

League of Women Voters honor founder

Malca Chall to be recognized at group's 50-year celebration

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HAYWARD — Personal recognition is not Malca Chall's strong suit, and she'd just as soon deflect the honors to be paid to her tonight as the founder of the Eden Area League of Women Voters. The league has educated the greater Hayward community about health, the environment, and political issues and candidates since 1957.

The organization, and its hundreds of past and present volunteer members, are the ones who should be in the spotlight during the 50th anniversary gala at Hayward City Hall, Chall insists. "Remarkable" is the Fairview resident's description of the local offshoot of state and national organizations.

"Think of the value of the league presenting pros and cons of ballot measures, in a nonpartisan way and after study," Chall says. "We have set up candidate forums and studied charter amendments." And its members have taken a proactive role in the communities of Ashland, Castro Valley, Cherryland, Fairview, Hayward, Hillcrest Knolls, San Leandro and San Lorenzo.

Eighty-seven members served in elective and appointive offices, ranging from Congress to the state Legislature, city, county, school and college seats. Like Chall, who volunteered for Hayward's Emergency Shelter Program and now heads — for the third time — her homeowner association's board of directors, the league's members are involved in civic and community activities. This includes men, to whom the league has opened its membership.

When Chall was invited to join Oakland's League of Women Voters in 1949, most members didn't have children and may have worked full or part time. As the decades passed, league members managed to juggle home, family, full-time work and community activities, abilities that Chall — who has worked for Oakland community agencies and as an oral historian — admires.

In the 1950s, Chall was living with her husband and two sons in San Leandro when she was asked to prepare a community study that led to the formation of the Eden league. Her efforts to form this chapter included about eight years on the board of directors as the fledgling league grew and became a force in the communities it served.

"I didn't know many people out here," recalls Chall, who is the Eden league's only honorary lifetime member. "San Lorenzo was our main source of members, along with Castro Valley and Oakland. More and more people became interested, because we provided a tangible way to do things, in a nonpartisan manner."

Interested in learning about the League of Women Voters? Visit <http://www.lwvea.org>, or e-mail lwvea@aol.com.