LEADERSHIP NOTES: PAST PRESIDENT

My time serving as a committed and enthusiastic member of your Leadership Team is coming to an end. It has been a rewarding tenure.

Over the past three years I have had the pleasure of working together with our stellar group, assisting Barbara Morrison and Veronica Williams as co-chair and finally this year in an advisory role. I am very proud of the increase in membership and participation during this time.

Each year has brought enthusiastic, talented and dedicated new members. Many of you have already volunteered your time and expertise on various Alliance activities. Thank you!

My experience with the Alliance began in 2012 when I was asked to chair the Greens Sale. I was a novice! Fortunately, the Alliance decided, for the first time, to include committee chairs on the Leadership Team. It was there that I began to learn what the Alliance was all about.

The Alliance leaders mentored me and I in turn committed myself to the group. I felt heard, listened to and supported. I learned that service to our membership and the church is a hallmark of the Alliance.

It is in this capacity that we become a model to our community. The more members who take their turn serving on the Leadership Team, as an officer or committee chair, the more we flourish.

All of us, adding our effort for the continuity of the Alliance, help fulfill our mission: to provide regular opportunities for fellowship, life-long learning and spiritual growth for our members, as well as service to the church and the larger community.

Thank you for the privilege of serving the Alliance.

Yours in Fellowship,
Jan Wolf,
Past President

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Elizabeth Newell

Although Elizabeth Newell admits to a former trace of timidity about bridges, she and husband Chuck settled in Portland in 2017. Their older son and family live here, and this city of bridges abounds with libraries. “I grew up loving libraries,” she remembers. “When I was five my grandmother took me by bus to the downtown San Antonio library to get my first card!” The stacks, the periodical room and the newspapers from all over the world (even the London Times!) piqued her interest then—and still do.

Elizabeth’s early curiosity about distant places became the impetus for travel and, perhaps, for her degree. At 20, she donned a backpack containing Europe on 5 Dollars a Day and traipsed around Europe for the first time. At the University of Texas, Austin, she played the flute in the UT Longhorn Band before earning her BA in English and History.

After marriage, Elizabeth and Chuck remained in Austin. When both of their boys were in school, she returned to UT to obtain a Masters in Library Science, as well as a teaching credential and became a middle school librarian.
Elizabeth Newell, continued

After retirement, she went back to the stacks. As a volunteer at Ransom Center, UT’s renowned research library, she loved meeting scholars from around the world and indulged her own curiosity about original documents, especially those of her favorite author, Virginia Woolf.

About her first visit to First Church Elizabeth says, “I knew the first time...that this was my church.” She joined the church in 2017 and the Alliance soon after. She participates wholeheartedly: she attended Eliot’s Winter Camp, where she loved reading Nancy Panitch’s Ireland blog, enrolled in Wellspring, and joined a book group that grew out of an Adult RE Program.

An indefatigable bookie, Elizabeth devotes her expertise and energy each week to two Portland public libraries and encourages young readers at one elementary school through the SMART (Start Making a Reader Today) program.

Naturally, she has gravitated to monthly service with the Beacon Bookstore. But, make no mistake. It is Elizabeth’s enthusiasm for people as well as for service that enlivens our connections to her! Welcome her to the Leadership Team for next term; she has graciously accepted our invitation to serve as Alliance Secretary.

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Barbara Surovell

Barbara welcomes me into her comfortable, buttercup-yellow living room. Tall shelves stuffed with books line one wall as well as the wall of a red room just beyond. Textured pillows and table settings, elegant Japanese obis and watercolors stimulate the senses in both rooms. “I love color” Barbara admits. Reading is clearly another passion.

Barbara walks carefully and gestures to a contraption for therapeutic home exercise; she is recuperating from knee surgery just weeks ago and feeling a bit impatient to be up and about.

Barbara was born in D.C. where her father was a Civil Engineer with the U.S. Army. When college time came, proximity to home guided her choices: Bennington, then Columbia, then Rutgers where she earned a degree in English and Comparative Literature. “I love going to school. I could go forever,” she says.

John Holt’s book, How Children Fail, caused her to choose teaching as a career. When jobs were scarce, she worked as a research assistant while sewing and selling her original “wide and colorful” men’s silk ties.

When she was a single parent with two children, she moved to Eugene where teaching jobs were available. She taught elementary and middle school for eight years and married Dean Baker in 1985. They moved to Portland in 1992 and have four children between them; today there are five grandchildren.

Barbara admits “I became an atheist...at an age when I was becoming ornery,” about 13. She continued to define herself as an atheist “until my 40s...when one day in Eugene I looked at a tree. I knew I couldn’t make that tree, not a single leaf, and decided there must be a God.” Invited by Elsa Porter to visit First Unitarian Church, she joined in 1998. “I am drawn to different ways of looking at things. We don’t all think the same.”

Barbara joined the Alliance in 1996. “This group is about connections!” Serving as Co-President with Betsy Riddell from 2009-2011 “was a high point for me. I’m happy to do anything.”

That pesky leg surgery is just a temporary setback for Barbara. “Only two more weeks!” Next term we welcome Barbara as Chair of the Allocations Committee.