

BOWLING'S ULTIMATE VOLUNTEER

Elaine Hagin's six decades of effort have benefitted the sport, the business and veterans.

■ By Mark Miller

Thank goodness for the sport of bowling that Elaine Hagin didn't completely follow in her mother's footsteps. Like many before and after her, Hagin joined her parents on the lanes at an early age. But Amelia Demonte's daughter didn't stop there. Because of her curiosity and desire to learn everything she could about the sport and business, she developed into perhaps bowling's ultimate volunteer. Now more than six decades into serving for nearly every local, state, national and international bowling organization, the Castro Valley, CA, great-grandmother of six continues to give her time whenever and wherever she can. "When anyone asks me what I do, I answer I'm a professional volunteer for the sport of bowling," Hagin said. "That's what I do."

Hagin's first brush with bowling came in 1940 at Highhat Recreation in her native Oakland. Just age 10, Hagin and her mother were watching her father Peter bowl games that included a dismal 88. "My mom said 'anyone can bowl better than that' so she bet my dad that she'd roll at least a 100," Hagin said. "It took her until 6 in the morning but she finally rolled a 102. After that, all three of us were avid bowlers." Hagin joined her first league



in 1942 with her mother and other adults because organized youth competition didn't begin until four years later. "There was a lot of controversy with children bowling in the league but ultimately they let me bowl," Hagin said. She averaged 125 that first year and by age 12 rolled a 218 game. Not long after that, she earned a war bond for a 237 game. She eventually achieved a 265 game and 658 series and averaged as high as 179.

Eventually, Hagin began wanting more out of bowling so she attended her first Alameda County Women's Bowling Association meeting at age 17. "My mother loved to bowl tournaments," Hagin said. "If there was something bowling going on, she'd be in it. But she would never go to a meeting. "She would complain enough about what she didn't like that one time I finally said 'I don't want to hear it. I'm going to go where at least my voice could be heard.' I enjoyed it and started wanting to learn more. This is while I was still working and bowling."

After graduating from high school, Hagin met and married her late husband Donald and studied stenotype for two years to be a court reporter. But while she was ready to do that work at age 20, state law wouldn't allow her to do so for another year. So she took some internships and also a job as secretary to a company executive vice president. "Work was a dirty word back then," said Hagin, who also gave birth to son Michael about this time. "Women weren't supposed to work outside the home but I was working 40 hours a week."



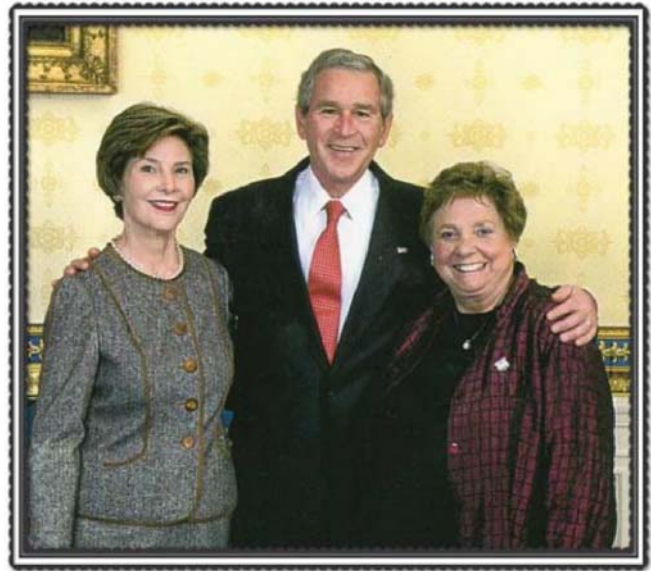
Elaine meets President Bill Clinton during a White House reception.

PERSON OF INTEREST

Her volunteer career officially began in 1949 when she was asked to join the Alameda WBA board of directors. She ascended through the ranks to association president and later joined the California WBA board. Sometime around 1960, Hagin attended her first Women's International Bowling Congress Annual Meeting as a delegate. Later in the 1960s, Hagin utilized her knowledge to begin writing for bowling publications throughout California. This prompted her to join the National Women Bowling Writers and later the Bowling Writers' Association of America. In 1973, she was nominated from the floor to become a national WIBC director and earned the position on the third ballot by one vote. She remained on the WIBC board, working her way to first vice president, until 2004 when WIBC disbanded in the merger that created the United States Bowling Congress. Back home, she began expanding her horizons beyond women's bowling as a member of the East Bay Bowling Council, Alameda Young American Bowling Alliance and becoming a youth certified coach.

In a true case of asking a busy person to do more, Hagin took on more national positions. She was the NWBW's historian from 1973-81. She also served on the BWAA Collegiate Committee and National 600 Club. Before further hitting the national stage, she enjoyed one last success on the lanes with youngest son Peter. "One of the big thrills in my life was in 1981," she said. "Peter and I bowled in the National Family Tournament. We won the local and state and earned a trip to Washington, D.C., for the national finals. "Peter bowled exceptional. We set three records between us. He had 666 for three games and 1,281 for six and we shot a 2,338 team series which was good for a bronze medal."

From then on there was little time to spend on the lanes because there was so much to do off of them. It started in 1988 when she was asked by the National Bowling Council to chair what started as the Bowlers Victory Legion and later changed to BVL Fund. When NBC folded two years later, she had to help the military veterans' charity make it on its own. "I had chaired the California BVL for 12 years so I knew what it was about," she said. "We did so much right from the



Elaine (right) in a meet and greet with President and Laura Bush

start. Because NBC was primarily marketing, they told me 'Elaine, you run with it.'" Helping change BVL to stand for Bowlers to Veterans Link in 1997, Hagin did more than just run with it in her 20 years as BVL's national chair. "One of the things we had to do was figure what could we do," she said. "There were a lot of things the government didn't pay for so that's where we came in."

That meant increasing support for recreational equipment at the 172 Veterans Association hospitals. It also meant BVL's reach would extend to veterans centers, state veterans' homes and to current soldiers. Now, the more than \$1 million annually raised could help expand BVL's reach to new facilities that included bowling lanes. It also provided reading materials, created and expanded the website, developed Re-Creation (the singing group that entertains veterans and current military members worldwide), and sponsored national veterans' competitions such as the Wheelchair Games and Golden Age Games. The program also was able to bring portable carpet lane kits to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hagin also took part in the annual Veterans' Day wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, VA. As part of her trip, she had her picture taken with both Presidents Bush and President Clinton. Her tenure that ended in 2008 also resulted in BVL being designated among America's Best Charities given only to the top two percent of organizations. She continues helping BVL as a member emeriti. Chairing BVL was far from Hagin's widespread volunteer reach. She served 11 years on the YABA Board of Directors including three years as president. She helped the Olympic bowling effort during nine years on the USA Bowling Board, two years as president. She has served on the Women's Sports Foundation Advisory Board since the 1990s. She has served on the International Bowling Museum and Hall of Fame Board of Trustees since 1994. And she was an original member of the USBC



Elaine (left) is photographed with tennis legend Billie Jean King and Pat and Lisa Ciniello.

