

MARY PATRICIA OSTRYE, FIRST WOMAN MAYOR

“Pat” was a remarkable change agent! She was the first woman on City Council (1974). She is the first elected mayor of Monrovia (1978). She led a time of growth and development – leading to Monrovia’s All-America City designation. Ostrye is the only person who’ve been elected to four positions in Monrovia: City Council, Mayor, City Treasurer, and City Clerk. And all through this, she was a consummate volunteer with an inclusive and optimistic attitude. We are fortunate to have this piece excerpted from a larger biography by Pat’s daughter, Madonna Ostrye Tyler (2024).

As the first of five children of Almira Cecilia Cook and William Joseph O’Brien, Mary Patricia was born on January 12, 1924, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Cooks understood themselves to be “Black Irish” with their dark complexion and dark hair. Pat’s father, known as a math wizard, served in the United States Navy during World War I, then worked at Diamond Iron Works through World War II. Pat’s mother worked as a PBX operator for Lindsay Brothers.

Pat participated in all the school’s plays and musical venues at St. Margaret’s Academy. Following High school graduation, Pat worked at KYSM radio in Mankato, Minneapolis. She did a woman’s program in the morning, read news at noon and interviewed notable people in the afternoon. In addition, she wrote commercials and organized their music library.

In 1944, Pat enlisted with the United States Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). She went to boot camp in the heart of the Bronx at Hunter College. As part of her first assignment in Pasco, Washington, she sold war bonds, and wrote the monthly newsletter. A second assignment led her to downtown Seattle at the 13th Naval District Headquarters. Next was the move to the Naval District Headquarters Air Control in downtown San Diego. Her rank as Telegrapher Third Class had her handling flight plans for twelve air stations throughout the area.

One of the other WAVES came from Monrovia where Pat’s aunt lived. Aunt Irene Gretton played the organ for the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. During a visit, Pat joining the IC choir for the day and met Peter Ostrye. Peter was born in Cleveland, Ohio, graduated from Western Reserve University with a degree in political science, and attended their law school for two years. Although he tried to join the military, Peter’s hearing loss had him rated as 4F. He volunteered with the USO and got a job at Lockheed in California. He rented a room from Irene Gretton and joined the Immaculate Conception Church choir. Peter’s cousin, Sister Mary Ellen, served as Superior at Maryknoll Sanitarium on Norumbega Drive. Peter bought 371 N. Alta Vista from a Japanese American doctor who was interned during World War II. Pat and Pete married at Immaculate Conception Church on June 30, 1945. Ten fellow WAVES acted as ushers.

Between 1946 and 1959, Pete and Pat would have seven children. In between, Pat attended San Jose State College on the GI Bill. After a stint at the post office, Pete taught at Monrovia High. When their youngest graduated from Monrovia High, Pat had completed twenty-five years of packing lunches, mending school uniforms, teaching her daughters to sew their own clothes, and rushing to hospitals for the family’s cancer, hernias, broken body parts, appendectomies, etc. Pat was also always volunteering especially at Immaculate Conception school and church.

In 1958, Pete ran a successful campaign for Monrovia City Council and remained active on the council until he resigned in 1968. He had campaigned on making the City Treasurer and City Clerk positions elective offices. Being a Catholic and a Democrat put Pete at odds with the predominantly White Protestant and Republican council. Pat and Pete’s awareness of discrimination only encouraged them to continually raise issues of injustice regarding race, religion and gender. Both Pat and Pete were leaders in

the local Democratic Party working for candidates and running campaigns. They served as delegates to the 1960 Democratic National Convention that nominated John F. Kennedy.

Amid their community, political, church and family activities, the Ostryes endured a setback when Pete suffered a major heart attack in the early 1960s. At 40 years old, Pat returned to work as a switchboard operator at Sears in Pasadena. Pat then worked with Conrac in Monrovia in Personnel, then as corporate librarian.

In 1973, Pat was approached to run on a slate of three to bring change to the Monrovia City Council. The slate included Pat, an Irish Catholic mother of seven and veteran; Eric Faith, a young white Protestant attorney; and Bob Bartlett, an African American corporate executive and civic activist. Their campaign of change put the first African American and first woman on the City Council. At the time, only one percent of legislators were women, but three women were elected in 1974 in the San Gabriel Valley area.

Eric Faith became mayor, followed two years later by Bob Bartlett. This new administration created a redevelopment agency that drastically changed the face of Myrtle Avenue and Huntington Drive. They purchase and relocated 400 units to redevelop the area to a bustling area for business and community-centered programs. The city brought in two major hotel chains, a department store and a shopping center on the corner area of Mayflower and Huntington Drive. The redevelopment also included new restaurants, small businesses, home décor stores and technical and industrial complexes.

Pat's boss at Conrac, Lou Tirapelle, became Pat's campaign manager when she decided to run for State Assembly in 1976. Pat ventured into the race and gained 35% of the vote, but not quite the win she had hoped for. Pat won Monrovia's Woman of the Year in 1976, an award she gratefully cherished.

By 1978, Monrovia decided to make the mayorship an elected office. Pat decided to run and again had Lou Tirapelle as her campaign manager. Pat broke several glass ceilings, becoming the first elected mayor, first woman mayor, first Catholic mayor and first Democratic mayor in a nonpartisan election. Change and inclusion had come to Monrovia.

Pat worked to make sure more women held key positions in the city offices, including women of color. While continuing to push for change, diversity and inclusion, Pat worked hard to keep community programs working for ALL the citizens of Monrovia. Pat succeeded in fulfilling her campaign promises of establishing a Meals-on-Wheels program, Dial-a-Ride, home library services and a federally funded senior lunch program called SNAP. The city purchased the former Monrovia News Post building to create the Monrovia Community Center on Palm Avenue. Pat was also instrumental in starting the New Horizons Senior Club; Pat became its president in her later years. The *Pasadena Star News*, the *L.A. Times* and even the *National Enquirer* wrote about this small city of 38,000 people run by women with Pat at the top.

At the end of her mayoral term in 1980, Pat decided to run for City Clerk, a part-time position with little pay. Pat remained as City Clerk until 1986 when she retired to spend time with Pete, who had retired from teaching in 1979.

Earlier in 1975, Pat and Pete sold their big house at 371 N. Alta Vista as Pete's sister Mary Ostrye, former Vice Principal of Clifton Junior High, built a home for herself at 361 N. Alta Vista and sold 363 N. Alta Vista to Pat and Pete. A Neighborhood Treasure dedication post stands in Pat's honor on the corner of Alta Vista and Hillcrest, erected in June of 2024.

After years of travel, politics tempted a widowed Pat back into office at the age of 68. In 1992. She was elected into her 4th office as Monrovia City Treasurer after Lou Bernabo retired.

In her many years working for the city of Monrovia, Pat rode in more than fifty parades. In 1995, Pat was part of the Monrovia delegation to the All-American City award finals in Cleveland, Ohio. Pat was thirty years – and governor of the 25th District twice - with Quota International, a philanthropic organization for the hearing impaired. In 1997, Pat went to the international convention held in New Zealand with her Monrovia friend, Charlotte Schamadan. Charlotte was then Quota's international president. Charlotte, who was hearing impaired, joined Quota with Pat's encouragement years before.

Pat also served with these organizations:

- Soroptimists Sorority
- Catholic Daughters
- President of New Horizons Senior Club,
- PTA president at Immaculate Conception
- Santa Anita Family Service Board
- Ethics Committee of Santa Teresita Hospital
- Monrovia's Coordinating Council
- The Volunteer Center
- Monrovia's Historical Museum
- Foothill Development School Board
- Red Cross and American Heart Association
- Chamber of Commerce
- Monrovia's Community Services Commission

Some of the awards presented to Pat Ostrye include:

- Kiwanis Distinguished Service Award in 1974
- Monrovia Distinguished Woman of the Year 1976
- Los Angeles County Award of Honor in 1980
- American Businesswomen's Citation in 1981
- Resolution of Commendation from the California State Assembly in 1986

Pat gave much credit to her husband Pete for his role modeling as a civil servant. In addition to raising seven children; teaching middle and high school in Monrovia; and being a city council member, philanthropist, devout Catholic Church member and choir singer, Pete also served on the Red Cross and Library boards and volunteered with Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus and the Holy Name Society. He earned Monrovia's Citizen of the Year award in 1983. But one of Pete's major contributions to Monrovia was spending three years to research and write *Monrovia Centennial Review 1886-1986*. For his work and authorship, Pete received a Preservation of History Award. Writing turned out to be a major part of the Ostrye household as Pat wrote a weekly human interest column for several different local newspapers for 35 years.

In 2004, Pat retired as Monrovia's City Treasurer after 12 years in that post. She moved to San Diego to be with family. But the pull of Monrovia remained strong, and Pat came back to a senior apartment complex. Pat was heavily involved with the New Horizons Senior Club that she started years back. In her late eighties and nineties, Pat enjoyed bingo, fundraisers, luncheons, card games, and concerts at the Community Center. Pat died peacefully in Monrovia on January 13, 2018, at the age of 94.

Her dedication to change, justice and opportunity for others was unmatched. She and her husband Pete never wavered in their principles, integrity and pursuit for a better life by active involvement in one's family and community.

Excerpted by Prof. Susie Ling from a 2024 biography by Madonna Ostrye Tyler.