



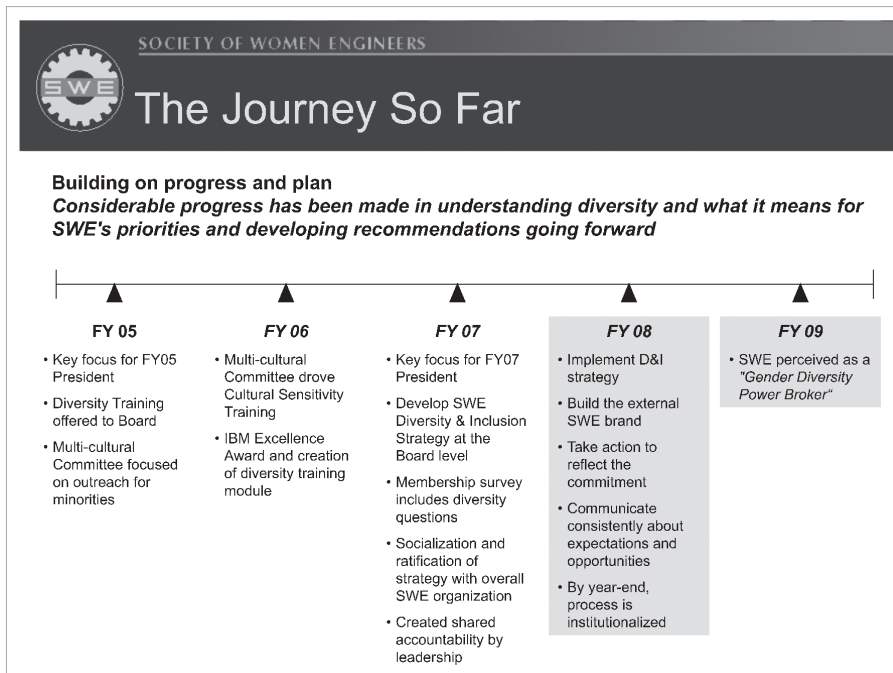
Wearing a yellow dress, Yvonne Clark, P.E., F.SWE, stands with her fellow conventioners. While technically meeting the 1957 convention hotel's segregationist terms, they did so with a spirit of mischievous civil disobedience, escorting Clark in through the front doors in the morning and parading her throughout the hotel throughout the day, ensuring she was seen by managers and guests alike. Clark fondly recalled the experience in a 2001 SWE oral history interview: http://bit.ly/Clark_1957

THE JOURNEY TOWARD INCLUSION

The Society reached a crossroads at the 1957 annual convention (as they were called then) in Houston, when hotel management refused to honor African American member Yvonne Clark's room reservation. In the heat of the moment, President Miriam "Mickey" Gerla chose the path of inclusion, threatening to cancel the convention on the spot. Clark demurred and chose instead to stay with a local aunt and to accept the hotel's concession: She could attend convention activities in the hotel, but must be accompanied by a white SWE member at all times.

More than a year later, SWE's board of directors codified a premise of inclusion into its convention policies (while simultaneously reflecting the bigoted language of the time). "Segregation – The southern sections should be allowed to have the national convention," the August 9–10, 1958 minutes declare before continuing, "the sections must provide equal accommodations for colored members; and ensure that no colored member is subjected to unpleasantness or embarrassment in attending meetings." By 1963 the word "colored" in the policies on file had been smudged out, replaced in handwriting with "all," a signal of the Society's evolving understanding of diversity. While the Society foundered occasionally in the subsequent decades, it continued at a quickened pace down the path it charted in 1957 at the crossroads of exclusion and inclusion. ✨

– Troy Eller English, SWE Archivist



Natalie Thompson, FY07 special director of diversity and inclusion, aptly described the Society's developing D&I strategic vision as a journey. The Society struggled to implement recommendations of the minority concerns committee in the 1980s, but did include diversity as part of its mission statement in 1986. It approved a set of diversity principles in 1998, albeit with a narrower vision of diversity than the Society has recognized in more recent years.

4. Invocations and grace at meals should embrace all creeds.
5. Menus should be planned so that a choice may be made by those with religious dietary restrictions.
6. Equal accommodations and arrangements for attendance must be provided for ~~colored~~ all members.

At its August 1958 meeting, the board also approved convention policies requiring that invocations and prayers be nondenominational, and that convention meals meet religious dietary restrictions.