Dear NOW members,

February is here and time to move forward, build our chapter, meet via Zoom, and celebrate Black History Month and Valentine’s Day. We had a great January membership meeting and were able to plan February’s meeting. We have decided to continue meeting via Zoom, and have changed the meeting date and time to the Third Thursday of the month from 6:30–8:00 p.m. The monthly meetings will include a half hour to meet and give reports, and the remaining time will be dedicated to a program.

Marion Aird, who was our interim treasurer and newsletter
editor, has retired to write her memoirs. I want to thank her for all her good work and effort for our chapter. At present I will continue as president and be interim treasurer. It is my hope that by June, we will have a new president and treasurer. I am happy to announce that Rebecca D. has volunteered to be our interim secretary, and will be the newsletter editor with the support of Amy N. Special shout out to June B., who is running our Zoom meeting. Having these women step forward is already making a difference.

For our next meeting on **February 18**, we will be honoring Black History Month with a presentation by Tina Rogers, a local activist who will give us some background on Black History Month, and presentations from three women who ran for election in November in Sonoma County and won.

The presenters will be:

- **Tina Rogers**, Overview of Black History Month
- **Jackie Elward**, Vice Mayor Rohnert City Council
- **Natalie Rogers**, Vice Mayor Santa Rosa City Council
- **Skylaer Palacios**, Council Member Healdsburg City Council

**A little trivia:** February 1 is National **Freedom Day**, created by Major Richard Robert Wright Sr., a former slave, commemorating the 13th Amendment, which formally abolished slavery and was officially approved on **February 1**, 1865. Almost 100 years later, that day became known as National **Freedom Day**. Also, on February 1, 1978, the first postage stamp to honor a Black woman, Harriet Tubman, was issued in Washington, DC.
Looking forward to seeing you at our February 18th meeting. See Zoom instructions below, and an announcement will also be sent as a reminder.

**Something to think about:** “The next time a woman of whatever color, or a dark-skinned person of whatever sex aspires to be president, the way should be a little smoother because I helped pave it.” —Shirley Anita Chisholm (November 30, 1924–January 1, 2005) was an American politician, educator, and author.[1] In 1968, she became the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress. In 1972 she became the first African-American and woman candidate from a major party to run for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination.

—Elaine Holtz, President

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**Join Us on February 18!**

Dear members and friends,

Here is the information for the NOW meeting of Thursday, **February 18, 2021 from 6:30–8:00 p.m.**
To celebrate **Black History Month** we will have special presentations
plus Q&A with:

- **Tina Rogers** – Overview of Black History Month
- **Jackie Elward** – Vice Mayor – Rohnert City Council
- **Natalie Rogers** – Vice Mayor – Santa Rosa City Council
- **Skylaer Palacios** – Council Member, Healdsburg City Council

**Zoom Instructions:**

**Date:** Thursday, February 18, 2021

**Time:** 6:30–8:00 p.m.

**Zoom Information:** Join Zoom Meeting

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87588753750?pwd=SW9nd1B3Y1dHbUphcGw4YW5LTUYyUT09

**Meeting ID:** 875 8875 3750 **Passcode:** 520289

**Phone-In Numbers:**

- **One tap mobile**
  - +16699009128,,87588753750# US (San Jose)
  - +12532158782,,87588753750# US (Tacoma)

  **Dial in by your location.**
  - +1 669 900 9128 (San Jose)
  - +1 253 215 8782 (Tacoma)
  - +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
Making history:

Local activists you'll meet February 18

—by Amy Nykamp

Tina Rogers

Ms. Tina Rogers is a delightful woman who describes herself as an “arts educator, humanitarian, and nature freak!” She has extensive knowledge of multi-cultural dance and music. She also has had a rich set of experiences in her life to be able to share with everyone. Growing up in Sonoma County and attending Rohnert Park schools, Ms. Rogers was engaged from a very young age in making her own music and dancing (beginning with soul music and hip-hop). In addition, she was heavily involved in
sports: basketball from childhood into college, and with the Women’s Professional Football League, in which she played seven seasons in five years from 2000–2005. During her long dance, rap, and DJ career, she rubbed shoulders with great musicians, such as the late hip-hop artist Tupac, and Leila Steinberg, who was his manager and is now an educator.

Currently living in Sacramento, during pre-COVID times Ms. Rogers was driving all over Northern California to instruct children in elementary, middle, and high schools for over 20 years. In addition to her multicultural classes in schools, she conducts children’s programs at a number of libraries in the area: Her Catch-a-Beat programs are a hit with patrons in San José and elsewhere. When Ms. Rogers began teaching, she focused on hip-hop, but through much study and mentorship she became adept in many of the world’s dances and cultures. When conducting a class, she brings to her students that richness of tying together “music, dance, history, and social science” (to quote her). Imagine you are in her class: One day, you will learn the history of Irish dancing and the next, you will be practicing the Filipino folk dance Tinikling!

Ms. Rogers clearly loves to do research, and on February 18 she will present the background of how February came to be Black History Month. We will learn who and what drove the movement, how it went from being a week to a month, and ways we can continue to celebrate this rich heritage.

While the National Organization for Women is new to her, Ms. Rogers is attracted to the work that is done toward changing women’s lives. When I asked for her thoughts about the first Sonoma County chapter meeting she attended in January, she said, “I like the idea that
women of all types, shapes, sizes, and beliefs have a place to unite, to feel comfortable, to be heard, and to be a part of something that is bigger than [themselves], bigger than something locally.” What resonates soundly with her is the organization’s activism in the area of racial justice, which works in tandem with economic equality. This is where Ms. Rogers intends to focus her efforts. As a new member myself, I am excited to work with Ms. Rogers and the chapter and see what we can accomplish in Sonoma County!

—Amy Nykamp

(Photo courtesy of Tina Rogers.)

Jackie Elward

Jackie Elward has led a very full life in the last four decades. Her childhood was spent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and since marrying in 2003, she has lived in the U.S., first in Oakland, then in Marin and eventually moved to Petaluma for several years. She has been in Rohnert Park for six years and was recently elected Vice Mayor of the city council. Jackie is full of experiences that shape who she has become.

Her first impression of helping the poor was watching her mother make meals and “pull a random child off the street” to provide food for them. When Jackie would question this, her mother would tell her that it
was important to care for others who don’t have as much.

Jackie attended the Institut Biblique de Kinshasa (Kinshasa Bible Institute) to learn theology. She met her husband, Ryan, there when he was one of her teachers. His family was living in Sonoma County (still does) and he left the Congo for the U.S. When she married and emigrated, it was to a new country, new culture, new language (she spoke no English), and no family or friends in her new home! Despite already speaking five languages, the fact that she had to learn English right away was not easy. Jackie not only speaks English very well now, but she’s in the process of earning not one, but two Bachelor of Science degrees: Sociology at Chico State and Criminal Justice at Central State University in Ohio! She’s currently taking 16 units plus working plus attending to city council meetings and all that role entails. Oh, and taking care of three children, two of whom are at Tech High and their youngest at the French American Charter School!

If that is not enough, Jackie and her husband formed a non-profit foundation in 2015 for poor children in the Congo, called Les Enfants Baobab. She was inspired to do this after she saw how terrible life is for foster children; seeing how they are treated made her want to help everyone. She is giving back to her community, the way her mother had so many decades before. The foundation ensures children are sheltered, fed, and clothed. Close to home, Jackie and her whole family volunteered to help those who lost homes or were evacuated in the 2017 wildfires, and they have continued in many ways to provide relief for those in most need of food or other services.

We talked about discrimination and how she has dealt with it. Jackie told me the very first time she experienced racism was here, in
Sonoma County. Evidently, the way she used to wear her hair (she had a large afro) made people uncomfortable, so she found that wearing hair extensions and looking more “normal” worked out better. Her children have had incidents of bullying because of their race, too. Despite or perhaps because of these events, Jackie is determined to change Sonoma County attitudes and actions. That is why she ran—to be in a position of leadership to represent the diverse community. Even running, for the first time in 2018 and then last year, she experienced racism—people were mocking her because of being an immigrant and for her accent.

Jackie was recently made aware of NOW and what the organization stands for. I asked her what she most wants to see our chapter work toward changing. She adamantly said that Sonoma County is not inclusive, and we need to make a push to elect leaders and others who can and will act to change the way things are now. That is our challenge as NOW members. Jackie’s doing her part—will we do ours?

—Amy Nykamp

(Photo courtesy of Jackie Elward.)
Natalie Rogers

After interviewing Natalie Rogers, I believe she truly embodies the Chinese proverb: “Character matters; leadership descends from character.” Natalie is not only mother to eight children, but also she has her own Marriage and Family Therapy business, and serves as the Vice Mayor of Santa Rosa. She is able to juggle her responsibilities by putting self-care first so that she can be successful at the rest. She also keeps a tight schedule, as you can imagine!

There are many people over the years who have mentored her, but one “angel” stands out: Dr. Stacie Cook, who was on the staff at the College of Marin when Natalie was a student. Natalie was inspired by Dr. Cook because of her doctorate—it opened up a world Natalie hadn’t imagined could be hers. She was determined to do more in her education and her life. Another inspiration is her late mother, who died when Natalie was in her early 20s. Natalie always wanted to make her proud, and like her mother, wants to be an example for her own children.

We spoke of how racism has affected her or others she knows. Her first experience was just before high school when she and her mother were driving to the store and a “gentleman” pulled up next to them and used the n-word. That was extremely upsetting, more than any other time she has heard it. (Unfortunately, it wasn’t the last time.) Since she became more of a public figure, people have refused to work with her because of her color. Natalie has been told that she is “intimidating,” whether she is trying to express herself passionately or simply remaining
quiet. A conundrum indeed! She wonders what allows other people the privilege to act in the same manner and not be called out.

Despite these incidents, serving on the council is fulfilling to her. She has a sense of pride in the council because, even when members might disagree on an issue sometimes, they are respectful of each other and they work well together. She sees that they can make change.

Natalie’s strong suit is listening, which fits in well with her profession as a therapist. She is eager to know what the public wants and needs, and loves to receive feedback in written or in-person means. She wants to be a leader and a mentor.

Though not (yet) a member of NOW, she sees the Sonoma County chapter as needing to focus on the national organization’s mission, but especially to work to bring more diversity into the county, encourage women to be in leadership roles, work for more equal rights, childcare, and to help provide support for women who are victims of domestic violence—help educate them about their rights and how to escape bad situations. Lots to do!

For her legacy, Natalie wants to be a bridge-builder so that all can be heard and that issues can be best resolved. Listening to understand others is key. For her children, she wants them to know not to be afraid to fail, to do their best, and to give 100% commitment to whatever they choose. Interestingly, change is difficult for Natalie, but it doesn’t paralyze her. She ran for office after a lot of family meetings and prayer before she made the decision to run last year. She’s glad she did, though, and so are we. Indeed, “leadership descends from character!”

—Amy Nykamp

(Photo courtesy of Kirk Photography.)
Skylaer Palacios

Healdsburg is fortunate to have Skylaer Palacios on its City Council. Only 26, she shows leadership and a deep understanding of what it means to represent her community. Since early childhood, she was influenced by her mother, who was a social worker and very involved in politics. As a young student, Skylaer would attend council meetings. She was a junior commissioner to the Commission for the Status of Women, and after high school, won the Miss Sonoma County Scholarship Competition; this enabled her to attend every single city council to discuss what her responsibilities were in that role. As a result, she has connections all over the county with past and present councilors.

We spoke of her experiences as a multiethnic woman in a predominantly white city. There have been incidents that wouldn’t have occurred had she been white. For instance, neighbors calling the police on her and her family with no merit; being threatened to not walk at the graduation ceremony for not fully paying for an athletic uniform; an attempt by a low-level administrator to give her a referral for the same minor behavior exhibited by a white peer who received no punishment; being known as a highly capable singer and dancer and the only Black identifying student in drama class, yet missing out on lead roles in a play whose cast historically consists of Black actors. She told me that some of
the students had to get spray-on tans to play the roles of African Americans! She has been treated rudely by businesses in the past or noticed strange looks from others. College at Sonoma State University was much better. She doesn’t recall any obvious racism, but she is aware of some incidents that others experienced.

On the other hand, Skylaer has a lot of great things to say about Healdsburg and her life there. She has thrived, that is obvious, and appreciates that the community is friendly and citizens have a special bond. One of the challenges, however, is that with the growth of the wine and tourism business there is more of an elitist attitude. She would like to see that lessened. The city has struggled since the pandemic began and there are closures. She sees that more support for existing businesses is necessary, as well as bringing in new industries.

In addition to her responsibilities on the council, Skylaer works with at-risk youth and those in the foster system. She is well aware that there is a higher percentage of Black, Latino/a, and LGBTQIA+ youth in foster care than in the population as a whole. In Sonoma County, she has noticed that we have a much higher economic disparity because of COVID-19 and strongly recommends that NOW work on getting economic recovery for women, which can be helped by adding childcare services. Women are being laid off more or having to leave their jobs to ensure their children are getting the education and the care they need during this pandemic.

Skylaer encourages all young people to get involved in local government. She says there are plenty of open positions in city councils for youth representatives. If your city doesn’t have such a position, ask for one!
In honor of Black History Month:

Two local leaders then and now

—by Amy Nykamp

Gloria Robinson

Gloria Robinson has lived in Petaluma for fifty years and has been one of the most active leaders in town since then (though she says she’s been learning to say “no” occasionally). I learned so much that it’s impossible to include everything. You should know, however, that the Petaluma Blacks for Community Development (PBCD), which she founded in 1978, has flourished for the last 43 years. This organization has a great deal to do with educating the community on Black history; and for a number of years, PBCD members tutored children, set up Census workshops, and gave financial support to Black students graduating from high school. I asked how the organization came to be and she said she was looking for a way to bring the African-Americans in Petaluma together. The kids were playing together in school, but the adults weren’t mixing. That pushed her to be active so that her kids would have representation. Her daughter, in high school at the time, provided a
list of all Black students in her school, and Mrs. Robinson called the parents to join.

Since the pandemic struck, the PBCD had to skip its annual picnic, but still celebrated Black History Month via Zoom. The members are growing older and would welcome any young families to its group, to continue its history. Mrs. Robinson lamented that there’s not as much community involvement as there was when the PBCD was founded; It’s harder to promote the organization’s activities.

Mrs. Robinson came to California from Miami after high school. She and her family first moved to San Francisco, then to San Rafael, and finally to Petaluma. Culture shock hit when living in San Rafael: Her son was the only Black child in his school, which resulted in him being bullied. Although she was used to the overt racism in Florida, where “you knew which side of the tracks you belonged,” she experienced discrimination in a more subtle manner in 1960s California. She related stories of how racism evidenced during house hunting in both SF and in Petaluma. Over the phone, they would learn of an apartment to rent and then, when they arrived in person, the landlord would ask if they had children (they had four). When they said yes, then the apartment inevitably would already have been rented to another person. In Petaluma, many Blacks found they were only shown housing on the east side of the town. The west remained unattainable in many ways until more recent decades, though Mrs. Robinson’s experience was different. She was shown a home there in 1970 but settled on the east side. Today, her children live in Petaluma, Ukiah, and Vallejo.

Mrs. Robinson had a primary role in educating the Adobe School District students on Black History Month. Her children attended school
and she provided food service in the district for 12 years. We talked about Juneteenth and how embarrassed I was not to have heard of it until a year ago. She made me feel better when she said that she was unaware of this celebration until she moved to San Francisco and met African-Americans from Texas and Louisiana!

I asked Mrs. Robinson how she dealt with discrimination and her pragmatic response was, “You ignore me, I’ll ignore you.” It has served her well, but unfortunately not so much for her children. One appalling racist story she shared had to do with prom. Her sons were able to attract white girls who wanted to date a Black boy, but for her daughter, this was a time of misery. No one would invite her to the dance, so she ended up going with a friend of one of her brothers.

Mrs. Robinson is very familiar with NOW. She was in the first parade held by the National Women’s History Alliance (founded by Molly Murphy McGregor). Her photo also appears on the October page in the NOW 2020 commemorative calendar. For her, our Sonoma County chapter would do well to challenge the county to provide more equal opportunities for minorities—encourage leaders and the police to represent them. In the interviews I’ve conducted for this month’s newsletter, this is a common recommendation. NOW, are we ready to move?

For more information about PBCD, they are holding Celebrating Family: Black History Month 2021 on February 27 at the Petaluma Library. Go to https://events.sonomalibrary.org/event/4849109 for more information.
Marteal Perry

Marteal Perry was a powerful force in Sonoma County, beginning from her move to Santa Rosa in 1953 until her death in 1996. She earned her title of Evangelist but was affectionately known as “Mother Perry.” Mrs. Perry was born in Texas in 1909 and moved to San Francisco in 1934. There, she earned her beautician’s license (which she kept current until her death) and met her husband, Fred L. Perry, Sr., from Cape Verde (which belonged to Portugal at the time), and who was a worker on the Golden Gate Bridge. In 1953, they bought property in Santa Rosa, where her family members continue to reside.

Mrs. Perry grew up in Texas where Juneteenth (June 19th) was celebrated in a grand manner. (For those unfamiliar, this is the date in 1865 on which the slaves in Texas learned they were freed—the last state to be aware of it.) Upon arriving in Santa Rosa, she learned that no such commemoration existed, so she organized one in 1954. To this day, there is an annual festival, even last year when it had to be virtually celebrated. Her granddaughter, Sydni Locke-Davenport, participates every year, as well as her grandchildren!

Mrs. Perry was an evangelist and in 1953, founded the Prayer Chapel Outreach Mission Church in southwest Santa Rosa, which still
thrives today. She was an advocate for fostering children; in addition to her three biological children, she adopted three and fostered many others over the years. Discrimination in this area was evident when the Sonoma County authorities refused to grant her an official license until 1966, after 13 years of being a foster parent! This would not have happened if she had been white. Sydni also reported that her grandmother had a pool installed on her property specifically for children who couldn’t afford to go to the downtown pool or any pool where they would have had to pay. This seems reasonable to today’s reader, but the KKK actually protested then. However, the family still uses the pool.

Despite various threats to her well-being, and that of her family, and discrimination over the years, her granddaughter never heard Mrs. Perry say any racial slurs or criticize anyone due to their race. When bad things occurred, she would pray. Her faith gave her strength. Sydni says, “She never gave up; she trusted God to be there.”

Mrs. Perry never bragged about herself, but she was well known: Maya Angelou stayed at Mrs. Perry’s home one time! Also, one of her foster children was the son of one of the Little Rascals.

Sydni isn’t certain whether Mrs. Perry was a member of NOW, though she belonged to and led so many local organizations, but Sydni appreciates that NOW works toward equal opportunity for all women. She does hope our chapter can encourage Sonoma County authorities to provide more housing and services for the mentally ill. This would be certainly meet the approval of Mrs. Perry, who would always say, “If you have less than me, you’re underprivileged.” She was a champion for the underprivileged and would be proud of the work Sydni herself has done.

—Amy Nykamp
February birthdays to celebrate

- **February 1, 1920** – Dorothy Hansen, Sonoma County activist and cofounder of Peace & Justice Center, *Peace Press*
- **February 3, 1874** – Gertrude Stein, visionary artist
- **February 4, 1913** – Rosa Parks, civil rights leader
- **February 4, 1921** – Betty Friedan, feminist author, activist, cofounder NOW
- **February 9, 1944** – Alice Walker, author, activist
- **February 15, 1820** – Susan B. Anthony, suffrage leader
- **February 18, 1931** – Toni Morrison, author, teacher
- **February 18, 1934** – Audre Lorde, feminist author
- **February 21, 1892** – Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet, playwright
- **February 21, 1918** – Helen Rudee, first Sonoma Co. Supervisor, feminist
- **February 21, 1936** – Barbara Jordan, U.S. Representative, rights activist
- **February 22, 1897** – Marian Anderson, singer, civil rights pioneer

Visit our Sonoma County NOW site for news and lots of links and information:
About NOW

As the grassroots arm of the women's movement, the National Organization for Women is dedicated to its multi-issue and multi-strategy approach to women's rights, and is the largest organization of feminist grassroots activists in the United States. NOW has hundreds of chapters and hundreds of thousands of members and activists in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Since our founding in 1966, NOW's purpose is to take action through intersectional grassroots activism to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls in all aspects of social,
political, and economic life.

**Core Issues**

NOW is a multi-issue, multi-strategy organization that takes a holistic approach to women’s rights. Our priorities are winning economic equality and securing it with an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that will guarantee equal rights for women; championing abortion rights, reproductive freedom and other women's health issues; opposing racism; fighting bigotry against the LGBTQIA community; and ending violence against women.

**Reproductive Rights and Justice**

NOW fully supports safe and legal abortion, affordable and effective birth control and other contraception, and reproductive health education for all.

**Economic Justice**

NOW advocates for a wide range of economic justice issues, women’s freedom and success and intertwined with racial justice, reproductive freedom, and other systems of oppression.

**Ending Violence Against Women**

NOW recognizes violence against women as the broad and
interconnected issue that it is, addressing oppressive structures and attitudes in our nation.

Racial Justice

A leader in civil rights since 1966, NOW continues to fight for equal opportunities for women of color in all areas including employment, education, and health care.

LGBTQIA+ Rights

NOW is committed to fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in all areas.

Constitutional Equality

NOW is a proud supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment and prioritizes giving women explicit protections in the United States Constitution.

For additional information go to:  https://now.org/about/
MEMBERSHIP AND RENEWAL FORM

- Regular membership $40/year
- $75 2 yrs
- $115 3 yrs
- Reduced dues: $10–30/year

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Sonoma County Chapter #CA0660

Mail with check to: National Organization for Women,
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