



BRETT WAYNE WIFALL: Franke Tobey Jones

Senior retirement community Franke Tobey Jones celebrates its centennial in 2024.

Tacoma retirement community Franke Tobey Jones turns 100

BY CRAIG SAILOR
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The retired sea captain was so eager to move in to his new retirement home that he put his belongings in a bedroom and waited on the front steps for dignitaries to arrive at the just-completed building.

The year was 1925 and the captain had been on a waiting list to get in to the new facility which carried the name of Franke Tobey Jones.

A century later, Tobey Jones' popularity hasn't waned. Bigger than ever, there's still a waiting list.

Tacoma's first retirement home is celebrating its centennial this year. The not-for-profit's staff and several of its residents, one a retired historian, began researching the organization's history to produce a book, "Franke Tobey Jones - 100 Years, 100 Sto-



CRAIG SAILOR: The News Tribune

Redmond and Suzanne Barnett have been residents of a Franke Tobey Jones duplex since 2019. Redmond Barnett helped write a book on the retirement community's history.

ries," as well as displays and a video.

The group's research went deep, including poring over board meeting notes as far back as 1921.

EARLY DAYS

A century ago, there was no Social Security, no such thing as senior living or retirement communities. Retirees, if they had no family to live with, went to

live in "old people's homes."

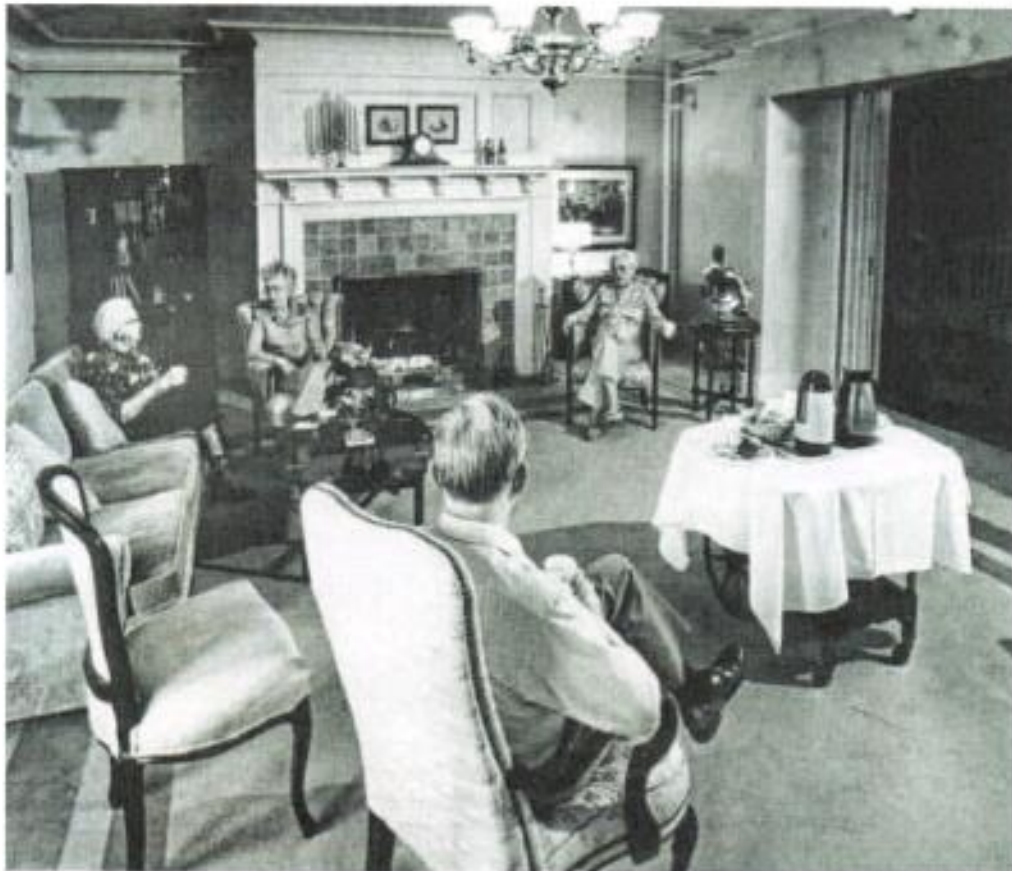
Franke Tobey Jones, the woman, envisioned something more than poor houses or pensioner homes for seniors and others who no longer could live independently or with their families.

But Jones wasn't the creator of the community which, over the past century, has grown to a 220-resident, 20-acre facility within a stone's throw of Point Defiance Park. It began in 1922 when Tacoma resident Virginia Mason spearheaded the creation of a retirement home in a rented house at 424 D Street, according to Tacoma historian Redmond Barnett.

That first house, called Resholme, according to a newspaper story, was for men and women aged 65 or older. There was no charge for entrance.

"The retired school teachers and the like were thought to be

SEE RETIREMENT, 11A



Residents of Franke Tobey Jones gather in a parlor, date unknown.

COURTESY Franke Tobey Jones



COURTESY Franke Tobey Jones

In 1888, Franke Tobey and Charles Hebard Jones settled in Tacoma. Charles Jones joined with partners to establish the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Co., and it quickly became the world's biggest lumber producer. Franke Tobey took an active interest in the business, even showing up on the mill floor. When Charles died in 1922, Franke kept her quarter share in the company and maintained full ownership and management of the mill in Hoquiam.

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RETIREMENT

respectable, just people down on their luck whose families couldn't support them," he said.

MRS. JONES

Mason (not to be confused with the Virginia Mason health care system) was the wife of Tacoma pioneer and Civil War veteran John Quincy Mason. Virginia Mason was a leader in the suffragist movement which worked to give women the right to vote.

While she and her cohorts were generally wealthy, it was the cash infusion of a neighbor that got the Franke Tobey Jones Home on the map.

That neighbor was Franke Tobey Jones. Jones lived across the

according to Barnett, ran card parties, cake sales and bazaars to raise money. That came to an end around World War II when women began entering the work force in large numbers.

Probably because Tobey Jones was ahead of its time in the 1920s, it began to fall behind the times in the 1970s when other, more modern senior and retirement communities were appearing on the landscape. Tobey Jones' wait list soon became a list of vacancies.

At the time, residents were required to give Tobey Jones half of their assets and half their income to the facility in exchange for lifelong residency and health care.



Two women stand in the gardens of Franke Tobey Jones in the 1930s.

COURTESY Franke Tobey Jones

street and was fascinated by the idea of a retirement home. Not for herself, of course. She was the wealthy widow of a co-founder of the St. Paul and Tacoma Lumber Company.

"Her husband had just died, so she had gobs of money, and she bought the land we sit on, or some of it, and gave a lot of money to build the Tobey Jones building," Barnett said.

GROWING

Jones donated \$150,000 and six acres to begin the project on Bristol Street. In March 1924, the then 80-year-old Jones helped break ground for the project.

Along with the sea captain, about 15 other residents moved in to the Tudor-style building when doors opened in 1925. Several residents of the D Street home refused to leave, staged a sit-in and had to be forcibly removed. When they finally visited the new facility, they called off their protest.

The 65-resident capacity building had bedrooms, dining rooms, a stage, library and solarium. At the time, according to the centennial book, it was only the second community home for seniors in Washington.

In 1947, a \$750,000 bequest from former Tacoma resident Lillian Pratt added another 40 acres. By the late 1950s, Tobey Jones' long waiting list necessitated the construction of a second building on the site. Some \$1.2 million was eventually raised for the new Pratt building, constructed in the early 1960s.

FUNDING

In its early years, Tobey Jones was funded by 29 women's groups that,

That model wasn't providing enough money to run Tobey Jones by the late 1970s.

In the 1980s, the organization was forced to sell around 20 acres to what is now Solstice Senior Living.

Today, in order to qualify for residency, a person (or at least one person in a couple) must be 62. They don't need to be retired. Tobey Jones charges monthly rent plus care fees, if needed. Three of its newer residential buildings require an entrance fee.

Tobey Jones spokesperson Christine Hall said Tobey Jones pricing is mid-range. Still, its residents are predominantly white.

"We've always marketed to all races but the population that lives closest to Tobey Jones doesn't represent that," she said.

The organization has just adopted a diversity, equity and inclusion policy, Barnett said.

TODAY'S TOBEY JONES

Barnett, 80, is not just a historian, he's also a resident of Tobey Jones along with wife Suzanne Wilson Barnett, 84.

The retired curator for the Washington State History Museum and his wife had a home in Tacoma's North End before moving to the retirement community.

"I said to my friends, we don't need to get out of our house. We're just doing fine. I love the stairs and they're part of my exercise," Suzanne said. "And then I heard Redmond later in the day come home from work, and he just was having a terrible time getting up stairs. And I said, okay, it's time."

Redmond retired from the museum in 2015. In 2016, they put their names



COURTESY FRANKIE TOBEY JONES

Frankie Tobey was born Frances Martha (Frankie) Tobey in Jay, New York, on May 22, 1845. She married Charles Hebard Jones on June 25, 1872.

on a wait list but it wasn't until 2019 when a home became available. By then, Suzanne was having mobility issues as well.

He and other residents researched the centennial book, just published, on the history of Tobey Jones.

RETIRING IN PLACE

Once, the city's streets and homes were built for the agile and able bodied. Tobey Jones, like other senior communities, is built with the conceit that people with varying mobility issues will be using them.

The Redmonds' duplex home is thoughtfully designed and all on one level. The doors, wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair, have no knobs, just levers. Changes can be made easily, Suzanne said. A tub could be swapped with a

emphasis on staying healthy and prevention. Old people's homes didn't want you if you couldn't walk or had other debilitating health issues in the early 1900s. Tobey Jones was no exception.

"As late as the 1960s, applicants were denied if they had long term medical conditions," Barnett said. In 1969, Tobey Jones' board voted to exclude a woman with diabetes because they feared her health care costs would be a burden.

Thankfully, attitudes about the elderly have progressed across the nation and at Tobey Jones. Today, the center's memory care unit has 49 residents who need specialized care. Residents in the assisted living building receive medication management and help with dressing and showering.

SENIOR UNIVERSITY

Exercise isn't just for preening 20-somethings on TikTok. It's vital for people at all ages, say health experts. Tobey Jones has a 6,000-square-foot wellness gym with personal trainers and multiple fitness classes.

A holistic wellness program offers nature walks, brain games, art classes, meditation, food studies and more.

"It's sort of expanding your mind to make sure you are taking care of your mind, body and soul," Hall said. "They are well attended."

Seniors are keen on keeping their education and knowledge up to date as well. The community's Senior University features knowledgeable speakers and experts from local colleges and universities. Topics range from the useful (navigating Medicare) to simply interesting

(Tacoma history).

The Senior University programs are free to all Pierce County seniors. Seniors who don't live at Tobey Jones can pay a fee to participate in the fitness and wellness programs.

Since 1997, Tobey Jones has been running the Point Defiance Senior Center in Ruston and in 2023 began managing both the Beacon and Lighthouse senior centers for the City of Tacoma.

But senior services at Beacon and Lighthouse are slated to end at the end of the year pending city council and Metro Parks board approval. Services at those two centers will transition to Metro Parks, according to city spokesperson Maria Lee.

THE FUTURE

In 2019, Tobey Jones opened a new 65,000-square-foot care center with skilled nursing and memory care and a 16-unit apartment building. Still, Tobey Jones has a waiting list for its independent and assisted living apartments.

The next expansion will begin later this decade with the construction of more luxurious, independent living — a growing trend across the country. The old care center will be demolished to make way for the higher end apartment buildings, Hall said.

It's all part of its founder's original vision, she said.

"We will continue to live out Mrs. Frankie Tobey Jones' legacy of providing high quality care and beautiful living accommodations for seniors," Hall said.

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