

HERITAGE NEWS

Rainier Valley Historical Society

Fall 2024

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3710 S Ferdinand St. Seattle WA 98118 - office@rainiervalleyhistory.org - 206.723.1663 - rainiervalleyhistory.org

A Night to Remember!

This year's Founder's Dinner and Auction on October 26th was truly one for the books! We came together to honor the legacy of our founder, Buzz Anderson, and celebrate our 2024 History Maker, Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova. The evening kicked off with a wonderful performance by the Filipino folk dance group FACES, followed by an incredible Filipino-inspired menu prepared by Dorothy's son and granddaughter, who run My Filipino Grandma Catering.

The night was filled with lively bidding and laughter as John DeFranco led us through an exciting Silent Auction, Live Auction, and Raffle, bringing in over \$25,000 in support of RVHS! We couldn't be more grateful for everyone who joined us, making it a night to remember and a huge success for our mission!

In honoring Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova, we celebrated her lifelong dedication to preserving Filipino American heritage. Read on to learn more about Dorothy's inspiring journey and her impact on cultural preservation.



Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova



RVHS Founder's Dinner and Auction Co-Chairs Karen O'Brien and Becky Corpuz presented the 2024 History Maker Award to Dorothy Laigo Cordova, at St. Edward Parish Hall, Hillman City. 140 people were in attendance.

Meet Our 2024 History Maker!

Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova's life is a remarkable story of resilience, leadership, and dedication to Filipino American heritage. Born in Seattle in 1932 to Filipino immigrant parents, Dorothy's early life was marked by hardship and determination. Her father passed away when she was just four years old, leaving her mother to support the family through a small café and grocery store in Seattle's International District. Growing up, Dorothy faced the challenges of being both Filipino and American at a time when cultural identities were often marginalized. These experiences fueled her lifelong commitment to celebrating and preserving Filipino American heritage. (cont. next page)



Office Hours @
3710 S Ferdinand St
Fridays 10-4 PM
and by appointment, email us!

Holiday Open House:

RVHS Office
3710 S Ferdinand St
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4 PM - 7 PM



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Meet Our 2024 History Maker Dorothy Laigo Cordova! (cont. page 1)

Dorothy’s journey into activism and cultural preservation began during her college years at Seattle University, where she studied Sociology and met her future husband, the late Fred Cordova. Together, they became trailblazers for Filipino American identity. In 1957, they co-founded the Filipino Youth Activities (FYA) in Seattle, creating a space where Filipino American youth could connect with their culture. Through programs in soccer, folk dancing, and the iconic drill team, the FYA empowered young Filipino Americans to take pride in their heritage. In the 1960s and 70s, FYA was also instrumental in civil rights advocacy, pressing for bilingual teachers in Seattle Public Schools and for Filipino-trained doctors to be permitted to practice in the United States.

Dorothy’s impact extended far beyond Seattle. In the 1970s, she served as Director for the Demonstration Project for Asian Americans (DPAA), conducting pioneering research on the challenges Asian American communities faced. Through the DPAA, Dorothy led efforts to document Filipino American experiences, collecting oral histories and archiving materials that would later form the foundation of an even larger legacy.

In 1982, Dorothy and Fred established the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS), a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and sharing Filipino American history. FANHS was born out of frustration with the lack of accurate representation of Filipino Americans in mainstream history and has since grown to over 40 chapters across the United States. Dorothy has served as the Executive Director of FANHS for more than 40 years, volunteering her time to build one of the most extensive collections of Filipino American history in the world. Housed in



Dorothy and Fred Cordova’s early work helped develop Seattle’s Filipino community and establishment of the Filipino Community Center on Martin Luther King Way S and S Juneau Street in Rainier Valley

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Seattle, FANHS’s National Pinoy Archives includes thousands of photographs, oral histories, and artifacts that document Filipino American life across the nation. The FANHS National Museum is located in Fred Cordova’s hometown of Stockton, California.

FANHS’s work under Dorothy’s leadership has been transformative. The society spearheaded the nationwide observance of Filipino American History Month every October, celebrating Filipino Americans’ contributions to the United States. FANHS also holds biennial national conferences, drawing scholars, students, and community members from across the country to learn about and celebrate Filipino American history.

At 92 years old, Dr. Cordova, affectionately known as “Auntie Dorothy,” continues to be a vibrant force at FANHS’s National Office. Despite announcing her intention to step back from her executive role, she remains a “Resident Researcher,” spending her days answering inquiries, guiding visitors, and sharing the wealth of knowledge she has gathered over decades. She is a mother to eight, grandmother to 17,

and great-grandmother to 22, passing on her legacy of cultural pride to new generations.

The Rainier Valley Historical Society proudly honors Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova as our 2024 History Maker this year. Her lifelong dedication to cultural preservation and her pioneering efforts to uplift Filipino American heritage resonates deeply with our mission. Through her work, Dorothy has not only preserved Filipino American history but has also fostered a broader understanding of the rich, diverse fabric of American society.

We are deeply grateful for her contributions recognizing her incredible legacy and the lasting impact of her work on future generations.

- compiled by Katie McClure



Dorothy at work in the FANHS archives. Photo by the Seattle Times

Mark and the Rutaaga Ghosts

Shared by Joan Neville, Charter Member of RVHS Board of Directors

In the the early 1990’s, there was an article in the South District Journal by Buzz Anderson. Buzz asked for local volunteers who were interested in the history of Rainier Valley to join him. There was an older historical association in the the valley called the Columbia Pioneers in which membership was composed mainly of the original settlers and their families in Columbia City. Buzz had grown up in the Rainier Valley and his ancestors were early residents. Buzz hoped to engage a larger population that would be interested in the local lore and cultures of the valley. Buzz cared deeply about Rainier Valley and wished to include the many new residents. He would call it the Rainier Valley Historical Society.

I had recently moved to the Lakewood/Seward park area. I loved history and everything about my new neighborhood. Buzz was eager to gain new voices. It was like a dream come true for me. I was new in the community and loved old buildings and story telling. I responded to Buzz and showed for the first meeting of the new Rainier Valley Historical Society in 1993. That was also the night I first met Mark Hannum, who was to be one of my life’s best friends from that moment until his death at too young an age.

In the beginning of our story Mark, who was taught carpentry by his father, was remodeling a huge victorian gothic house in Hillman City. It needed lots of love which he gave. My favorite part of his home has always been the deep purple velvet living room curtains. It looked like a place that would appeal to the spirits but, as far as I know, in that house there were none.

Mark was opening a new restaurant. The building he bought at 4857 Ranier Avenue South had quite the interior mess to be cleaned up before his restaurant was ready to open. The bistro would be called Rutabaga. I

spent many hours helping to make the bathroom free of a mountain of litter. Fast forward and Mark had created a warm and loving place for people of all ages to enjoy. He had friends with children, including my five, and there were always cookies and chocolate milk to be had in the afternoon following their exits from school.

One of his early Rutabaga events was an evening Halloween Party for his friends. The restaurant was closed to other guests and yes, there were ghosts! There were also devils, zombies, witches, and other scary Halloween characters. A wonderful party but impossible to find any real spirits.

So when did the real ghosts come?

At first it was the random pan falling stupidly on the floor. We all inexplicably have had something drop or fall in our own kitchens. Random and annoying, but this was something else. The pans in the Rutabaga began to drop more frequently. Mark told me they started flying over toward the restaurant tables. One day I was walking down the alley in back of the Rutabaga. Mark was leaning against the wall looking at his feet. “Mark!” I said. And before he got a word in, I added, “you look tired.” “I am,” he replied. “These pans and utensils that are flying off the wall are too noisy and driving me crazy” “Are you sure it’s not the kids with cookies making the noise?” I asked. He looked at me with disdain.

I left but returned the next afternoon. We discussed what was going on. Mark wondered if the activity was related to the funeral parlor nearby. He said someone told him that his building long ago held bodies before funerals. He didn’t know if that story was true or not. I replied that perhaps it could be caused by little earthquakes that no one knew about or could feel. As soon as I finished saying that, one of the bigger pans went flying off the

wall toward me. It was like a child that wanted more attention.

I am not sure if there were other witnesses to this, or other stories unknown to me.

Earthquakes? Spirits? I don’t know. But there were at least two of us who saw what we saw.



Back door alley to the former Rutabaga’s kitchen, present day La Medusa, at 4857 Rainier Ave. S. in Columbia City. Photograph by Joan Neville



Mark Hannum, former Charter RVHS Board Member with Joan, at our outreach table during a Rainier Valley Heritage Parade and Festival, August 8, 2009. Photograph by Chelsea Rodriguez

RVHS Remembers Lifetime Members and Supporters

Grover Haynes, RVHS Lifetime and Emeritus Board Member

After serving in the Korean War, Grover was hired as an engineer with Boeing, where he retired after a 41-year career. Grover was dedicated to his family, especially to his wife Wanda, and to their community. Grover’s leadership style was one of ease and grace, a mentor to all that served with him. His leadership roles included serving as Vice-President of RVHS, President of Lakewood Seward Park Neighborhood Association, President of the Southeast Seattle Crime Prevention Council, President of Genesee Merchants Association. He received the Jefferson Award for Public Service in 2004 from the Black Law Enforcement Association of Wash. and awarded the John L. O’Brien Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009. Grover touched the lives of many, leaving a legacy of service and dedication. (Please find Grover’s obituary in the Seattle Times).



Grover Haynes, honored as RVHS Emeritus Board Member, by Board President Sheila Harvey, 2017

Theo Skowronek-Nassar, RVHS Senior Member

Theo graduated from Franklin High School and stayed connected to her Rainier Valley roots as a member of RVHS. Born to Polish immigrant parents, Theo grew up in Hillman City, took to the arts at a young age performing as a solo concert pianist and danced classically as a teen. She graduated from Washington State University with a degree in Social Work. You can read Theo’s oral history on food in Chapter 2: Hard Times, in our *Rainier Valley Food Stories Cookbook*. “My dad had a Victory Garden, and he grew everything from okra, tomatoes, peas, carrots, you name it. Everyone in the country was urged to grow as much as they could of their own to help the economy during the war.” (Please find Theo’s full obituary in the Issaquah Reporter).



Theo Skowronek-Nassar, 1939-2024

Mary O’Brien, RVHS Lifetime Member

Mary spent her 99 years in Rainier Valley, moving less than two miles from her childhood home in Brighton to her family home in Seward Park. Her life centered around family as a beloved and selfless mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt, great-aunt, cousin, friend, and woman of deep faith. Mary was St. Edward Church’s longest-serving parishioner in Hillman City, having been baptized there in 1924. She is now reunited with those she dearly missed: her husband of 55 years, John L. O’Brien, her daughter Mary Ann Suver, her parents, siblings, niece, nephews, and her closest friends from the valley, Flo Keefe and Annie (Loranger) Martineau. The legacy of “Seafair Mom” and her family traditions lives on. (Please read Mary’s obituary in The Seattle Times).



Mary with her daughter Karen O’Brien, RVHS Board President, at the 2018 Founder’s Dinner

Florita Skov, RVHS Lifetime Member

Florita and her husband Ervin settled in Rainier Beach where they raised their family. She was active in All Saint’s Church on Cloverdale Street and worked for 10 years at the Southeast Seattle Senior Center. She travelled frequently with her husband in retirement. They celebrated their 70th anniversary at Lakeshore Senior Living. A seamstress and quilter, Florita lived a full life of kindness, gentle strength, and happiness in friendship and family. (Excerpt from the Seattle Times).



Florita Skov, 1927-2024

Stuart Weiss, RVHS Lifetime Member

Stuart, born in 1929, graduated from Franklin High School and the University of Washington. In 1952 he married fellow Franklin and UW alum Virginia Starr. Stuart spent his career working as an electrical engineer for Pacific Northwest Bell. Son of Columbia Pioneers Philip Weiss and mother Marion Southard, Stuart followed in his father’s footsteps as a civic activist. Stuart was involved in many community organizations, including serving as president of the Rainier Beach Community Club. Stuart was a generous donor to our operations throughout his lifetime, and included RVHS in a life insurance policy. His extensive contributions to our archives runs deep, 4 generations of family heritage, his father’s diaries, his own oral history and more. Stuart’s passion for local history will be remembered. (Please read Stuart’s obituary in the Seattle Times).



RVHS Board Member Laura Day, Stuart’s daughter, at his childhood’s family home reunion in 2016

2024 Programs & Events!

This year was filled with exciting programs and meaningful events at RVHS! We celebrated the Hillman City Heritage Bell Installation, a community effort years in the making that now stands as a powerful symbol of local heritage. Special thanks to the Hillman City Neighborhood Association for hosting the Hillman City Block Party, where we unveiled the bell and shared the rich history of Hillman City with neighbors and friends!



RVHS Board Member Becky Corpuz and Indigenous performers at the Hillman Heritage Bell dedication, 8/10/2024

Throughout the year, our Monthly Open Houses, held during the Columbia City Night Markets, welcomed new and familiar faces to explore our collections and connect with Rainier Valley history. In September, we had the privilege of presenting at The Woman’s Century Club meeting, where speaker Harriet Baskas, supported by the Humanities Washington Speakers Bureau, captivated the audience



with tales of “Weird, Wonderful, and Worrisome Objects in Washington State’s Museums”—and gave RVHS a chance to showcase some of our own fascinating artifacts! Our booth at the San Gennaro Festival celebrated Italian heritage with stories of Italians in the Pacific Northwest and the storied history of Rainier Valley’s own “Garlic Gulch.” Lastly, our History Happy Hour series featured “The Explosive History of Hitt’s Hill,” where attendees learned about the fascinating and fiery legacy of Columbia City’s fireworks production.

Thank you to everyone who joined us, making 2024 a remarkable year for community engagement and historical exploration! We can’t wait to update you all on our 2025 programming!

- Katie McClure, Programs and Marketing Director

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membership!

A membership or donation of \$100 value or more, receives a copy of the
20th Anniversary Edition Rainier Valley Food Stories Cookbook!

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What’s new in the Archives!

2023.012: Lakewood Community Club meeting minutes and records - Thank you Lakewood Seward Park Neighborhood Association Board of Directors!

2024.002: 1896 Letter from Frank Osgood, president of Seattle Renton and Southern Railway on Seattle & Rainier Beach Railway stationary, 2 Franklin HS patches. Thank you RVHS board member Dave Eskenazi!

2024.003: Seattle Neighborhood Markets Posters, Tote bags, Yard Signs, a Trophy, and Newspaper clippings. Thank you Karen Kinney!

2024.004: Scrapbook “This is Your Life, Howard Kleinoeder”, former resident of Rainier Beach. Created and donated by Darcy Schlichting, his niece. Thank you Darcy!

2024.005: Lakewood Seward Park Neighborhood Association, Lakewood Community Clubhouse 1915 piano. Thank you LSPNA Board of Directors!

2024.006: Oh Boy Oberto! inflatable hat shaped like a hydroplane, Dex White Pages and Dex Mini for Seattle, 4 Pacific NW Magazines, and a biography of “The Hyde Residence”. Donated by RVHS board member Laura Day. Thank you Laura!

2024.007: Photographs of Columbia Bakery, Betty’s Café, Cleo’s Apparel, and Rainier Beach’s Dairy Valley Milk House and the Cleo’s wall clock. Donated by the granddaughters of Gerry & Jen Johnson, owners of Cleo’s Apparel from 1963 - 1991, at 4824 Rainier Ave. S and S. Edmunds St. Thank you Jill Shaw!



Jerry and Jen Johnson owned the Columbia Bakery at 4865 Rainier Ave. S in the 1950s, stand behind the bakery counter in the left photograph. Above: Cleo’s Apparel, 4824 Rainier Ave. S and the Cleo’s wall clock. Check out our website to view this collection! rainiervalleyhistory.org

2024.008: Rainier Beach Community Club records, maps, House of Values matchbooks, antique end table, family scrapbook, travel slides, and newspaper clippings. Thank you to the Estate of Stuart Weiss!

Uncataloged.814-Uncataloged.821: Keith Wiltse’s local history book collection. Thank you Ann Wiltse

Uncataloged.822: Original “Rainier Valley Food Stories” Cookbook. Thank you John and Mary Charles

Uncataloged.823: Article titled “Seattle’s Indian Trails” by David M. Buerge. Published in “The Weekly” on May 20, 1981

Uncataloged.824: Article titled “Seattle’s Indian Trails” by David M. Buerge. Published in “The Weekly” on May 20, 1981

Honor Roll

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Rainier Valley Historical Society's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret and share the history and heritage of Rainier Valley and its people and to engage public involvement in and appreciation of its diverse cultures. Our geographic boundaries are from Dearborn Street on the north to the city limits on the south, and from I-5 to Lake Washington.

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