

LOCAL & STATE

COMMON SENSE

SI
CANTWELL



Cape Fear 'scrapbook' traces role of women

Women are a valuable resource and a majority of the population in New Hanover County.

So begins *Women's Work: A Century's Worth*, and far be it from this henpecked husband to quarrel with either assertion.

Women's Work describes itself as "A Cape Fear scrapbook" documenting women's roles during the 20th century. It was created by the New Hanover Commission for Women and is online at www.nhwomen.org.

The commission was created in 1978. It grew out of a state organization established in 1963 by Gov. Terry Sanford that's now called the N.C. Council for Women.

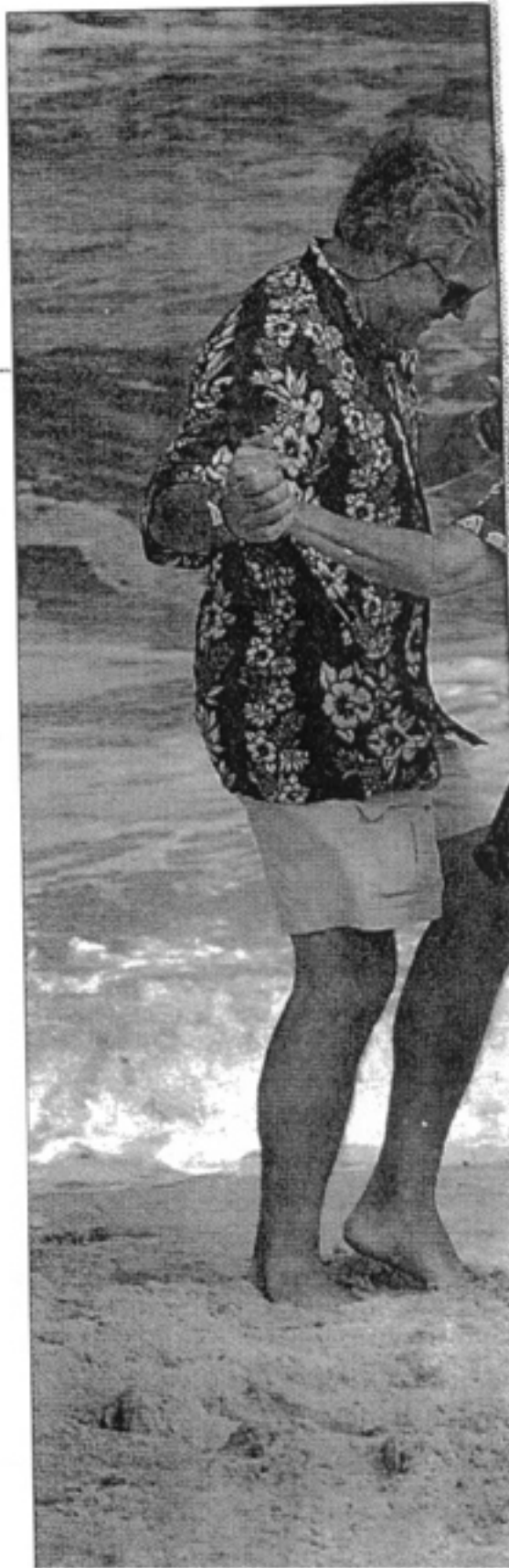
The local commission is supposed to have seven representatives from New Hanover County, seven from Wilmington and one each from Wrightsville Beach, Carolina Beach and Kure Beach. It's short a few members.

Maybe it's time for some boards to get busy making appointments because this commission does good work. In 2000, a Women's Agenda Project used input from more than 245 locals to identify important issues.

The commission worked through university classes and Wilmington Housing Authority meetings, polled policewomen and found other ways of contacting people.

It came up with five prime issues: access to health care, economic self-sufficiency and living wages, child care, aging and pay equity.

N.C. Equity, which lobbies on women's issues, calls such surveys statewide every two years and makes a presentation to the General Assembly. Christy De-



every two years and makes a presentation to the General Assembly. Christy Demory, president of the commission and a staff attorney with U.S. District Court here, hopes to get much more input this year.

The *Women's Work* pamphlet uses photographs and quotes to illustrate the five themes. The pictures are marvelous. Nurses in funny caps graduate at James Walker Memorial Hospital in 1900. Black women wearing long skirts and bonnets plant rice from gourds around that time. A mother with two small children delivers laundry in a baby carriage during the Depression. Women are shown serving in a cafeteria line at N.C. Shipbuilding Co. in 1944. The Gregory School faculty, most of them women, poses on the steps in 1960. Frances Weller brings sharp professionalism to her job as WECT news anchor in 2001.

The factoids are revealing: In 1940, 15 percent of the state's female workers had clerical, retail or service professional jobs. By 1995, the figure was 55.3 percent in New Hanover County. Sixty-seven percent of our state's mothers worked outside the home in 1995, the highest rate in any state. In 1995, 89 percent of New Hanover County's laundering and dry cleaning workers were black women.

Leslie Hossfeld, who teaches sociology at UNCW and is co-chairwoman of the Women's History Project, said the commission wanted to bring the information to more people.

"There is not a written documentation of women's history in this region," Ms. Demory said. Jo Galloway of the local history room in the New Hanover County Library agreed.

✓ Commission member Aimee Ennis of 4 Geeks and a Laptop designed the Web site and incorporated the history project into it. She also put the pamphlet on CD.

The commission decided it wanted to reach children, Ms. Hossfeld said. So a committee of eighth-grade teachers from five counties devised a lesson plan around the pamphlet that not only teaches history but also language arts, computer skills and some math.

Ms. Hossfeld hopes it will become a formal part of the eighth-grade history curriculum.

Ms. Demory and Ms. Hossfeld said commissioners often get calls from women needing various services or information. So the commission is shaping itself as a place to go to find who offers what to women in our community.

The best way to contact the commission is to visit the Web page or send an e-mail to feedback@nhwomen.org.

It's a valuable resource.

"Common Sense" appears Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. Contact Si Cantwell at 343-2364 or si.cantwell@wilmingtonstar.com

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By Todd
Staff Writer

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