



Women's Poker Association

The History

By Founder, Lupe Soto

The concept of an association for poker players is not new. There have been many attempts and its never truly seen the light of day. The Women's Poker Association however, was an idea born of necessity to unite women and create a voice in a very male dominated game. Did we get it right the first time? No. BUT, it has grown to be the premier association for women poker players – globally.

Chapter One – 2011

After dedicating a decade to women's poker, it was clear to me there was little being done for women in the game in general. Even though there were some women's poker tournaments, there was still no collective voice for women, nor any formal discussion on how to grow poker by marketing and supporting women in poker.

I had to do something about it.

The Idea

I have been blessed to know a great many women who are passionate about the game. I had some dear friends who were mostly retired and loved poker and I pitched them my concept. Catherine Alford and Julie Shozi answered the call and together, we formed the first concept of the Women's Poker Association.

The Challenges

Most women knew me because of the LIPS Tour I started in 2004 and the women's events I hosted across the country. Other women's groups viewed my participation in the WPA as a competitor and had a problem embracing the concept. WPA was also going to host conferences, educational seminars and tournaments. Again, the division in the women's groups were acting as barriers to the growth of the Association. After a lot of internal discussion, we decided to table the WPA and regroup at a later time.

Chapter Two – Redesign of WPA

Understanding the challenges we previously experienced, I knew WPA couldn't be proprietary. No "one" individual should or could own it. It needed to be organized in a manner where it could stand the test of time. Meaning the Women's Poker Association had to be a Non-Profit in true professional association fashion.

I spent months designing the organization with an outline of what I felt the organization needed. Most importantly, who would lead the organization and who would execute it.

My background is in the nonprofit sector and I was privileged to organize an enormous collaborative in San Diego many years ago with significant success and sustainability. That formula serves as the basis of how WPA is formed. Outline our goals, integrate consensus voting, execution of the plan.

WPA needed to include community, education, support and recognition of achievements. What it couldn't be is a 'poker tour'. We never wanted to be in competition with any operator which provides open doors for participation.

Once the program design was developed, I pitched the "new WPA" concept to women I knew who were amazing, talented and dedicated to the growth of women in poker. More so, were visionaries and were willing to provide their expertise as volunteers for the greater good. Together, we addressed the outline and further developed it to address the baseline initiatives. The first Board of Directors included:

Bonnie Carl (President)

Peggy Carlson

Terry Constantino

Leslie Grodin

Liz Hagensick

Ruth Hall

Lynne Pohl

Susan Rhodes

Lori Smith (Treasurer)

Jana VonDach (Secretary)

You might ask where was I? Well... I wanted for the WPA to be an organization led by women who were not already in the industry. Grass roots so to speak. I held the Executive Director position and left the voting up to the Board, and the execution of the plans up to me. When Bonnie Carl stepped down, I was selected as President in 2019.

One of the first agenda items was to address "funding the Association". Every organization needs funds to operate! We shared the WPA concept to other *like minded* women and created the "*Royal Flush and Queens Clubs*". These women each invested in the WPA by becoming Founding Members. There are 65 Members of the Royal Flush Club (\$300 Membership) and 65 Members of the Queens Club (\$150 Membership). This allowed the WPA to conduct business in our first year of operations until fundraising programs could be established. ([View the list of the generous women who gave their support here.](#))

After the initial year, WPA was able to provide free membership to all women poker players. The success and interest in the WPA was clear and we very rapidly saw a few thousand women join in the membership ranks.

WPA leadership dedicates three-year terms as board members. The changing of the guard comes and goes on an annual basis and fluctuates to meet the ever growing needs of the Association. In 2022, myself, Lori Smith and Terry Hatcher (Terry managed WPA Advocate & Fundraising programs) completed our terms and stepped down from the Board.

The future of the WPA is in the hands of the current Board of Directors. They are extremely dedicated and talented women who are constantly looking at the growth and mission of our

organization. I am fully confident they will exceed our expectations and continue to work for the betterment of all women in poker.

Current Board of Directors as of July 2022

Joyce Alexander (Treasurer)

Tatiana Fox (Board Member)

Liz Huey (Secretary)

AJ Rudolph (Board Member)

Rebecca Scales (Board Member)

Tara Smith (President)

Rene Summers (Board Member)

Opening the International Membership is Ivonne Montealegre (Board Member)

Chapter Three – The Initiatives

There is really only one reason to have an association at all. *To provide a voice and collectively elevate the position of women in poker.* WPA does all of those things.

Our main objectives are to grow the number of women in poker, and to educate, support and celebrate those who play now. The programs and relationships WPA has created must meet one of those initiatives to be considered.

Currently, we host the following:

Raise It Up movement – Asking operators and players globally to help eliminate the barriers preventing women entering the game by Raising the Respect and Raising the Fun in poker so we can Raise the Number of Players who want to enjoy poker.

WPA Advocates – Identifying women in all areas of the world who understand and support our initiatives and are willing to take a volunteer role in the development of WPA and our initiatives in their areas.

Education – We have joined forces with an amazing organization, [Poker Power](#), the dream child of Jenny Just, whose mission is to teach one million women to play poker. Not only for the enjoyment of the game but for the skills poker emulates in life. Critical thinking, decision making, money management, negotiation, etc to name a few. Poker Power is included in all the WPA initiatives and hold a Board Position in WPA. Representing Poker Power on the WPA Board are AJ Rudolf and Sarah Stefan in a shared Board seat.

We have also been supported by Learn WPT who provides thought provoking hand scenarios for discussion of players for our WPA Action Quiz program. Always fun and “correct answer” members are placed in a drawing for fun prizes.

Purple Tie Guy – MEN SUPPORT WOMEN IN POKER! We just never had a way for them to show it until now. Our Purple Tie Guy program allows for men to be recognized immediately as someone who supports women by sporting the PTG patch while playing. In a male dominated sport, it's fabulous to have those guys willing to be counted as a supporter!

Celebrating Achievements – WPA does this so well. Highlighting women in poker who have accomplished success in the game, introducing new rising stars, celebrating ladies events by providing operators with a Circle of Champions trophy and final table gifts. And lastly and more importantly, the creation of the WPA Player of the Year leaderboard program. Another prestigious honor in celebration of women in poker.

My Last Chapter

After five years, I have stepped down in my leadership role with WPA. The organization has grown wings and needs to fly high... and it's time to allow the younger generation to take the reins!

The current and future leadership are poised to further develop programs and initiatives to elevate all women in the game. I so look forward to observing the growth and the emersion of new talented women as they step into supportive roles in WPA and continue to help women gain the footing and support of the industry at large. Please consider being one of those women!

Always elevate and support those women who are trying to do their best to grow this game for you. Volunteering is a thankless job.... but can be one of the most rewarding things you ever do.

Cheers!

Lupe