



# 1968

## and the Pittsburgh Women's Movement

By Patricia Ulbrich, Ph.D.



The Greater Pittsburgh Area Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) provided leadership in the late 1960s as women struggled for equal rights. Wilma Scott Heide, a behavioral scientist and activist, founded the Pittsburgh chapter in September 1967.<sup>1</sup> By the start of 1968, the Pittsburgh chapter had grown to 40 members, with another 40 on its mailing list.<sup>2</sup> Over the next 12 months, chapter members acquired leadership skills and developed an effective grassroots organization.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of the chapter created an aura of symbolic capital for Heide. She was elected to the NOW Board and appointed chair of the membership committee at the annual conference in December 1967. NOW also accepted her invitation to hold its next board meeting in Pittsburgh, headquartered at the Hotel Webster Hall in Oakland on January 27-28, 1968.<sup>4</sup> Heide's ascent in NOW connected activities in Pittsburgh to the larger women's movement and empowered chapter members in their struggle to gain rights for women in Pittsburgh.

The Pittsburgh chapter was organized around five task forces: legal and political rights, employment, the image of women in the media, family, and education. The issues

each task force addressed were in line with NOW's strategic agenda, but their approach was driven by the culture and politics in Pittsburgh.

### Employment Discrimination

Cindy Hill was developing a legal case against the Chartiers Valley School District when Wilma Scott Heide recruited her to become a founding member of the Greater Pittsburgh Area Chapter of NOW. Hill, a high school music teacher who had reached her salary ceiling, requested a sabbatical from her teaching job to earn a master's degree. She completed the degree, but was fired by the school district after having a baby while on sabbatical. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* ran a front-page story about the public hearing with a photo of Hill and her baby. While her case galvanized support among feminists locally, she also gained encouragement at the state and national level. Wilma Scott Heide arranged for Hill to attend the annual NOW conference where she addressed a national audience. Betty Friedan, NOW's president, held a news conference to announce the organization's support of the case and the Pennsylvania State Education Association provided financial assistance for legal counsel.<sup>5</sup> In August 1968,

County Court Judge Benjamin Lencher ruled that Chartiers Valley School District must reinstate Hill for the fall term.<sup>6</sup> Her experience became symbolic of the conditions surrounding women's employment in Pittsburgh.

### Discrimination in Public Accommodations

In the 1960s, it was common for restaurants to have separate dining areas for women and men. Men's dining rooms or grilles were a symbol of male bonding. Following the leadership of blacks "sitting in" at segregated dining counters, women likewise began demanding equal treatment. Members of Pittsburgh NOW identified the Stouffer's restaurant in Oakland as a target for their grievance in part because Wilma Scott Heide worked nearby. Male diners were escorted to a private dining room, but women had to wait to be seated in a public area. Chapter members developed multiple tactics to protest the practice. First, Heide met with the manager of the Stouffer's who explained the policy came from higher management and "that sometimes women were allowed but generally they preferred not to sit in the men's section because of the possibility of bad

Wednesday, Oct. 23, 1968



Press Photo by Robert J. Pavuchak

PREPARING FOR THE INVASION of the men's only dining room at Stouffer's restaurant, from left, Mrs. Virginia Johnson of Plum, a research assistant at the University of Pittsburgh; Kathy Doerfler, a research assistant at the University of Pittsburgh; and (standing) Dr. Jo-Ann Gardner, a research assistant at the University of Pittsburgh.

## Women 'Table' Restrictions, Battle 'Men Only' Dining Rooms

By DOLORES FREDRICK  
Talk up another point for men's rights.

Or was it? Regardless, the sit-in in a dining room pre-arranged for men.

### Professional Women

The sit-in group is professional women who yesterday succeeded in breaking bread—fortunately that was all—with their counterparts in the business world.

The leader of the band of women's rights advocates, Mrs. Wilma Scott Heide, a New Kensington sociologist, charged that a dining room reserved for "men only" was just one of the many indignities women have to accept.

Mrs. Heide has plans to carry her campaign even further—first to the City Human Relations Commission today then the State and finally the national level.

She said she has a meeting scheduled with the City in which she will request that one three-letter word—SEX—be added to the City's ordinance on human relations, which includes "race, color, religion, ancestry and place of birth" as grounds of forbidden group discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations.

The Federal Government is the only level where "sex" is included in a discrimination law, she said, "and it deals with employment."

Group Is 2 Years Old Backing Mrs. Heide in her

Washington. Mrs. Heide is president of the Pittsburgh chapter.

They are Mrs. Vivienne Manias, a Thornburg secretary; Dr. Ina Braden and Dr. Jo-Ann Gardner, psychologists at the University of Pittsburgh; Mrs. Virginia Johnson of Plum Borough, a research assistant; and Kathy Doerfler of Lawrenceville, a senior mathematics major at the University of Pittsburgh.

The scene was Stouffer's restaurant in Oakland. But, according to Mrs. Heide, it could have been any restaurant in Pittsburgh where "men only" dining rooms are in operation.

"It just happened," she declared, "that we work in Oakland and it was a spot we frequent for lunch."

language."<sup>7</sup> Next, NOW wrote to the manager of the Stouffer's chain protesting a males-only dining room. He replied that the practice "was tradition and that some women preferred this."<sup>8</sup> Outraged NOW members staged a "sit in" at the Stouffer's Men's Grille in Oakland to draw attention to what they believed to be a blatant example of separate and unequal treatment. Heide chose the date for the sit-in to coincide with the campaign to have sex discrimination in public accommodations banned in Pittsburgh.<sup>9</sup> The *Pittsburgh Press* provided the visibility they sought for their cause by running an article with a photo of NOW members "sitting in" at the Stouffer's restaurant. The article quoted Heide, who said that "most working women have less time for lunch than men and I don't see why they have to wait in line to be seated when men are shuffled to a reserved room [in] just one of the many indignities women have to accept."<sup>10</sup> One NOW member remarked, "Anyone who doubts relevance of this action to NOW's goals need only think of black people's indignation at their traditional exclusion from public accommodations labeled 'white only.'"<sup>11</sup>

## Pittsburgh Anti-Discrimination Ordinance

Pittsburgh already had a strong anti-discrimination ordinance at the start of 1968 that outlawed discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on many criteria—but not sex.<sup>12</sup> Wilma Scott Heide began a campaign to have gender made a protected category. Heide, Thelma Isaacs, and two other NOW members met with David Washington, executive director of the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations, to initiate action to amend the ordinance. She also met with Florence Reizenstein, a member of the Commission on Human Relations. Not only was Reizenstein supportive of the idea, she urged NOW to



“Most working women have less time for lunch than men and I don’t see why they have to wait in line to be seated when men are shuffled to a reserved room [in] just one of the many indignities women have to accept.”

request hearings with the city.<sup>13</sup> Heide intended to do so, but encouraged NOW members to do their homework before requesting a hearing. They needed to know what kinds of information the commission wanted in order to evaluate their request, and they also needed to solicit support from other organizations.

They observed City Council meetings and successfully recruited the YWCA, the ACLU, and the Allegheny County Council for Civil Rights to join Pittsburgh NOW in petitioning to add sex to the ordinance.<sup>14</sup> After six months,<sup>15</sup> the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations finally scheduled hearings. The Pittsburgh chapter had two and one-half hours to make its case. NOW chose to rely on its members’ expertise. Gerald Gardner, a mathematician, presented data on occupational segregation by sex and resulting pay differentials. Sandra Bem, a psychologist, testified on the psychological impact of sex discrimination. Wilma Scott Heide took a different approach. After speaking for nearly an hour, she appealed to the commission members’ commitment to human rights:

Men have always been taught to be brave, and women have always been taught to care. Now, men must be brave enough to care about the total quality, the interpersonal equality, of our lives without fear of being called soft or effeminate; women need to care enough to bravely assert our concerns about the quality of our common lives without fear of being called too aggressive. Male and female qualities are human qualities. If it is good for men to be adventurous, assertive, curious, dynamic, it is good for humans. If it is good for women to be tender, compassionate, caring and concerned, then it is good for humans.<sup>16</sup>

Members of the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations were persuaded by

the testimony they heard and submitted an amendment to the Pittsburgh City Council requiring fair practices in employment, housing, and public accommodations for persons of both sexes. It would take another six months before the amended ordinance was signed into law, but Wilma Scott Heide and NOW members began planning issue campaigns to challenge sex discrimination in Pittsburgh. Together they established the Greater Pittsburgh Area NOW chapter as the leading organization in the struggle for women’s equality in Pittsburgh.

**Patricia Ulbrich, Ph.D.**, is director of In Sisterhood: the Women’s Movement in Pittsburgh®, an oral history project. For more information about the project go to <http://insisterhood.info> or contact her at [pat@insisterhood.info](mailto:pat@insisterhood.info).

<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Humes Haney, *A Feminist Legacy: The Ethics of Wilma Scott Heide and Company* (Buffalo, NY: Margaretdaughters, Inc., 1985), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Wilma Scott Heide, *Memo to Kathryn Clarenbach*, n.d. Collection of Kathryn Clarenbach, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archive. Series 41/4/4/4/1: National Organization for Women, Box 002, Folder 06.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Ulbrich and Suzanne Staggenborg, *Building a Grassroots Movement Organization: NOW in the Pittsburgh Women’s Movement*. Paper presented at the International Sociological Association Meeting (Gothenburg, Sweden: 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Wilma Scott Heide, *Letter to Kathryn Clarenbach*, 3 January 1968. Collection of Kathryn Clarenbach, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archive, Series 41/4/4/4/1: National Organization for Women. Box 002, Folder 06.

<sup>6</sup> Vince Gagetta, “Her ‘Mistake’-A Baby: Teacher Says Battle was Real ‘Education,’” *Pittsburgh-Post Gazette*, 19 August 1968, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Minutes of June 17, 1968 meeting*, Greater Pittsburgh Area NOW chapter. University of Wisconsin-Madison Archive: Series 41/4/4/4/1: National Organization for Women, Box 002 Folder 06.

<sup>8</sup> Wilma Scott Heide, *Notes and Activities from June to September 1968*. University of Wisconsin-Madison Archive: Series 41/4/4/4/1: National Organization for Women, Box 002, Folder 06.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, Joann Evansgardner, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Delores Frederick, “Women ‘Table’ Restriction, Battle ‘Men Only’ Dining Room,” *Pittsburgh Press*, 22 October 1968, 70.

<sup>11</sup> *Minutes of October 17, 1968 meeting*, Greater Pittsburgh Area NOW chapter. University of Pittsburgh Library, Archive Service Center: Collection of Jean Witter Papers, Box 6 Folder 17.

<sup>12</sup> City of Pittsburgh, Ordinance No. 75 Sections 2(A)(1) (2) and Section 2(B). University of Pittsburgh Archive Service Center: JoAnn Evansgardner and Gerald H.F. Gardner Papers. AIS.2001.09, Box 25, Folder 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Minutes of February 20, 1968 meeting*, Greater Pittsburgh Area NOW chapter. University of Wisconsin-Madison Archive: Series 41/4/4/4/1: National Organization for Women, Box 002 Folder 06.

<sup>14</sup> *Minutes of April 2, 1968 executive committee meeting*, Greater Pittsburgh Area Now chapter. University of Wisconsin-Madison Archive: Series 41/4/4/4/1: National Organization for Women, Box 002 Folder 06.

<sup>15</sup> Heide announced at the chapter meeting on April 16 that the Commission on Human Relations was too busy to schedule a hearing. It is likely the social turmoil in Pittsburgh following Martin Luther King, Jr.’s death raised issues that demanded the commission’s immediate attention.

<sup>16</sup> Wilma Scott Heide, *Testimony to the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations*, 23 October 1968. University of Pittsburgh Archive Service Center: JoAnn Evansgardner and Gerald H.F. Gardner Papers. AIS.2001.09, Box 25, Folder 22.