

# OPINION

## VIEWPOINTS

# EMPOWERING WOMEN

## Michigan women blazed trail to Supreme Court



**Your Turn**  
Renee Knake Jefferson  
Guest columnist

History will soon be made when Ketanji Brown Jackson is confirmed for the United States Supreme Court. As the nation's first Black female Justice, her name will be heralded by the press, repeated in history books and engraved on monuments.

President Joe Biden's promise to name the first Black woman to the Supreme Court is the culmination of an effort more than four decades in the making. The untold stories of women who helped blaze the trail for her, however, deserve attention too — some with important Michigan ties.

That women with Michigan ties helped blaze this trail should not be surprising, given the strong female officials who currently lead the state — including Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.

Amalya Kearse, the first Black woman to appear on a president's shortlist, began her legal career at University of Michigan, where she graduated cum laude in 1962. She was one of only eight women in her class and served as an editor for the Michigan Law Review. After graduation, she became the first female and first African American partner at the New York firm Hughes Hubbard & Reed in 1969 and was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit by Jimmy Carter in 1979.

Kearse appeared on Ronald Reagan's shortlist for the Supreme Court when he instead nominated Sandra Day O'Connor to be the first female justice

in 1981. She was shortlisted again by Reagan for later vacancies he filled with white men. Her name re-surfaced during the presidencies of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Indeed, Clinton considered her for the very seat that now, finally, will go to a Black woman. Kearse remains on the Second Circuit today as a judge in senior status.

The runner up to O'Connor was also a life-long Michigander. Cornelia Kennedy, born in Detroit, received her law degree from the University of Michigan in 1947. She was affectionately referred to as the "First Lady of the Michigan Judiciary" due to her status as the first woman to sit on a federal bench in Michigan, appointed by Richard Nixon to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan in 1970.

She also was the first woman to serve as chief judge of a U.S. District Court, holding the role from 1977-79. She was nominated to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1979 by Jimmy Carter. Gerald Ford, himself raised in Grand Rapids, was the first president to place Kennedy on the shortlist. Though he did not nominate her, Reagan's presidential archives include a personal letter from Ford to Reagan recommending Kennedy for the Supreme Court. She came the closest, one of two interviewed by White House officials at the very end of Reagan's deliberations.

As the nation prepares for its Supreme Court membership to more accurately reflect the public it serves — with four women on the bench, including the first Black female justice — we should take a moment to remember the women who came before her.

*Renee Knake Jefferson is a law professor, co-author of the book "Shortlisted: Women in the Shadows of the Supreme Court" and a trustee of Michigan State University.*

## Empowering women to vote, defend democracy



**Your Turn**  
Sue Rosko  
Guest columnist

Over the past 102 years, the League has fought for election protection, democratic reforms, equal access to the ballot, environmental issues and social justice — all while maintaining its commitment to non-partisanship and an informed electorate. We are dedicated to advocacy, litigation and unbiased, factual resources — such as VOTE411, a non-partisan voter guide — to include more voters, expand and protect voter access and ensure that elections remain secure and accessible.

To this day, the League remains as one of the most trusted sources of non-partisan election information for American voters.

The League originally evolved from the women's suffrage movement — a decades-long fight to win women the right to vote. In August 1920, the 19th Amendment was ratified, enfranchising American women and declaring they, like men, deserve the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The League was designed to help 20 million women carry out their new responsibility as informed voters.

League members pressed for reforms in voter registration, taxation, civil service and laws affecting children. Successes have included civil service reform, election law reform and legislation concerning children's welfare. In 1941, Michigan law was amended to forbid factory work by those under 16 and to mandate school attendance by children between the ages of seven and 16.

After World War II, the League held a national campaign upon President

Franklin Roosevelt's request, to establish the United Nations and ensure U.S. participation. President Harry Truman invited the League to serve as a consultant to the U.S. delegation at the United Nations Charter Conference. One of the first organizations officially recognized by the UN as a non-governmental organization, the League maintains official observer status today.

Today members of the League are working to dispel misinformation and disinformation. We urge passage of the For the People Act, John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act or Freedom to Vote Act in the U.S. Senate. These are essential in protecting voter rights, continuing secure elections, helping to remove big money from politics and returning power to the people.

Our support of voting rights is decades-old and has been supported by both major political parties. The League of Women Voters Michigan addresses voter suppression here and is committed to ending gerrymandering. We support the Promote the Vote 2022 Ballot proposal — intended to assure a voting system that remains secure (after over 250 audits in Michigan proved there was no voter fraud in the 2020 election) and works for all of us.

The League continues its 102-year history as a grassroots organization that believes citizens should play a critical role in democracy. Our Calhoun County geographical unit is proud to be part of this strong, viable, credible organization. We urge all residents to join us in creating a more perfect community, state and nation by participating — and supporting participation of others — in our democracy.

*Sue Rosko is chairperson of the League of Women Voters of Kalamazoo Area, the Calhoun County geographical unit.*

## Dresses with a purpose empower women's confidence



**Your Turn**  
Karen Palka  
Guest columnist

From the outside, The Closet looks like a dress store with over 1,000 dresses on the floor — from girls size 6 through adult size 28. Actually, it's #MoreThanADressStore and offers #DressesWithAPurpose!

Since 2008, A Beautiful Me (a 501c3 nonprofit) has been providing self-esteem programs with outcome-based growth for girls from grades 3-12. The sole purpose for A Beautiful Me to open a retail, brick-and-mortar store in 2019 was to provide teen girls free business training through an original, hands-on curriculum.

For the past three years, teens have logged over 1,500 hours in training through a 3-step weekly business series to build confidence, education, philanthropy and life skills.

As founder and executive director of A Beautiful Me, I noticed a gap in education to empower young females to be independent with their basic knowledge in business — ideas like setting a budget, cash flow, strategic management, operation management and communication. At The Closet, our organization just happens to use beautiful new and like-new dresses as the vehicle to educational success — along with additional benefits to women of all ages shopping in our retail store.

Women allow negative talk of themselves in a dressing room. The dressing rooms were created strategically with small 18" mirrors hung at face level to encourage shoppers to come out of the dressing rooms to the full-length, tri-fold mirror. By stepping out, to see themselves in a full-length mirror, the

staff at The Closet watch women stand taller and beam with self-acceptance.

Along with the "Flash of Fashion" 60 second video series, with different everyday women modeling monthly and pushing through nervousness to build their confidence. Women empowering women — providing healing and promoting hope.

One hundred percent of all proceeds from The Closet sales go directly to our programming for girls in grades 3-12. Applications are being accepted for teen girls in grades 8-11 to register in emerge360 and participate in A Beautiful Me's business training by texting emerge360 to (586) 623-4407. Each level is on average a commitment of 16 weeks, meeting one time per week for two hours at The Closet (located at 235 Huron Avenue, Port Huron, Michigan). Visit over1000dresses.com for more information.

*Karen Palka is the founder and executive director of the Port Huron nonprofit A Beautiful Me, building self-worth & confidence through workshops, programs, and events.*

## Empowering women through service, leadership in Rotary



**Your Turn**  
Brenda Tipton  
Guest columnist

Rotary has a long history of empowering women and opening opportunities. What is Rotary you ask? Rotary is a global network of 1.4 million neighbors, friends, leaders and problem solvers who see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change — across the globe, in our communities and within ourselves.

Rotary has been around for over 110 years, but only accepted women beginning in 1987. Today women make up approximately 40 percent of the service organization's members — and our number is growing.

In 1987, Brighton's very own Melanie Moses was the first woman in Livingston County to be presented a Rotary Ann Pin into membership. In 2022, the Rotary World will welcome

its first female Rotary International President in Jennifer Jones from Windsor, Ontario.

Rotary clubs provide enormous opportunities for women's growth, leadership and empowerment. Rotary clubs stand out by putting service above self and assisting in numerous ways in order to better the community and the folks that live in this amazing area.

A priority for Rotary and its local clubs is growing and diversifying membership — to make sure they reflect the communities they serve. Rotary celebrates and welcomes people of all backgrounds regardless of age, ethnicity, race, color, abilities, religion, socioeconomic status, culture, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Come visit a Rotary club near you and experience all that service work has to offer. The opportunities to "Change Yourself, Change Lives and Change Others" are priceless!

You can enjoy a meal and open your opportunities to partake in life changing events with local Rotarians every day of the week:

- Monday, noon lunch in Howell at the board of education room in the administration building (on Highlander Way).
- Tuesday, noon lunch at the Brighton Community Building (aka the Boy Scout Building).
- Wednesday, noon lunch in Fowlerville at the First United Methodist Church (on 2nd Street).
- Thursday, 7:30 a.m. breakfast at the Hartland Insurance Agency (on Old US 23, just north of M 59).
- Friday, 7:30 a.m. breakfast at the Livingston Education Service Agency (on Grand River across from Howell High School).

*Brenda "WooWoo" Tipton is currently Rotary District 6380 Governor and has been a Livingston Sunrise Rotary member since 2012.*

