

Pam Stone, first woman elected to Wodonga City Council and its first female mayor, dies aged 93

ABC Goulburn Murray / By Callum Marshall

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Pam Stone was the first woman elected to Wodonga City Council and its first female mayor. (Supplied: stonefamilyinaustralia.com.au)

The first woman elected to Wodonga City Council and its first female mayor and deputy mayor, Pam Stone, has died at the age of 93.

The family confirmed that Ms Stone passed away at home on Saturday following a period of declining health.

Ms Stone was elected to Wodonga City Council in 1977, three years after her husband Les Stone's death — the man who was the last president of the Shire of Wodonga and the first mayor of the new Rural City of Wodonga.

From August 1979 to August 1980, Ms Stone served a term as Wodonga's deputy mayor and then made an unsuccessful run to become its mayor in 1981.

Key points:

- The family confirms Ms Stone's death on Saturday following a period of declining health
- Ms Stone was elected to Wodonga City Council in 1977 and was the city's mayor from August 1985 to August 1986
- A close family friend says she always fought for women's issues including widows' rights

She would eventually become the city's mayor in August 1985, serving for a year after she decided not to seek a second term.

On Sunday, close family friend Jean Whitla paid tribute to a figure who was "always progressive".

"Pam Stone was one of the best things that happened to Wodonga because she made us all think and from the thinking came support and action," she said.

"Pam's attitude wasn't that 'it can't be done' but 'how can it be done'."

Ms Stone was also awarded an Order of Australia Medal and made a Justice of the Peace.



Pam Stone in the lounge room of the family home circa February 1977, with a photo of Les Stone in the background. (Supplied: stonefamilyinaustralia.com.au)

Wodonga Mayor Kev Poulton said she left a strong legacy on education in the community — from her involvement with the city's first kindergarten in Stanley Street to the establishment of its TAFE, as well as pushing for universities in the region.

"All had her fingerprints on it," he said.

"We've certainly got a much better community now through some of her compassionate and thoughtful leadership over many years."

Widows' rights advocacy

Ms Whitla said Ms Stone had always fought for women's issues including a wife's right to collect her husband's pension when he died.

"Her husband died in New South Wales at the Mercy Hospital and at that time New South Wales was reorganising all its own local government things," she said.

"We couldn't get the Victorian government to pay her his pension because they were different states.

"She campaigned also that widows should not lose the pension and superannuation that her husband had had. She won that battle and that was a tough battle."

A fight for respect

A core feature of Ms Stone's time in local government was a battle for equality — a fight not only on issues like a fair living wage for widows but also a fight for respect.

Ms Whitla said this was evidenced during her unsuccessful run to become mayor.



Ms Stone receives the Medal of the Order of Australia from the Governor of NSW Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair in April 1994. (Supplied: stonefamilyinaustralia.com.au)

"She believed that she had the numbers to become mayor and she and her daughter turned up to hear her be elected mayor," she said.

"In that time there was a break and she went to the toilet. The men's toilet was next door and through the thin walls she heard the men having their own little meeting saying 'We can't have a woman as Mayor'.

"It was that sort of battle that women had in council."

But Ms Stone's fight for respect was not going to stop.

Ms Whitla said her push for change, and the election of more women to council over the coming years, would have an impact.

"Pam instituted changes by her persistency and intelligence," she said.

"There had to be another way of doing this and she would find it."

Ms Stone is survived by her children Shane and Susan, her youngest sister Terry and her grandchildren Jack and Madeleine.

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