

THE 1972 CAMPAIGN

WOMEN'S CAUCUS
PLANS FUND DRIVELocal Unit Sets Benefit With
Billie Jean King to Aid
Failing National Group

By LAURIE JOHNSTON

Billie Jean King, who has spoken out for abortion reform and was a founder of the "Women's Lib" that fought for bigger prize money in women's professional tennis, will play an exhibition match here Oct. 3 as part of a fund-raising "rescue operation" for the National Women's Political Caucus.

The Manhattan branch of the caucus, sponsor of the benefit, will send most of the proceeds to the Washington headquarters, which has said it may have to close because of overdue office rent and staff salaries.

The Connecticut state caucus has scheduled a benefit for Sept. 29 in Westport, with entertainment by the Women's Liberation Band, an all-female rock group from New Haven.

About \$150,000 would be necessary, a member of the national policy council said, to continue this year's scale of operations and the caucus's new tax-deductible educational arm, which replaces the election-year "Women's Education for Delegate Selection".

The reactions of the caucus members in the tri-state metropolitan area to the possible closing, however, range from emphatic concern to euphoric calm. Nearly all agree that the financial crisis of the national caucus is more an ironic fallout from its members' successful 1972 preoccupation with party politics than a failure of its long-term "multipartisan" purpose.

Termed 'Too Successful'

"The Women's National Political caucus was too successful for its own good," said Christine Van Lenten of Edison, N. J., a member of the steering committee of the New Jersey state caucus. "The women it got into politics put campaigns first and the caucus second."

"Beyond our impact on the conventions, maybe it's not time for the grand national scale," she said. "Maybe we should build local caucuses from the ground up, not from the top down."

A New Jersey colleague, Mrs. Eone Harger of Annandale observed: "Maybe this is just what we want to happen—for local caucuses to take off on their own."

Closing shop in Washington "would be absolutely fatal," said Mrs. Elinor Guggenheimer, a Democrat and a New York member of the caucus's national policy council.

Joyce Ahrens, a Republican member of the Manhattan caucus and a first-time political candidate running for the State Assembly, agreed.

"National coordination affects what we can do at every level just as we must stay multipartisan to exert pressure," she said.

No Endorsements

A Sept. 23 political conference and workshop of the Manhattan caucus will make no endorsements, according to Cathie Samuels of the coordinating council.

"We'll channel women into specific assignments—so they don't get swallowed up—in every campaign that interests them, from Presidential on down," she said.

Local members will be working for the election of Family Court Judge Nanette Dembitz, a Democrat who is a candidate for the state Court of Appeals, and for several caucus members who are candidates: Elizabeth Holtzman, a Democrat running for the House of Representatives from Brooklyn; Carol Bellamy and Karen Burstein, both Democrats, running for the State Senate from the Brooklyn and the Brooklyn-Queens districts, respectively, and Mrs. Ahrens. All are lawyers.

Mrs. Jane Pickens Langley, a Manhattan Republican opposing Representative Edward I. Koch, Liberal Democrat of Manhattan, was described as "O.K. by some caucus members, though not really knowledgeable politically."

Will Work with NOW

The Manhattan caucus members heard preliminary plans Thursday night for the "One-to-One" project, in which it will cooperate with the National Organization for Women during this year's state legislative session.

Each male legislator will have a monitor—unofficially described as "one woman assigned to drive him crazy"—who will "follow bills through committees and find out where the votes are at all times."

On Oct. 10 the Fashion Group, Inc., will hear leaders and political candidates from the caucus speak at a luncheon at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel honoring the women's movement and its election-year reverberations.

"I don't see any danger involved in getting fashionable," said Ronnie Feit, a New York member of the national policy council who is working with Mrs. Guggenheimer to find money sources, possibly including corporations and foundations.

"It's a breakthrough toward support from the women who have been the least interested because they've already made it," she said.