

SUN SENIOR NEWS

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Pauline Watson – Keeping Careful Watch

BY JENNIFER MARTIN

Before she first joined Neighborhood Watch in 2007, Pauline Watson had never volunteered for anything, content to tend her garden and stay at home. But, she soon realized how much she had missed being around people and came away from the meeting with a renewed sense of purpose while SCLH gained a dynamic infusion of energy and leadership that's lasted for years.

Born in 1940, Pauline lived with her parents, one sister and five brothers in Woonsocket (Indian name for waterfall), Rhode Island, until she was twelve and the family moved to Massachusetts. She attended St. Claire's High School, an all-girls Catholic school. She recalls the nuns "having a fit" when the boys from the local all-male Mt. St. Charles Catholic High School would circle around in their cars during the lunch hour, flirting with the girls. "The nuns would tell us to stay six feet away from the fence," she says with a laugh.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MARTIN

Following graduation, Pauline got a job with Grace Holmes Club Plan in Ashton, Rhode Island, a catalogue company, typing address labels used to mail customers' orders. Five years later, in 1963, her bosses were sad to see her go because her typing accuracy was phenomenal. But, it was for a good reason. She married Andy Thibodeau on October 5, 1963, a week after he graduated from RI Radio and Electronics School. Immediately following the wedding reception, they left for San Jose, California, where a boom in electronics was taking place in Silicon Valley.

The couple lived off their savings for three months until Pauline applied for a position at San Jose College (now San Jose State University). On the day they planned to return to New England if no jobs were to be had, Pauline got the call she'd been waiting for at 5 minutes to 5 pm. She was hired as a

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Pauline Watson

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receptionist in the Business Manager's Office. In subsequent years she went on to become the secretary to the VP of Business and Financial Affairs until her retirement in July 2000, having spent more than 36 years in her career.

Divorced in 1984, Pauline was asked by a co-worker to join her at the Wutzit Club, a singles group, which held dances in a gym behind the University of Santa Clara. One night, in walked a tall, debonair, gray-haired man, wearing a yellow sleeveless sweater and snapping his fingers to the music. It was Frank Watson, and it was love at first sight. One of Frank's buddies leaned over to him and pointed out Pauline. "See that lady over there?" he said. "That's wifey material." Frank, who had been single for 20 years after a divorce, took a deeper look at Pauline and agreed. They started dating and despite a few break-ups due to Frank's concern about their 16-year age difference, they eloped to Las Vegas on Feb. 22, 1988.

Life with Frank was a breath of fresh air. Having no children of her own, Pauline became a stepmother to Frank's children from a prior marriage: Steve Watson who lives in Sonora with his wife and has three married children and Pamela Mason who lives in Santa Rosa with her husband and has two married daughters. Even though he was older, Frank was very young at heart and encouraged Pauline to cultivate a more active way of life. "He taught me to ski at Dodge Ridge, to golf and play tennis," she recalls. The couple also got into ballroom dancing. "It was a whole new life for me," she says.

They enjoyed traveling to places like Canada, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Montreal, Quebec, Halifax and many cities throughout the U.S., especially the East Coast where Pauline's favorite relatives lived.

Pauline and Frank moved to SCLH in 2005 on the recommendation of a relative who said it would be a great place to retire. During her years working at San Jose State, Pauline gained many organizational skills when she managed the University's Annual Employee Service Recognition Award Luncheon and coordinated various conferences for them.



Frank and Pauline Watson in 1988.



Pauline Watson and her recognition award from the Neighborhood Watch.



Remembrance poster Pauline Watson made for what would have been their 34th wedding anniversary.

Knowing this, when attending a National Night Out (NNO) event at the Village Coordinator's house, unknown to Pauline, Frank nominated her as the Mailbox Captain for their street. That was the beginning of Pauline's commitment to Neighborhood Watch (NW). "You can blame Frank," she says with a grin.

Pauline attended a reorganization meeting of NW in January, 2007, because volunteers were needed for certain positions. After learning what NNO entailed, she walked out of that meeting as its Coordinator. Four months later, NW Executive Director, Ken Sheehan, had a long discussion with her about their need for a secretary and based

on her qualifications, Pauline was a great fit. As a Director, she oversaw several villages, a position which lasted 12 years. Frank was very happy for her. "I felt I had a newfound purpose," she says. "I could see where I could help."

One of her talents was her ability to recruit over 100 candidates for Director, Village Coordinator and Mailbox Captain positions. She continues to be a Village Coordinator for 6 villages with 23 "fantastic" Mailbox Captains, who secure and maintain residents' emergency contact information and forward alerts to them.

Throughout her years of volunteering, Pauline has been recognized for her

outstanding contributions to the community. For example, in 2009, she received the NW Spark Plug Award for her efforts as Editor in making it easier to navigate their website, in organizing potlucks and performing board social functions. Especially notable was her participation in SCLH's 10th Anniversary parade and in helping the Association assemble and deliver 6,783 green gift bags for both the 10th and 20th Anniversary celebrations.

She was honored at the Lincoln Hills Foundation Hats Off II ceremony in 2011 which cited her efforts making NW "the best in the city of Lincoln and a model for other neighborhoods that want the program." And she was also nominated for the SCLH Association's Wall of Fame in 2019, in recognition for making a profound impact on the SCLH community. The Wall of Fame praised "individuals who have helped grow our SCLH community, motivated others to get involved, and remained active in the causes that they believed in so passionately."

Sadly, Frank passed away last year at the age of 97 and is buried at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon. On February 22, 2022, on what would have been their 34th wedding anniversary, Pauline invited family and friends to a memorial where she displayed a large posterboard filled with photos of their courtship days and life together. At 2:22 pm, the group went outside and tooted horns in celebration.

Now Pauline fills her days tending to her beautiful garden, adding to her large milk glass collection which she began nearly 60 years ago, and working on jigsaw puzzles which she temporarily displays on her dining room table. She also volunteers as an AARP scheduler, setting up free appointments for individuals when tax time is here.

Someone once sent Pauline a card which read: "Congratulations! You're the kind of person who makes the world a better, brighter place." With her many contributions to SCLH throughout the years, she has, indeed, made our community a safer and more neighborly place.

Want to share your story or know a neighbor who should be recognized?

Just let us know!

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