

# Seward's Inspiring Women\*

**Women's History Month Exhibit in the Seward Museum atrium**

\*Local entities chose local women to be honored in this exhibit.

# Women's History

Every woman has a story.

In celebration of Women's History, the Seward Museum invited the community to help shape this display by nominating women affiliated with local organizations whose lives and work have made a meaningful impact on Seward. Through this collaborative effort, the museum seeks to honor women, both local and state, past and present. While we do so, we are expanding and enriching our collections with stories rooted in the community itself.



Left: Taken on the Seward Pier, Seward, Alaska, 1906. RBHS 2001.172  
Above: A young woman wearing a traditional fur parka. RBHS 2910.17

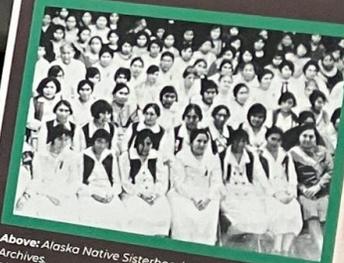


## The Fight for Women's Suffrage in Alaska

While the 19th Amendment granted women in the U.S. the right to vote in 1920, Alaska's women won the right seven years earlier.

Lena Morrow Lewis, a political organizer, traveled throughout Alaska in the early 1900s, giving speeches about the importance of women's rights. Her advocacy helped inspire the passage of the Shoup Women's Suffrage Bill, the first bill signed into law by Alaska's newly formed legislature in March 1913.

However, not all women were granted voting rights. Alaska Native women were excluded until much later, as they had to renounce their cultural traditions in order to vote. The Alaska Native Sisterhood, formed in 1914, fought for Native women's rights, land ownership, and citizenship. Their perseverance laid the groundwork for Indigenous activism that continues today.



Above: Alaska Native Sisterhood, Haines, 1929, NIH Archives.  
Right: Lena Morrow Lewis, 1912, Monmouth College Archives.



Becoming Seward...

"Service is the rent  
you pay for being  
here...so let's pay our  
rent and do a little  
service somewhere."



Margaret Anderson

# Margaret Anderson

*Seward Rotary Club  
Seward Children's Museum  
Seward Prevention Coalition*

Margaret Anderson was born in Seward in March of 1933. She graduated from Seward High School in 1951 and later married, having four children. Margaret and her husband worked diligently as independent business owners. They owned and operated a Texaco fuel distribution business in Seward when fuel sold for \$.20/gallon. In 1973, they operated a seafood processing plant in Seward. Then procured six different commercial fishing and tender vessels employed in the herring, salmon, and crab fisheries around Alaska. Many years later, Margaret eventually sold the business operations and led her children into commercial fishing careers around Alaska.

Margaret continued as an active community member. She served as a City Council member from 1994 - 1997 and 2004 and was a Planning & Zoning Commissioner from 2006-09 and 2014-15. She was a seasoned Rotary member and served on various boards and committees, including Seward's local hospital board, Resurrection Lutheran Church, the Kenai Peninsula Boys and Girls Club, the Seward Community Foundation, Seward Area Hospice, and Seward Mariners Memorial.

Margaret was a generous donor, had a gift for hospitality, and was renowned for delicious meals and fellowship parties with family and friends.



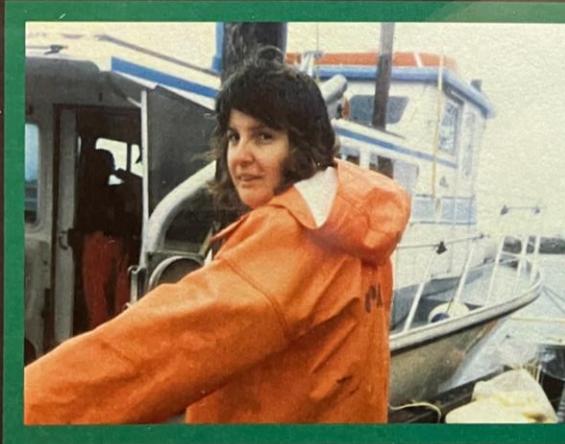
# Anne Castellina

## *Kenai Fjords National Park*

Anne Castellina was the first female superintendent of Kenai Fjords National Park. Appointed in January 1988, she worked to integrate the park into the local community. Anne once told an interviewer, "Becoming part of things just seemed natural; I felt like I'd come home."

Anne's leadership was crucial in the early stages of trail development, which improved visitor access to Exit Glacier and the vast Harding Icefield. Throughout her time as superintendent, she worked hard to secure funding for big ideas, improvements, and new safety measures, ensuring the park could be enjoyed by all.

Anne's vision that Kenai Fjords National Park and Seward could support each other proved true. Over 16 years of service, as visitation and information sharing at Kenai Fjords National Park increased, so did the tourism to all of Seward. The love she poured into this park remains a lasting legacy found throughout the park and in the heart of its community.



*NPS Photos.*

*Above: Castellina during the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill clean-up efforts.*

If you want to talk about Seward newspapers, no one speaks the language better than Bev Dunham, owner of the Seward Phoenix Log newspaper from 1966 to 1984.

Before graduating from high school in 1951, she got a job at the Seward Seaport Record and began learning the fundamentals of the business. Although the paper folded in 1955, Bev worked as a typesetter for its successor, the Petticoat Gazette, which fit well with her role as a mother of three young children. The Petticoat Gazette steered clear of anything controversial. But after the 1964 Alaska Earthquake devastated the community, it became apparent that something more was needed.

The first issue of the Seward Phoenix Log was published on October 6, 1966. The paper took its name from the ship Phoenix, built in Resurrection Bay 200 years earlier by the Russians under Alexander Baranov. Bev is proud of the Log's work. "It took so much imagination, so much dedication, so much everything. I did something you're not supposed to do. You're not supposed to get involved in the political end of things, but when it came to lobbying for projects, I used it. It was necessary to use it."

Bev looks back on those years with pride, "I think we did some good things that really needed to be done. We did take stands, and they were not always popular."

## SEWARD'S INSPIRING WOMEN



***Bev Dunham***

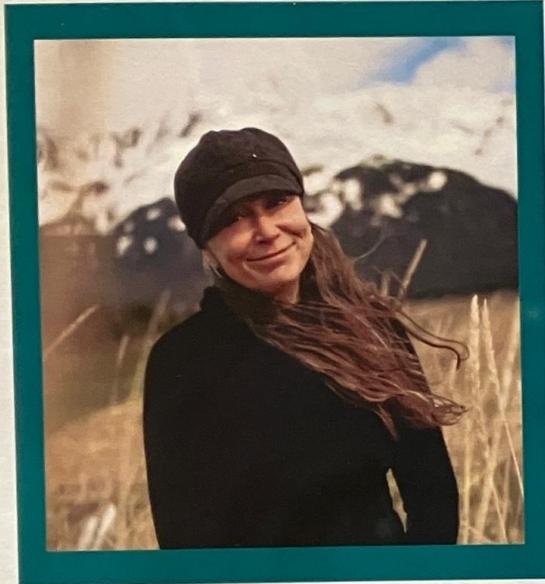
***Seward Folly***



**Olympian Lydia Jacoby  
G.O.A.T.**

Shauna Potocky is a poet and  
landscapes and seascapes, Shauna  
and *Yosemite Dawning: Poems of*  
work appears in the forthcoming  
work appears in *Wild*  
2023), *Beyond W*  
Women Speak, and  
the Sitka Conservation Society during 2024 and is serving as an Artist in the  
gram in Seward during 2026. She established the Seward Poetry Festival, a program  
of the Seward Arts Council, and has served on a book review panel for *Sea of Mountains* (Ecco) and

# Shauna Potocky



Shauna Potocky is a poet and painter with a strong connection to the natural world, both landscapes and seascapes. Shauna is the author of *Sea Smoke, Spindrift and Other Spells* (2025) and *Yosemite Dawning: Poems of the Sierra Nevada* (2023), both published by CIRQUE Press. Her work appears in the forthcoming *Alaska Literary Field Guide* due for release in March 2026. In addition, her work appears in *Writing Through the Apocalypse* (2023), *Seward Unleashed Water and Wonder* (2023), *Beyond Words International Literary Journal*, *Alpinist Magazine*, *Cirque Journal*, *Alaska Women Speak*, and other literary publications. Shauna served as Artist in Residence for the Sitka Conservation Society during 2024 and is serving as an Artist in the Schools program in Seward during 2026. She established the Seward Poetry Festival, a program of the Seward Arts Council, and has served as a book reviewer for the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival for over a decade. Shauna also established the Seward Cares For Its Bears Collaborative, a community initiative that amplifies bear awareness education, provides resources, and mitigates costs to reduce bear-human challenges. She provides poetry readings and workshops and enjoys participating in art and literary collaborations. Along with this work, Shauna has served as a dedicated public servant for over 20 years.

## SEWARD'S INSPIRING WOMEN SEWARD ARTS COUNCIL

The Seward Mural Society was founded by local artist and premier muralist Jennifer Headtke, along with other dedicated local artists and art lovers who began painting murals in 1999. Jennifer Headtke has been sketching and painting her whole life. When she moved to Alaska, she picked up watercolors to paint and capture the state's natural beauty, and it's been her medium of choice ever since. The Mural Society was a happy accident. It was an experiment in producing public art as a group in Seward. The Society developed an amazing, uncanny self-fulfilling drive. Now, with 35 murals in town, the Society has partnered with many groups and entities over the years. Some highlights include travelling to Japan to paint a "mural gift" from the City of Seward to our sister city in Obihiro, Japan. In 2023, the Society was asked to design a mural for NOAA, celebrating the visit of one of their Explorer vessels, "Okeanos," when it was docked in Seward. In 2024, the Mural Society had the honor of partnering with Alaskan great Jon VanZyle to paint the latest "Iditarod Trail" mural.



**Jennifer Headtke**



**ESTHER RONNE**  
**QUTEKCAK NATIVE TRIBE**

Esther Kristina Ronne was born on November 17, 1925, in Kanatak, Alaska. Tragically orphaned at a young age during the devastating Spanish flu pandemic that swept through Alaska Native communities, Esther and her three brothers found themselves at the Jesse Lee Home in Seward. Growing up here in Seward and establishing a homestead with her family, Esther embarked on a professional career that would span decades.

Ronne worked for the State of Alaska's Health and Social Services department, serving the community until her retirement, dedicating herself to helping fellow Alaskans access vital services and support. Esther was deeply proud of her Alaska Native heritage and understood the importance of preserving and strengthening Native voices. As a member of both the Chugach Alaska Corporation and the Qutekcak Native Tribe, she remained actively engaged in supporting her people throughout her life. Her most significant leadership roles came through her service on the health boards of two critical organizations: the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) and Chugachmuit. Her firsthand understanding of the challenges facing rural and Native communities made her an invaluable voice in ensuring culturally appropriate and accessible healthcare for Alaska Native people.

Beyond her formal roles, Esther was known throughout Seward for her traditional skills and generous spirit. She loved picking berries, making jams and jellies, canning foods, sewing, and engaging in craftwork that connected her to her heritage and that she shared freely with family and community. Her 66-year marriage, her role as mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, and her service to Seward and Alaska Native healthcare systems represent a life fully lived in service to others.

Esther passed away in 2024, and Qutekcak is honored to recognize not only her official contributions but also the countless small acts of kindness, the preservation of traditional knowledge, and the example she set for younger generations about the importance of staying connected to one's roots while working to improve the future.

In 1976, Linda Sewall moved to Seward when her husband, Jonathan, accepted a lab tech position at Seward General Hospital. She loved the town and the schools and quickly became involved in the community. Linda was elected to the Seward Community Schools Advisory Board, where she served for many years. She was later recruited by Dan Seavey for the newly formed Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers.

In 1982, Linda officially became their Secretary and Treasurer. She held that position until Fall 2023. During her time on the board, she kept the organization in order by maintaining the bank account, handling correspondence, and taking notes at monthly meetings. Linda was instrumental in numerous events organized by the Trail Blazers over the years, including the Seward Bike Path Project, the Phoenix Bicentennial Monument, the Iditarod Mural, and the Mayor's Cup Sled Dog Races.

Linda is always there to support the Trail Blazers and the Seward community. If one ever gets the chance, it is an honor to work with her.

## SEWARD'S INSPIRING WOMEN



*Linda Sewall*

**Iditarod Trailblazers**



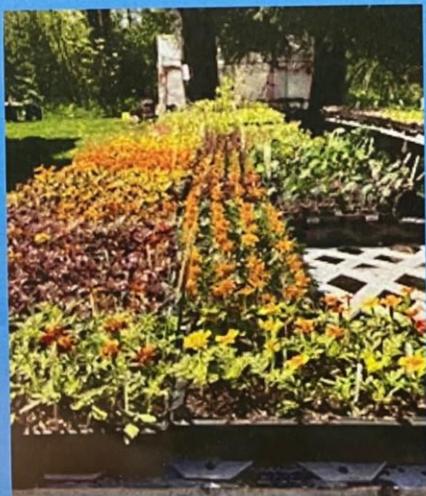
# Carol Souza

*Seward Senior Center*

Carol moved from Indiana to Seward in 1974, drawn in by the beauty of the landscape. She found small jobs such as bread baking, poster-making, hairdressing, and housekeeping. She worked as a prep cook and, on weekends, served drinks at the local bar.

Carol has been operating Weezingreens since 2000, supplying plants to residents of Seward and the city beds. When Carol reached 60, she joined the Seward Senior Center and has made the Center her social hub. She participates in exercise programs and digital education and enjoys nutritious lunches with friends.

Having received so much from the community, she is pleased and always willing to give back. She has served on several boards of directors, taught art classes, and is part of a string band that plays around town. She never regretted moving to Seward and has found her home at the Seward Senior Center.





Kristen Thorsness is a pioneering figure in Alaska rowing and a true trailblazer for the State. A graduate of Anchorage's West High School, Thorsness became the first Alaskan to win an Olympic medal when she earned gold at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. Her success reshaped expectations for Alaskan athletes and opened doors for future generations of rowers across the state.

Her achievements on the world stage inspired local Alaskans to create rowing clubs in our state. The Kenai Crewsers Rowing Club was established in 1996 and is the best rowing club in Alaska. Today, the club rows on Bear Lake in Seward and encourages all interested individuals, ages 14 and up, to explore the sport.

### SEWARD'S INSPIRING WOMEN



*Kristen Thorsness*

**Kenai Crewsers  
Rowing Club**

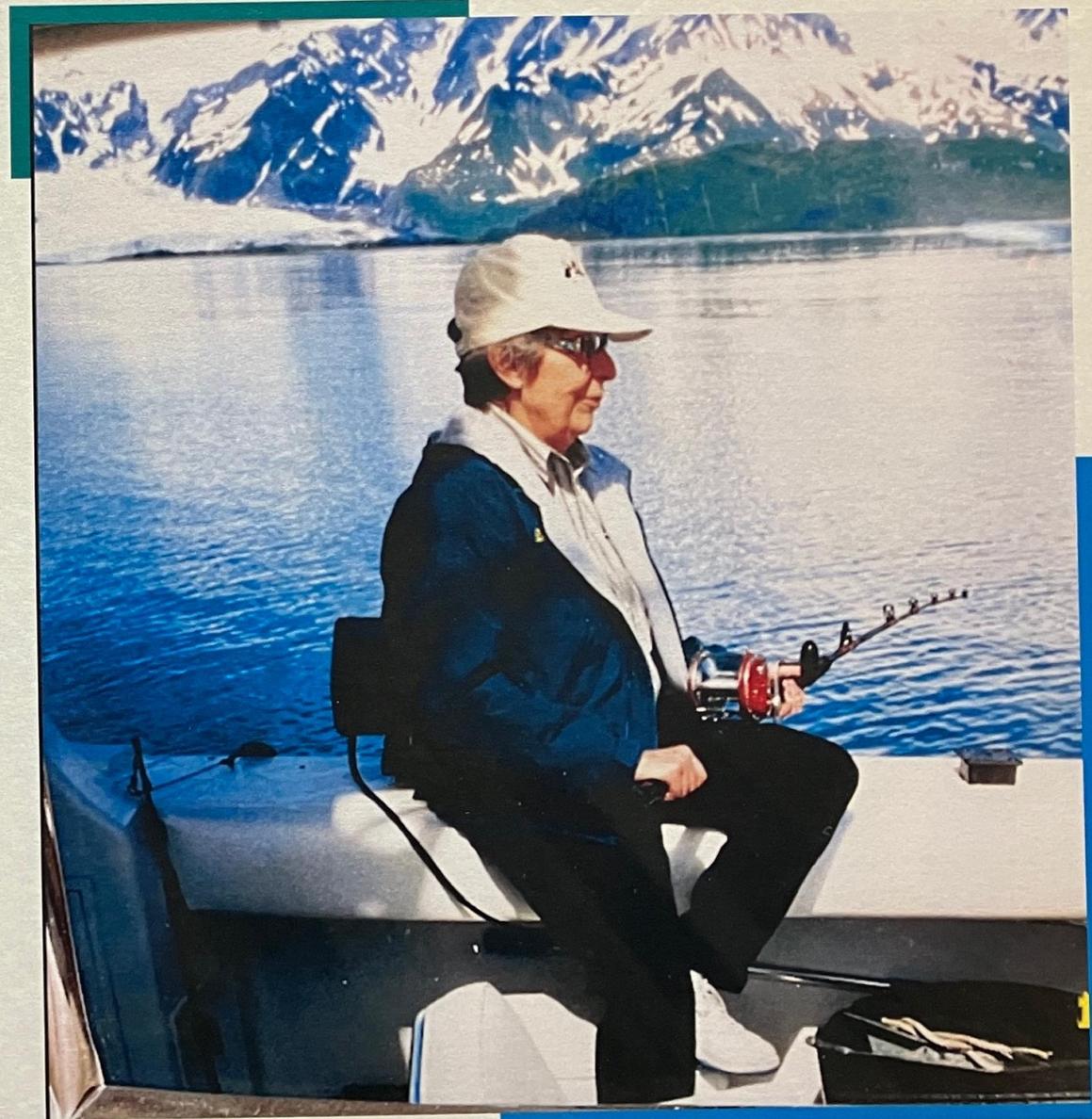
## SEWARD'S INSPIRING WOMEN

In 2025, the Seward Chamber dedicated the 70th Silver Salmon Derby to Dorothy Urbach, a beloved local who passed away last year.

Dorothy Urbach was a beloved member of the Seward community, a successful businesswoman, and an accomplished angler. She co-owned Urbach's Clothiers in downtown Seward, which is a thriving business that remains open today.

Dorothy was the Salmon Derby Publicity Chairman for 30 years, passionately advocating for the Derby and participating in it herself. In 1979, she won First Prize in the Derby with a 16.11 pound Coho! Dorothy's daughter, Robyn, says, "Wherever she went, Dorothy shared wonderful Seward stories with those she met, a proud ambassador."

She was very active in the community, serving on or leading boards including the Seward Community Library, the Seward Chamber of Commerce, and the League of Women Voters. The Chamber believes Dorothy is the perfect individual to spotlight during Women's History Month with her numerous personal and professional achievements, exemplifying a well-rounded Alaskan woman!



Edna Coughlin Weir was a 1915 graduate of Kenosha Hospital Training School for Nurses. After a year of private nursing, she joined an American Red Cross nursing unit and was one of many of her generation who responded to serve in The Great War. Only 24 nurses have received the Distinguished Service Medal, and Edna is one of them. After working several months at the Base Hospital No. 22 outside of Bordeaux, France, in an area called the Beau Desert, she volunteered to serve for nearly a month on the front lines as part of a small evacuation medical unit under constant fire during the war's last major offensive, the Meuse-Argonne.

After returning to the U.S., Edna worked for the Visiting Nurses Association and then attended Marquette University, graduating in 1937. Weir volunteered for the American Red Cross, a practice she continued until 1972, and was awarded a pin for her 55 years of service.

In 1952, Edna moved to Seward and married a longshoreman, Ted Weir. She was active in the American Legion and served as post commander of Seward Post 5. She sang in the choir of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Seward, was a member of the Rebekahs, the Business and Professional Women's Club of Seward, the Seward Chamber of Commerce, and Pioneers of Alaska Auxiliary No. 9. Edna was often seen walking around town, using a cane, an umbrella, or a ski pole. Some recall her at the American Legion, in a wheelchair, with her little dog in a bedpan, wrapped in a fluffy blanket.

## SEWARD'S INSPIRING WOMEN



***Edna Weir***

***American Legion***