

## **A Short History of New Mexico Press Women**

by Sandy Schauer and Denise Tessier

The founding year of New Mexico Press Women (NMPW) could properly be called 1950, but the ideals of NMPW show up earlier in organizations whose members were the working women of the New Mexico press in the late 1940s.

One of those organizations, the Albuquerque Women's Press Club, formed the nucleus of the nascent NMPW with an initial meeting in December 1949.

During the 1950s the group grew, creating districts across the state, approving a constitution that included a board of directors, and holding conferences, where members expanded their knowledge and skills.

In 1953, to bring attention to women journalists, NMPW members voted to annually bestow a Zia Award. (The sun symbol of Zia Pueblo is often used to represent the state of New Mexico and is proudly displayed on the state flag.)

The first Zia Award was given a great deal of publicity, as was the first Zia Award dinner, held in July 1954 in Albuquerque. The inaugural recipient was Margaret Page Hood, a contributor of essays to the *Christian Science Monitor* and author of ten novels.

From its beginnings honoring many types of outstanding work, the Zia Award has evolved into a book award for a woman with strong ties to New Mexico and is still presented annually, given in rotation in the categories of children's books, adult nonfiction and fiction.

With the arrival of the 1960s New Mexico Press Women celebrated its tenth anniversary by adopting a new constitution opening NMPW to any "woman active in the fields of publishing, radio, television, public relations and freelance writing."

For New Mexico Press Women, the decade of the 1960s allowed the group to accomplish much and grow. Frankie McCarty was named New Mexico's first Woman of Achievement in 1963. She was then writing articles for the Albuquerque papers from Finland, where her husband taught English.

New Mexico Woman of Achievement winners went on to compete with other state nominees for the singular title of National Federation of Press Women Woman of Achievement and four have won what since 1991 has been called the Communicator of Achievement award.

New Mexico's Faye Plank won the national award in 1981 competing against 21 other state nominees. Three more NMPW members won NMPW's highest honor — Ree Strange Sheck, 2005; Cary Herz, 2008; and Loretta Hall, 2016. Three New Mexicans have been named national runners-up — Sherry Robinson, 1980; Denise Tessier, 1995; and Anne Hillerman, 2015.

With the advent of the 1970s, NMPW became a totally independent organization when it broke with the New Mexico Press Association, with which NMPW had been holding conferences.

The group struggled, but by 1979, it had 100 members. And even in lean times, it supported college students who wanted to study journalism (and journalism's expanded forms such as public relations and advertising).

NMPW established the Doris Gregory Memorial Scholarship after Doris Gregory's death in December 1969. She had held a variety of journalism jobs across the state and served NMPW in various capacities, including president.

The scholarship is awarded to this day to students studying different forms of journalism. And NMPW continues to support high school students with its annual communications contest.

New Mexico Press Women not only survived the Disco 70s, but began to thrive, and the January 1980 newsletter was entitled *The Pushy Broadsheet*, perhaps a sign of the times. That newsletter listed current job openings and kept members connected.

The 1990s started with New Mexico hosting the National Federation of Press Women for the first time. The decade ended with five active chapters meeting around the state.

NMPW entered its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year – 2000 – with a board shakeup and the president serving a double term, but it proved to be a good decade as the group became revitalized and members won national honors.

New Mexico Press Women stayed alive in the years that started with 2010, beginning the decade with release of a book of the group's 60-year history, put together by two member volunteers. As always, an active board helped keep members interested.

One issue the board and members dealt with periodically was whether a name change was necessary. In 2010, the name remained New Mexico Press Women when neither of the options suggested by a bylaws subcommittee (New Mexico Media Professionals and New Mexico Press Women/Media Professionals) received enough votes.

Over the decades NMPW members have entered the communications contest, often in multiple categories, and have won individual sweepstakes honors, in addition to the state winning the NFPW sweepstakes in 1988 and 1993.

With a history that now approaches seventy years, New Mexico Press Women maintains its own in a world where media is constantly challenged.

Whatever its future, the group continues to support journalism students, honor outstanding members, and be an advocate for ethics, professionalism and a free press. And through monthly luncheons and statewide conferences, it continues to serve as a forum for discussion of matters affecting both the media and the public at large.