

FROM ONE TO ALL

ST. PAUL CITY COUNCIL SEATS

For the first time, women will fill all seven seats. The council was composed of men only from 1854 to 1956, when the first woman was elected.

By KATIE GALIOTO, JAKE STEINBERG and ANNA BOONE • Star Tribune staff

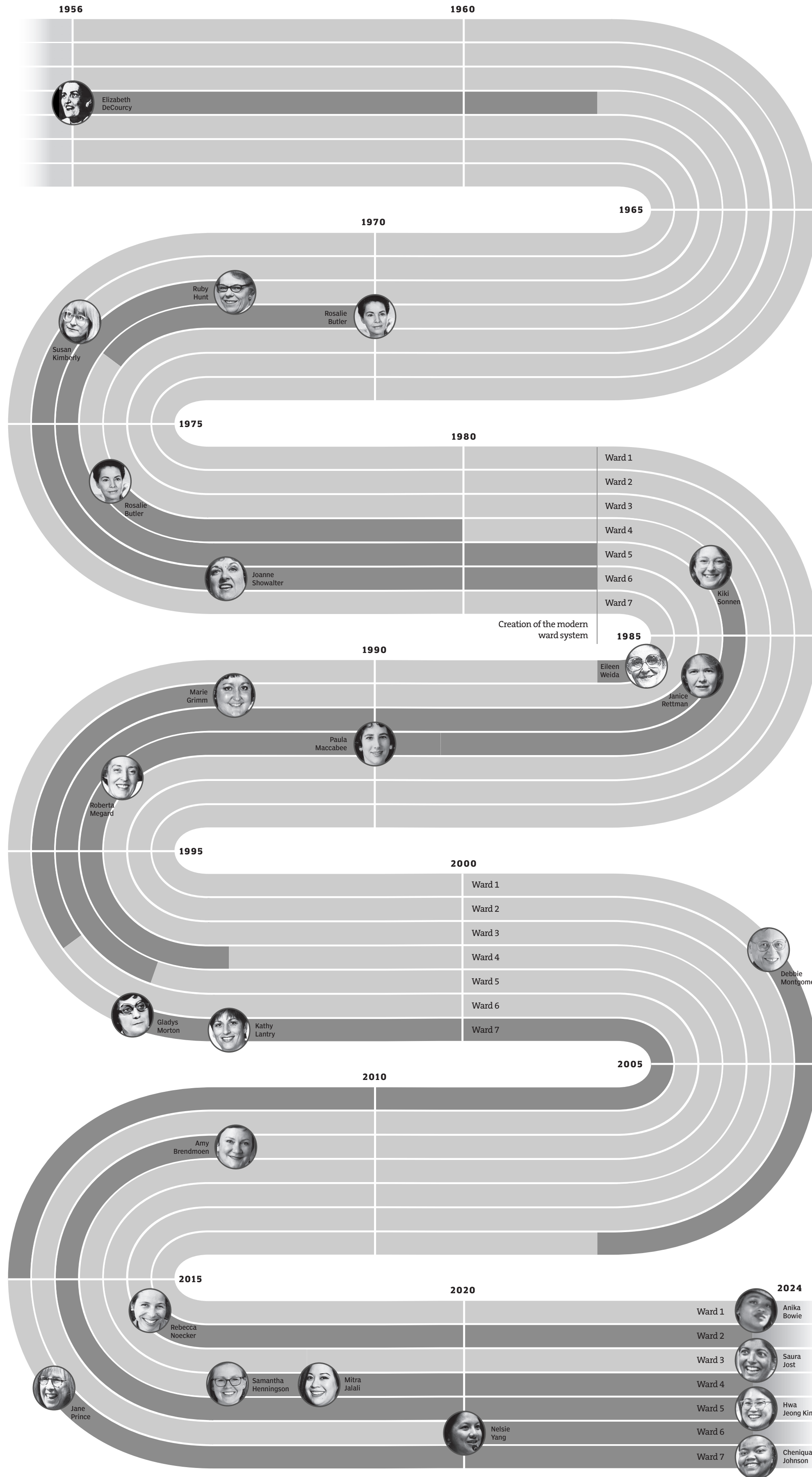
When St. Paul's new City Council is sworn in on Tuesday, all of its seats will be filled by women for the first time in the city's 170-year history. Some say that St. Paul may well be the largest American city to ever elect an all-female council or legislative body.

"I think we've been writing this story for a while," Hwa Jeong Kim said after winning election to the council in November. "To place yourself in the middle of this timeline, it feels very historic."

Like her six colleagues, Kim has a list of several women elected to office who served as her mentors. And those women also credit female leaders for wisdom and guidance.

"There are people that have come before us that have envisioned this happening," Kim said. "They've been speaking it into existence years before a squad of ladies decided to run together."

Here's a look at some of the 20 women who have been elected to the St. Paul City Council over the past seven decades, along with the four incoming members who are making history this week.



Susan returns to Bob's field of expertise

By Richard Merriew

A former St. Paul City Council president who underwent a suture change operation two years ago returned to City Hall Tuesday, saying it's time to reintegrate the fact that I am both Susan Kimberly and Robert Sylvester.

Susan Kimberly, formerly Robert Sylvester, was appointed by the council to head a 15-member commission that will review the city's housing and financing practices and make recommendations for its future.

In accepting the position, Kimberly, 42, returns to the political arena where Sylvester made a name for himself a decade ago.

"I couldn't have done this two years ago," Kimberly said Tuesday. "But I wanted to come back and show people Bob Sylvester worked with that I could do it."

Since making public her plans for a suture change operation two years ago, she has worked on and off at several consulting jobs but not enough to enjoy financial security, she said. Her new position with the city will last about nine months and pay her about \$20,000.

Kimberly said yesterday that she applied for the job because she felt it was time to establish Susan Kimberly professionally and show the community what people Sylvester knew and worked with.

In choosing to return to City Hall, Kimberly said, she realized that



Star Tribune, Feb. 13, 1985

1974-1977

Susan Kimberly

Susan Kimberly publicly transitioned from man to woman in 1983. Two years later, she came back to work in St. Paul politics, a decade after she had served on the St. Paul City Council under a different name.

"I was a well-known political figure in the Twin Cities when I came out and I think that was the first situation of that kind," she told Time magazine last year.

"One of the first in the country. And I had this terrifying experience where the press corps from St. Paul and Minneapolis knew who I was, and wanted me to

tell the story. And I concluded that the only way I was going to survive this was to tell the truth in depth."

A staunch DFLer, Kimberly was named the city's deputy mayor in 1995 by Mayor Norm Coleman, a Republican, and later switched parties. "I lost more friends becoming a Republican than I did becoming a woman," she said in 2010.

She ran Coleman's state office when he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2002, and later headed St. Paul's planning department under Mayor Randy Kelly.

1984-1989

Kiki Sonnen

When then-City Council Member Bob Fletcher suddenly resigned from the council in 1984, he told his aide Kiki Sonnen: "Why don't you run and carry on our work?"

"So that's what I was trying to do — to keep a focus on what is good for the community," Sonnen said.

For her first year in office, Sonnen was the only woman on the council. "It was kind of strange," she said, remembering an instance when her male colleagues made dirty jokes in the council chambers. "But you just kind of put up with it. And things got better."

Sonnen's interest in city government grew through her involvement with the St. Paul Audubon Society and Hamline Midway Coalition. Her activist background lent itself to a boots-on-the-ground political style. "Diplomacy, caution and compromise were foreign to the strong-minded political independent," according to the Star Tribune in 1990.



Running as an independent, Sonnen defeated three candidates backed by the DFL before losing to Paula Maccabee in 1989.

"The women that I worked with on the City Council, they were more attuned than men to social issues like libraries, parks, supportive services," Sonnen said.

1998-2014

Kathy Lantry

Kathy Lantry, whose mother was a state senator and father a labor leader, loved her family name — so when she married, she kept it. Eventually she and her husband, Joe Fleischhacker, agreed to pass it on to their two sons.

A 1995 Star Tribune article about Lantry's first council race describes an instance when her opponent, incumbent Dino Guerin, playfully addressed her as "Mrs. Fleischhacker." Lantry wasn't pleased, but she kept her cool.

"I said, 'I believe we've met. I'm Kathy Lantry,'" she recalled at the time. "They had a good laugh about it in the bathroom, I'll bet."

Though Lantry narrowly lost that contest, she was elected two years later to the council, where she went on to represent the East Side for 17 years before leading the city's Public Works Department for another five.

Lantry was the only woman on the council during her first six years in office. Coming from a job at a property management company that was run by women and a family with "a super matriarchal background," Lantry said she didn't think much about how gender dynamics might



come into play. "But it was lonely being the only woman," she said in an interview.

"My big joke was: When women want to get something done, they don't care who gets credit for it. They just want it done," she said.

It wasn't until Lantry became council president in 2004 that she felt she grew in confidence, leading a new liberal majority that often clashed with conservative DFL Mayor Randy Kelly.

"That's when I was like, 'I'm not going to take the back seat any more,'" Lantry said.

TODAY

Anika Bowie, Saura Jost, Hwa Jeong Kim, Cheniqua Johnson

Incoming Council Members Anika Bowie, Saura Jost, Hwa Jeong Kim and Cheniqua Johnson on Tuesday will join Rebecca Noecker, Mitra Jalali and Nelsie Yang to make up St. Paul's first all-female City Council. The new council will be the youngest and most racially diverse in city history, reflecting shifts in demo-

graphic trends.

"These women ... won't be shy about sitting around, waiting for things to happen. They will be the ones who are making things happen, without a doubt," Lantry said. "And if you have seven women on the council, maybe the city of St. Paul will finally get a woman mayor."

Staff news researcher John Wareham contributed to this story.

New St. Paul Councilwoman Says She'll Make Some Changes

By JEAN WORRALL
Minneapolis Tribune
Staff Writer

Mrs. Donald M. DeCourcy, St. Paul's first woman city council member, has been in office only a week.

But already she wants a change.

Like any other woman setting up headquarters, she's planning to rearrange her office furniture a bit.

AND THAT ISN'T the only



Minneapolis Tribune, June 6, 1956

1956-1961

Elizabeth DeCourcy

A widow with two young sons, Elizabeth DeCourcy — she preferred to be called "Mrs. Donald DeCourcy" back in that midcentury era — campaigned on the idea that "maybe a little tight rein on finances — like many of us homemakers have to apply in our homes — might be helpful for government," she told the Minneapolis Tribune. She was the first woman elected to the St. Paul City Council, in 1956.

She made her first foray into politics with a failed bid for the Legislature in 1948, less than two years after her husband died of a heart attack. His life insurance policy sustained the family until she was elected to the Ramsey County Board in 1950, another first for women.

Michael DeCourcy said he remembers sitting outside smoke-filled rooms at City Hall while his mother swapped votes and negotiated deals.

"They were really strong, tough guys," he said. "And they were not happy with having Mrs. Donald M. DeCourcy sitting at the table. But she held her own."

DeCourcy served on the council for six years before losing her bid for a fourth term. She died in 2004.

"She was very proud of who she was and her family, and just the fact that she was a woman and opened the door for others," said Michael DeCourcy, who was elected to the Ramsey County District Court in 1990.

1970-1973 & 1976-1979

Rosalie Butler

Two years after she lost a competitive race for mayor, Rosalie Butler was elected to the council in 1970. When she ran for re-election in 1972, she ran up the highest vote total ever recorded by a candidate for city office and became council president.

"Her words and her name evoke both outrage and ovation," the Minneapolis Star said of Butler in a 1977 profile of the colorful, thrice-divorced mother of four who became a fixture of St. Paul politics.

Butler entered the spotlight in 1966 when she was accused by City Council Member Milton Rosen of using DFL connections to get a state-owned plow to clear snow from her walk. Butler in turn accused Rosen of spending the public's money "like a drunken sailor."

After stepping down to run for mayor in 1974 and subsequently losing the DFL primary, Butler reclaimed her council seat in 1976. Two years later, she bucked the party's endorsement and won re-election as an independent, aligning



herself with a campaign to repeal part of a city ordinance that protected gays and lesbians from discrimination.

She also crusaded against massage parlors and strip clubs. Business owners issued threats, but Butler was undeterred. "I'm too strong to keep down. A lesser person would have been destroyed," she said in 1978. She died in office the following year.

1972-1981

Ruby Hunt

Described as a peacemaker and negotiator, Ruby Hunt served for 10 years on the council — and two as its president — during the 1970s and early '80s, a time of big St. Paul personalities. She was most proud of the unflashy work she accomplished — what she called solid policymaking, not just headline-making.

"Everyone thinks of Ruby as someone who works for a solution that's practical," former state Rep. Kathleen Vellenga said in 1993. After Hunt left the council, she spent 12 years on the Ramsey County Board.

