

A LOOK AT YESTERDAY

"Why can't P.E.O.s give money to women in our own country to help with their education just as we do to those who come here from other countries?" This question was asked at a meeting of Chapter AK, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in early 1970.

Another member of AK wondered, "Are women in the United States and Canada really having trouble financing their education?" To answer this question, the chapter surveyed a number of colleges and universities to learn about the scholarship needs of women. The results were overwhelming. Business and nursing schools also confirmed that women were having great difficulty financing their education.

Based on this information, the chapter presented a resolution to the convention of Pennsylvania State Chapter in June 1970. They suggested that P.E.O. consider a scholarship program for women in the United States and Canada similar to the IPS program. The resolution passed and was presented to the executive board of Supreme Chapter.

STUDY COMMITTEE

The executive board had received similar suggestions from other parts of the Sisterhood, but the Pennsylvania resolution provided the catalyst for action. In December 1970 Irene Kerr, president of Supreme Chapter, appointed a special study committee to investigate the feasibility of a new project. Co-chairmen from the executive board were Florence Wallace and Marie Busch. Members were Elizabeth Boyington, Washington; Lilas Brandhorst, Missouri; Lillian Corley, Indiana; Ruth Romero, Pennsylvania; and Helen Storbeck, Kansas.

The committee made plans to define the greatest educational needs of women of the United States and Canada. A questionnaire was sent to members and educators throughout both countries.

The responses confirmed a great need to help women continue their education, and suggested a broader program than one that offered traditional scholarships. Financial aid was most lacking for the mature woman who needed to upgrade her skills or acquire training to meet life's changing demands. Such a program could assist with academic or vocational courses and also with expenses related to a woman's education such as books, childcare and transportation.

At the 1971 convention of Supreme Chapter in Detroit, the study committee presented a resolution proposing a new continuing education program for P.E.O. This was adopted with the recommendation that the committee be continued for the following biennium to prepare and submit amendments to the Bylaws of Supreme Chapter to implement the resolution.

PILOT PROJECT

The study committee instituted a pilot project to make financial assistance available to applicants submitted by chapters throughout the Sisterhood. Twenty-two grants were awarded in those two years. Each situation was evaluated using the criterion established by the committee. (An article which appeared in the January 1989 issue of THE P.E.O. RECORD tells

about the original twenty-two recipients.) The results were reported at the convention of Supreme Chapter in New Orleans in 1973, where the amendment to the Bylaws of Supreme Chapter passed by a wide margin. The Program for Continuing Education (PCE) became the fourth P.E.O. project.

Applications were sent to the first board of trustees, and a backlog of files built up due to limited funds. However, as chapters became aware of the possibilities for involvement and service, contributions increased until modest grants were possible for almost all eligible applicants.

P.E.O. has adapted to changing times as PCE has grown. In 1979, "Supreme Chapter" became "International Chapter". All levels of the Sisterhood have become increasingly aware of the changing needs of its members as well as the needs of other women.

PCE TODAY

Qualifications for recipients have been tightened since the inception of PCE. In January 1986, applications were restricted to those women who had two years or less to complete their educational goals. Since the beginning of PCE, the highest priority applicant has been the single parent with little or no marketable skills, who has a realistic, short-term goal that will allow her to train for a job to support her family.

Chapters are encouraged to study the policies and consider which P.E.O. project is most appropriate for a student before voting to sponsor her for a P.E.O. grant or loan. PCE has established itself in partnership with ELF, Cottey, IPS, and P.E.O. Scholar Awards to extend the scope of P.E.O. educational opportunities for women. The rapid growth of PCE since 1973 reflects the outstanding support of all P.E.O.s and the foresight of Pennsylvania Chapter AK as well as the Study Committee in anticipating the continuing needs of women.

Note: Chapters should always reference the P.E.O. International website for the most current policies and forms.

Source: Unknown, 1989