

# Breaking tradition

by SUE MAYFIELD GEIGER JANUARY 24, 2015 *Coast Monthly*



JOYCE MAXWELL IS THE FIRST FEMALE COMMODORE IN THE 60-YEAR HISTORY OF LAKEWOOD YACHT CLUB. PHOTO BY STUART VILLANUEVA

Joyce Maxwell has more than one claim to fame these days. Growing up in Metropolis, Ill., the adopted home of Superman, was pretty remarkable. So was getting her law degree.

But the newest milestone in her life has come in the form of four gold stripes and three gold stars that now adorn her traditional “dress blues,” making her the first woman commodore in the 60-year history of Lakewood Yacht Club in Seabrook.

Those who know Maxwell say that her rise among the ranks had everything to do with hard work and passionate dedication. Voted in unanimously, Maxwell is honored and excited to take on this new post, she said.

Growing up, blue water sailing excursions took Maxwell and her family to enchanting ports of call.

“I was a water person growing up since we lived close to the Ohio River and the Land Between The Lakes recreation area of Kentucky,” Maxwell said. “We had ski boats and took fishing vacations to Canada, Florida and the Bahamas.”

It wouldn't be until her college years, however, that she learned to sail. A 1971 graduate of Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., Maxwell took up sailing at Southern Illinois University while taking summer classes.

After graduating from college, she moved to Houston in 1975 to work in public relations. She eventually decided to go to law school and enrolled at South Texas College of Law, graduating in 1984.

“I'd bring my little Sunfish sailboat to Clear Lake every weekend, sail and read a law book while enjoying the water,” she said.

She soon met lawyer Darold Maxwell, who had a much bigger boat, so sailing became a lot more exciting.

“We fell in love, got married in 1986 and took a three-month honeymoon, sailing the

northern Bahamas on Whiffler, a Pearson 424 Ketch,” said Maxwell, who took her 9-year-old son, Austin, along with them.

Thus began their adventures on the high seas, which included a 14-month journey to far away destinations, with Joyce teaching Austin fourth-grade studies onboard. Darold flew back to Houston on occasion to take care of law duties.

The Maxwells eventually made a permanent move to the Clear Lake area — Seabrook, then Bacliff — and practiced law together. Darold concentrated on tax law and Joyce focused on litigation.

They joined Lakewood Yacht Club in 1992, and sailing excursions to the western Caribbean, Mexico, Belize, Honduras and Panama followed. Other trips included jaunts to Nova Scotia, Maine and the Balearic Islands off the coast of Spain.

Their involvement at Lakewood grew with Joyce Maxwell taking on numerous committee positions, including chairwoman of membership and chairwoman of Harvest Moon Regatta. She was the first woman to serve on the executive committee, eventually becoming fleet captain.

“Once you are fleet captain, you are in line for commodore,” she said. “It’s then a progression to rear commodore, vice commodore and ultimately commodore. The duration of each position is for one year.”

As commodore, Maxwell — along with the general manager, the executive committee and the board of directors — will be making important decisions about the operations of the 510-member club.

“It involves a lot of strategic planning, very much like a corporation, with projected goals five to 10 years out,” she said. “We’ll be focusing on things like replacing bulkheads, piers, building floating docks and remodeling the interior of the dining room. We also have to think about future hurricane damage and develop a plan of action. I have a list of goals I’ve been working on.”

She’s aware change comes about slowly.

“Certainly I plan to change things, but not fast,” she said. “Whatever I develop will be carried on into subsequent years and will be the beginning of change in the future. I am truly very honored to be commodore.”

Sadly, Darold died recently and Joyce regrets he won’t be with her to share her new post.

“I will miss having him by my side because he was as excited as I am about being commodore,” she said.

As for Maxwell’s traditional dress blues with its new stripe and stars — you can expect a bit of style added.

“I’ll be wearing pearls and heels along with it,” she said.