

Interview with Golda Conner, January 5, 1984.

Annette: The way I've been starting out is just to ask--and I remember the day that we talked--is your first experience with the Senior Center. You were one of the beginners? You were involved with the SC from the very beginnings, weren't you?

Golda: Yes.

Annette: What was your actual experience with the Center?

Golda: Well, I worked for North Coast, in the SC program, with Lynetta Jones. I resigned, but I still continued helping her with this program. Because we did see the need of help, for older people in the County.

Annette: So it was you and Lynetta who kind of spawned it? It was your idea?

Golda: Yes. And Mrs. Lebe, from the Commission of Aging come up, and she was going to meet with North Coast Opportunities, and talk to them about the aging program. So Lynetta got ahold of me and told me Mrs. Lebe was in town, and that there was funding available for Senior Citizens, if we could get it. So we held a meeting and at that time I was on the Board of North Coast. I presented this to our meeting, to the Board that evening, and asked for money to be allocated toward doing something for senior citizens. North Coast was at this time in a building, an old house, and we thought that it would be alright, you know, for something to start with, because they were going to bigger and better quarters. So we worked around and got this old house.

Annette: Where was it?

Golda: It was on North State. And I was president of the Progressive Senior Citizens. This was a kind of a social club that we had got up in the meantime.

Annette: I'd like to hear more about that, as preceding the Senior Center. When did the Progressives start?

Golda: While I was still working, at North Coast Opportunities, a man come down--I believe it was Mr. Zeek--come down and approached us for help. They had an organization, but it was down to nothing. So he thought that if we could get some new blood in it, and get it started, that it would help. So we all met at a church, and Mr. Hill--there were several people from Sacramento that we wrote to and told them we were going to start--right this time there was quite a thing about senior citizens and the help that they needed.

Annette: Do you remember a date on that?

Golda: I don't. It must have been about 1974.

the Board. And we got, I think it was \$38,000, to get started.

We were awfully slow. We would have a meeting, then not do anything for a week, then have another meeting. It should have been worked on, constantly. If I had had my way, we would have. After I got it into the Board, I wasn't chairman anymore.

Annette: You mean you weren't having regular meetings?

Golda: Well, we were having regular meetings, but they were a long ways apart, see? And our rent was going on, and our lights and water. And it was cutting down on our \$38,000.

Annette: You were where then? Where were you located?

Golda: We had the building then, see.

Annette: On State Street?

Golda: Yes. And, by the time we got down to our meals, I think we had \$700 to start. That's what we started them on. But we approached the government, we got some foods from them, you know, those surplus foods. And then North Coast helped too in this, because they had a program going, giving food out to the poor. We got help from them.

And that's how we got started. But we worked on this Board quite a long time.

Annette: Now, was Lynetta Jones still involved at that time? I'm thinking back to when we first started talking, and you mentioned that you and Lynetta had started it. I'm trying to get ahold of that line of growth in my mind.

Golda: Well, she was working for North Coast, and she couldn't very well go into our Board or anything, because it would be conflict of interests. She was in the background doing things and suggesting and so forth, but actually she was working for North Coast then. And she had her office there, in . . . building, but eventually they put her out of there, because she was interfering too much. I don't know why. And then the Senior Citizens had their office there, started an office there.

Of course it had grown up, and
By this time we had our own little paper started, and we were serving people. I think it probably by this time required a cook, someone to come in and do the cooking.

Annette: What kind of a paper did you have started? I haven't heard about that before.

Golda: Oh, it was just a little newspaper.

Annette: What was its title?

Golda: I think the Stamp. The same as it is now.

Annette: So that's when the paper you have now was started. Did you work on it?

Golda: No, I never did work on that.

Annette: I'm also unclear on the evolutions from Progressives to Senior Citizens?

Golda: Well, we just used that organization, the Progressives, to get started. Anything that we needed done--like, we used the Progressives to wait tables, to wash dishes, to do the cleaning--all of this--until the Senior Citizens got up to a place where they were big enough to take over themselves.

Annette: Did the Progressives continue on their own, then?

Golda: For awhile they did. I think I was president of it for 2 or 3 years. Then _____ took it. Then the other lady that was up there, Marcella Barnett. And by this time it was running down, it wasn't--you've got to work to keep those things going, and there just wasn't enough work put in on it. And then, I don't know--they seemed to like to go down to the Senior Center and work with that. About this time I pulled out of all of it, because I'd had my fill of it, and after I got off the boards, I stayed off for awhile.

Annette: So your years of activity were in the beginning? But you're still active, obviously, you're on this committee, and...

Golda: Oh, I'm still interested, naturally you are--when you help start something. You like to see it grow, and--I can see what an advantage it is to have the people go down there and eat. Some of them are hardly able to..well, they couldn't feed themselves.

Annette: What were some of your goals? What were some of your hopes for the Center when it first started?

Golda: I think to help the Senior Citizens. To be able to feed the ones that weren't able to cook for themselves and needed help, as well as socially. We felt that the social problem was equally as great as feeding.

Annette: What do you mean exactly by the social problem?

Golda: Well--them not being able to get out. To parties, or go and sew, or--get out. They were just sitting at home. I don't know how many hundred people, old people, that we went into their homes and talked to them. To find out what they were doing, what they would like to do, how they were getting along and what they'd like to see happen.

99999

Annette: So you spent a great deal of personal time?

Golda: Oh, yes, we spent--oh, I don't know, I guess 2 or 3 years working this up. And we even worked on that White House conference, where all the--almost all the things that happened for senior citizens. we worked on that.

Annette: Really? Did you go out and bring people in, or did they just come on their own.

Golda: Oh, yes, We had everyone who had a car being somebody.

Annette: No kidding! What was it like? What kind of music did you have, and...

Golda: Well, see, Lynetta's outfit there, they had a lovely band. And they brought the band in.

Annette: You mean the Jones group?

Golda: Oh, they had a good orchestra. And we danced, and we had a lovely time down there, It was lots of fun. They even brought people from out in Talmage itself. See, Talmage was operating then. And they would bring busloads of people that could dance and get around.

Annette: Nice. What kind of music did they play?

Golda: Oh, waltzes and two-steps..that sort of music.

Annette: Just good old time music. Did you have refreshments?

Golda: Yes. And that again was Joneses. The ladies out there made all sorts of things and brought them in. You know, it's a shame that they went the way they did. They helped so much.

Annette: Yes. I'm trying to include some personal background about the people involved. I thought it would make the history more interesting, if we knew where people came from to get to the Senior Center. Where were you born?

Golda: I was born in Nebraska and raised in Wyoming.

Annette: Did you belong to farming people back there?

Golda: I lived on a ranch most of my life back there. And then I married, and then during the Depression we come to California.

Annette: With your mother and father?--oh, no, ~~you~~ were married.

Golda: I was married then. My mother was here, but my father was back there. Of course I had that rest home at that time. You wanted something funny, I'll tell you this. And Claude Tremble had a rest home, and we were talking, and he said: "Well, when we get into these resthomes, it's sure going to be rough on the operators, because, he said, we'll know all the ropes. And nobody'll be able to push us around."

Annette: What rest home did you have?

Golda: I had one up on Sanford Ranch Road. That's what it was when I was in it, and it's a home now. Claude Tremble had Silver Birches.

Annette: When you first came to California, did you come to Ukiah, or to another part?

happy event for me, to see so many people, old people, that were housebound, come to those meetings and little parties and social events.

Annette: What kinds of social events did you have?

Golda: Oh, we had cards and sewing and knitting. In the first, we had dances.

Annette: The dances started on Leslie, or...

Golda: No, I and Lynetta started those, when we were working for North Coast.

Annette: Oh, you did? Where did you have your first dance?

Golda: In the old Safeway building, down on Talmage Road.

Annette: Now this is what you were telling me before. This was where your first meeting place was, wasn't it? In the old Safeway building on Talmage Road?

Golda: Yes. Well, that's where North Coast--not the Center--this was for North Coast. And she and I worked the Senior Citizens Program from that building. Then they moved--they almost folded, NCO did, at that time. And they didn't have enough money, so they moved into this old house. And, in fact, if it hadn't have been for her and I, in our dealing with the old people and seeing so many of them in our program, I believe NCO would have folded at that time.

Annette: Did you work for them, too? Did you work for North Coast?

Golda: Oh, yes.

Annette: And what did you do with them?

Golda: I worked on the Senior Citizens Program. There were 3 of us ladies.

Annette: Okay, I didn't understand that. I thought you meant you were a volunteer. You and Lynetta, and who was the third?

Golda: Nancy Westphall.

Annette: So the three of you got it going?

Golda: Yeah, she quit. She didn't work too long. But we really got ahold of a lot of old people. We went out to Redwood Valley, and we went all over.

Annette: And how was your first dance? Was your first dance a success?

Golda: Very good.

Annette: The one you held out at Talmage?

Golda: We had maybe a hundred.

Golda: I come to Lakeport. But I didn't stay over there very long.

Annette: You mentioned you were married? Did you have children?

Golda: Uh-huh, I have two sons, have a daughter. I was married in Wyoming and come out here--we come out in July, I believe, and the following May my husband was killed. So I raised my boys, and moved to Ukiah, and they graduated from high school here.

Annette: Did you work?

Golda: I had a restaurant.

Annette: What was its name?

Golda: Golda's Kitchen.

Annette: Was it in Ukiah?

Golda: Uh-huh.

Annette: Where?

Golda: On North State Street. Just about where the Indians have their Nutrition Program, right in there. And then I remarried, and we adopted a little girl. The mother was a waitress, and she and her husband ~~was~~ separated, and she didn't know she was pregnant. She finally had to quit, and I kiddingly said to her--'Well, if it's a little girl, I'll adopt it.' And when it was born, she called me and said, 'Well, I have your little girl.' So I went down and brought the baby home--it was a month old.

Annette: So you raised her too?

Golda: Yes, that's my two sons and my daughter (photos). I've lived here since 1946.

Annette: What years did you have your restaurant?

Golda: From about 1948, till 1957 or '58.

Annette: It's interesting how towns change, to me.

Golda: That's another reason, I suppose, that I was interested in a program for feeding older people. Is because I knew about the food situation.

Annette: Feeding people was really your business, wasn't it?

Golda: Right. I felt that it was a good thing, you know.

Annette: And when did you go to work for NCO? How did you happen to? It seems quite a change from owning a restaurant.

Golda: Well, I wasn't working. I had remarried, and I wasn't working. The boys had left home, they were both in the service then.

SECRET 10

And I didn't have anything to do. And they advertised. See, this program was all coming up. They wanted 3 women to work on an elderly program. So I put in my application--I guess there must have been 30 or 40 of us. And I and Lynetta and Nancy Westphall was chosen as the 3 people to work on this program. And it was interesting. We were more or less on our own. They didn't even know what we oughta do. So we just sit down and mapped out what we should do, and what the town needed, and talked about it. And then we started out, just visitin. Everytime we'd hear of somebody that was old and couldn't take care of themselves, we'd go see them. And then we'd make records of it, and document all this. And it just worked into the Senior Center.

Annette: It must be something to start..to be involved in the seeds of starting something like this, and have it grow as it's grown.

Golda: It's very satisfying. You feel good, when you go down there, you know, and you see so many people. So many of them you know, that if that wasn't there, they wouldn't be having a decent meal, like that

Annette: Do you see the goals now as being similar to what your goals were when you started out? To what you had in mind for it?

Golda: I think so. This was just our dream really. To see this grow into something that would be big enough to take care of these people. I'm very happy with it. I really feel--to just start from nothing, you know. Only just, as I say, a dream of knowing the need of the people. And then it was someplace for people to come and talk, and socialize. I think that this is one of the things that older people need more than anything else.

Annette: I'm sure. Because we always need that social contact, but the older we get the more difficult it is, I think, to get it.

Golda: Well, you can't get around, you know. And then, when you do, you go to their place, and they'll just talk a leg off from you. And you know it's because they don't get enough social activities. And you'd be surprised what we had to do to get those people to come to things, to get them.

Annette: Really? What did you do?

Golda: Well, we just had to go and almost drag them out. We'd call them and say, 'we'll be there, so be ready.' And a lot of the people that run theresthomes, they worked with us. And they'd get 'em ready, and make 'em get ready, and we'd drag 'em down there. And some of them, they were so mad at us, it was terrible. You know, take the good with the bad.

Annette: Sure. And when people get used to being in, it's hard to convince them to go out, and once they get out they might enjoy it, right? How do you see the needs of the aged being different--or how do you see the treatment of the aged being different--than when you were a girl?

Golda: Well, you know when I was young the old people stayed with their families more. And now they're more on their own, they're out in their own homes. I imagine they're happier people. I don't think any woman that has had a home can ever be happy living with somebody else, until she gets to a place where she just can't handle her own self, you know? Then it 's time to give up. But like with me here now, I'm very happy with my own place. I'd be very unhappy if I was someplace else.

Annette: We're used to being independent, and we like to stay that way.

Golda: As long as you can. You know, when I had the rest home that was the hardest part that I found, is bringing the people in and getting them to adjust to being away from their own home. And the things that some of them would drag in, you know, their possessions that they'd had for 40 or 50 years, maybe rocking chairs held together with baling wire. But dear to them.

Annette: I think they're dear to us. It's like our identity's very tied up in our things.

Golda: And if you take all of that away from them, and put them into some beautiful home, you're lost. The adjustment is terrible.

Annette: Oh, I know I would be. And having to do things someone else's way, when you've been used to doing them your own way for so many years.

Golda: Uhuh. I had one old lady, she was up from the Golden Rule. And she was the most dominating human. And I was always after her, to leave them alone, let them do their own thing, don't tell them what to do. ~~888~~ I guess maybe I done it more than I realized, because one day she said to me, 'You know, you don't like me, do you?' And I said 'I like you very much, in fact I think maybe you're my favorite person here, because you are intelligent enough for me to talk to. And she was, she could play the piano and she could crochet. She was in her 90's. She said, 'You really like me?' 'Yes,' I said, 'I really do, Ethyl.' And she said, 'Well, alright.' And she'd start in, you know, telling some of these other poor old people things, and I'd say, 'Ethyl,' and she'd say, 'Yeah, I know, I know, I know.' It was real funny. But after that I never had any trouble. When she found out that I liked her. So love is there too. You've got to have that. I think along with everything else, you have to have that.

Annette: Well, it's pretty basic, at any age.

Golda: At any age, it doesn't make any difference. Right now my children are gone, I get it from my grandchildren. It makes the world go round.

Annette: Can you think of any questions that would be ~~good~~ good to include that I haven't asked? Things it would be helpful to find out from people I talk to in the future? For putting together this history

Golda: Well, there's one thing that I'm disturbed about. I've given it lots of thought. When I go to the Center...Originally this was a poverty program for the poor people. And I see people down there that have got more money than they'd ever use. That disturbs me a little bit.

Annette: In what way?

Golda: Well, if I had the money to pay somebody to come in and fix my meals..I wouldn't be down.

Annette: But the social needs they might still have, no?

Golda: Well. They probably don't go to those social things down there.

Annette: You're talking about mainly just for the meals?

Golda: I think they could have better meals that wouldn't cost as much, if those people--I would like to see a sign, "This is a Poverty Program," put out front. Or something to that effect.

Annette: I was just wondering if that might put off some people that didn't want to be considered poverty...

Golda: Of course, that would be the object of it. You know, if you can afford to have your meals cooked and served to you--I can understand the social bit of it, but still--you could do a whole lot more for the ones that need it. Of course, I'm not on the Board. I should go down to the Board meetings more and find out more up with them, but...

Annette: Are the meals...there's a charge for the meals, but it's not very large--am I right about that?

Golda: That's right.

Annette: A small charge. But it's mainly funded by government funds?

Golda: Yes. Some of them I guess don't put in any. I've heard those that...

Annette: It's a volunteer donation sort of thing?

Golda: Yes. You can't charge on a funded program. It's just a volunteer situation.

Annette: Well, do you think that about does it? Is there anything more you'd like to add?

Golda: Well, I can't think of anything more I can add. I think that about does it.