

Spotlight On Women

The women that operate in Pine Lake government

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Pine Lake also is a place where if you have to deal with city government, you probably will deal with a woman. The mayor and two of the five city councilors are women. The city clerk is a woman. There are no women on the police force but there's almost no police force, the town's entire public safety department consisting of Police Chief Sam Schlesinger and one part-time deputy. The active role played by women in **Pine Lake** city government is, Mayor Myra Singer believes, a product of circumstance. "I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that the city government is voluntary," she said. **Pine Lake** is a small town, in the best sense of the word. It's the kind of place where the 900 residents regard themselves almost as members of the same extended family. It's the kind of place where, when the city council had to pick someone to serve out the balance of an unexpired term, council members asked for a show of hands to see if the people in the audience approved of the person being considered.

"That may have been as good as holding an election," said **Pine Lake** resident Lauren Colburn, who was present at that meeting. "The people in the audience probably were a representative sample of the people who vote in **Pine Lake**." If you call City Hall, the telephone will be answered by a woman, Judy Griswell. Her title is city clerk but that's misleading. As the city's only full-time employee other than Schlesinger and two maintenance men, she handles a wide variety of duties. She collects taxes, serves as clerk of the municipal court, and generally oversees the operations of city government. From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, Ms. Griswell, who, ironically, does not live in **Pine Lake**, is the city government. "I do it all," said Ms. Griswell, who is married and has a son and a daughter. "I've been doing it for four years now and I still enjoy it. You get to meet all kinds of interesting people." A lot of the interesting people Ms. Griswell meets are law breakers, most likely people who have violated traffic regulations in **Pine Lake** and gotten caught at it.

As Ms. Colburn said, most of the 900 people who live in **Pine Lake** "are reasonably well-behaved." That leaves the police with little to do beyond traffic patrol and they're very efficient at it. As a result, Ms. Griswell's office draws a steady parade of motorists coming in to pay traffic fines. She handles them politely but firmly. When one driver, a Floridian, wanted to pay part of his fine and return later to pay the balance, Ms. Griswell said, "That's okay, but I can't give you your license back until you pay the whole thing." The man gave Ms. Griswell a wad of bills and left, disappointed. "She's just wonderful," said City Councilor Jennifer Brabson. "This city could not run without Judy."

Ms. Brabson would not claim any credit for herself, but she also works hard at making **Pine Lake** a going proposition. She doesn't regard being on the **Pine Lake** City Council as a stepping

stone to a higher political office. In fact, it's almost an accident that she's on the council. "I was originally appointed to fill a vacancy," she said. "I never had any aspirations of being in politics." "I don't think that being a woman makes me a better city council member," Ms. Brabson went on. "I think that what makes this government succeed is that we all want similar things and that we care about what we're doing.", Ms. Brabson and her fellow councilors certainly aren't in it for the money. "We don't get paid," she said. "It's in our city charter. We're basically volunteers.

In **Pine Lake** Like people serve in city government because they care about their community. "Nobody cares more than Mayor Myra Singer, Ms. Brabson said. "Her heart and soul are in this city," she said. "She really cares. "Accessibility is a key feature of being mayor of **Pine Lake**. "She's easy to reach," Ms. Brabson said. "You can call her at home. I can't imagine anyone living in Atlanta calling Andy Young at home. I don't believe people think he's accessible. "People like to call on Saturday morning," she said. "A man called early one Saturday morning to complain that his garbage hadn't been picked up. I'm not sure what he thought it would accomplish to call me on Saturday morning. There was nothing I could do about it then unless I went to his house and picked up his garbage and brought it back to my house."

The active role played by women in **Pine Lake** city government is, Ms. Singer believes, a product of circumstance. "I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that the city government is voluntary," she said. "It's getting harder and harder to get anyone to volunteer to do anything other than their jobs. "Any man or woman who works full time has difficulty serving as an elected official because it isn't always possible to take time off from work to deal with city business." "Some of the men seem to be having problems scheduling their time," Ms. Singer said. Scheduling is less of a problem for Ms. Brabson, who helps her husband manage the Pizza On The **Lake** restaurant in **Pine Lake** and is able to fit city business into her day. Ms. Singer also is able to fit city business around her job schedule. "I have the advantage of only working part time and I have a very understanding boss," she said. Even with those advantages, Ms. Singer finds that her duties as mayor interfere with other aspects of her life. "But it has its rewards," she said. "You get satisfaction from knowing that you're accomplishing something." In spite of the rewards, Ms. Singer said she doesn't think she'll run for re-election when her second three-year term ends in 1988. This decision, she said, is partly due to the fact that she will soon be working full time and partly because she wants to spend more time with her husband and two daughters.

Ms. Brabson, who was appointed to the council four years ago and elected to a full term in 1985, also said she doesn't think she'll try to remain on the city council after her current term ends. "It's somebody else's turn now," she said.

Photo: **Pine Lake** City Councilor Jennifer Brabson (left) goes over some city documents with City Clerk Judy Griswell/Chuck Bell