhlenberg Hospital where the staff was seriously depleted by the draft.
- Purchasing needed items for the Westfield Rescue Squad: a Life-Pak 5 (a defibrillator monitor); pagers for communication between headquarters and squad members; four new radios for two of the ambulances; refurbishing and refurbishing the crew waiting room at the squad building; contributing funds toward a third ambulance; "Heartstart" defibrillators; in 1990, replacing the truck and chassis of one rig; contributing \$10,000 in 2016 toward new digital radios and receivers and assisting with the purchase of three state-mandated iPads to communicate to ERs while en route to hospitals.
- Endowing a private room at Overlook Hospital in 1949 and donating a room to Rahway Hospital in 1956 in memory of Carol Stapp.
- Redecorating Children's Specialized Hospital's out-patient reception room in 1963, and in 1975 donating a medical control room and assisting in the equipping of an audiological room.
- Supplying every member of the Westfield Police Force with a bulletproof vest, purchasing a station wagon to be used by the Red Cross as a transportation van and providing members with pagers to facilitate communications.
- Conducting the first Historic Homes Tour of Westfield and sowing the seeds for the development of the Miller Cory Museum.
- Commemorating the League's 40th anniversary by presenting a flagpole and plaque honoring the Veterans of the Vietnam War to the town's Memorial Pool.

The League celebrated its 50th anniversary on November 18, 1983, which included the reunion of nine of the original charter members who were, in turn, honored by the League for their foresight and dedication. The Town of Westfield joined in by presenting the League with a certificate of appreciation, however, the real surprise of the day, was a congratulatory telegram from President Ronald Regan... quoted here in part, "As we experience a renewal of the volunteer spirit of America, it is most fitting that we recognize those who have tended its flame. I send my congratulations and gratitude to all of your members, past and present, along with my best wishes for the future."

The League marked its 60th anniversary by donating funds to the Westfield Recreation Commission to landscape the area surrounding the flagpole at the Memorial Pool. In 2017, the League was recognized with a proclamation by the Town of Westfield for its 85 years of service to Westfield. League members were on hand to receive the proclamation and be recognized.

During 93 years of service, the Westfield Service League has given close to \$3,000,000 in grants to such organizations including but not limited to: Birthday Box, Children's Specialized Hospital, Contact We Care, Covenant House, Emmanuel Cancer, Family and Children's Services, Mobile Meals, Westfield Food Pantry, Westfield Historical Society, Westfield Y and YWCA Union County.

Currently, we are a group of 173 volunteers: 100 Active/Senior Active members, 19 Associate members and 54 Sustaining members.