

Mt. Lebanon Junior Women's Club

Serious philanthropists, they change with the times



The "Juniors" have always been stylish and fun-loving, as the 1970s photo (at right) of bouffanted young homemakers in pointy black glasses proves. But community spirit has always been at the heart of the club, which has raised \$200,000 for local nonprofit agencies and organizations over the past 20 years. Today, leaders such as Tammy Yakovac, president, Sandy Caruso, president-elect, and Celeste McWhirter, past president, are working to continue the club's legacy while meeting the needs of a changing breed of member.

BY DEBRA DIAMOND SMIT
PHOTOGRAPHED BY GENE PUSKAR

Some women will do almost anything for money — especially the "Juniors," more formally known as the members of the Mt. Lebanon Junior Women's Club (MLJWC).

In the '70s, they cavorted round the community center in wigs for the Festival of Wigs Fashion Show. A few years later, they pitched a Sheik of Araby tent

at a South Hills Village bazaar and won the \$200 first prize for their handmade macrame wall hangings, plant hangers and belts. Last year, they donned hats for the Mad Hatter Extravaganza, a fashion show, vintage hat exhibit and Monte Carlo night with the Steelers' Gary Anderson as a celebrity model.

But don't let their antics fool you. The Juniors are serious, industrious,

philanthropic women. This year the group, which has raised more than \$200,000 for South Hills organizations and local chapters of national organizations, celebrates its 25th anniversary of service to Mt. Lebanon.

Seventy strong, the members are of various personalities and backgrounds. The club — in addition to fulfilling its loftier goals — provides a chance for

Club

women to socialize outside their homes or professional realms. Many are mothers — some who are at home full-time, others who combine motherhood with careers. Still others are newly married, single or single with children. Most live in Mt. Lebanon, but any South Hills resident is welcome.

The club addressed similar needs when it was founded in 1968, but the group dynamics were very different. Back then, few mothers worked outside the home, and many women who sought satisfaction beyond the role of homemaker became professional volunteers. The Junior Women's Club brought together many such young wives and mothers.

"In those days, everybody was home with their children," says Marlene Milik of Mayfair Drive, 1973-74 president. "The club got you in touch with the community and the outside world."

"Most of us were active on a daily basis," recalls Marilyn Erwin of Tampa Avenue, a former club president and editor of the first "Marker," the club newsletter.

Early Juniors filled their appointment books with dates for luncheons, committee meetings, coffees, craft seminars and lectures, as Erwin's massive collection of scrapbook memorabilia reveals. Local newspapers chronicled the club's accomplishments each week, and photos of the members — wearing fashionable beehive hairdos and pointy glasses, and always identified by their husbands' names — abounded.

The club was started by a group of friends who wanted to expand their

circle and contribute to the community, but were too young to feel comfortable in the well-established Woman's Club of Mt. Lebanon on Hollycrest Drive. Initially, they affiliated with the Allegheny County Federation of Women's Clubs, and had two criteria for membership: they were to be between 20 and 40 years and share an interest in the club's goals. (Today the club is no longer federated. Members tend to be between the ages of 25 and 45, but no one ever gets carded.)

The club grew quickly and "opened a whole new venue," says Dr. Julie Agar, a founder, who raised her four children on Longuevue Drive.

For many members, commitment to volunteer life went into it, and long-lasting relationships came out of it.

"It was founded on a commitment to volunteer life," says Barbara Frantz of Osage Road, the Juniors' fourth president. "Out of it, a lot of sincere, long-lasting relationships were formed."

In retrospect, Erwin says she is "amazed" at the vision and energy the club embodied in those early years. "We addressed the problem of drugs and teenagers in the community," she recalls. "And we brought the community together (in a forum) to address the issues."

Today, the club is important but not central to most of its members' lives. With more and more women working outside the home, MLJWC has, like other organizations that depend on volunteers, reduced both the number of meetings and the scope of obligations. While members were once required to serve on at least one committee each year, current members are asked only to "participate" on major

Continued

May 8 is Mother's Day...

Show her how special she's been.

- European Plant Combo Baskets
- Blooming & Green Plants
- Large Selection of Fresh Flowers - Arranged or Boxed
- Fruit & Goody Baskets

725 Washington Road
561-2500

The Classroom
RESTAURANT

133 Camp Lane
McMurray, PA 15317

Lunch, Informal Tea, Dinner
Call 942-4878 for Reservations and Information.

Mt. Lebanon Junior Women's Club

Continued

fundraisers, which usually means doing a shift selling tickets or refreshments on the day of the event.

The club has never owned a clubhouse — no doubt a wise decision, since many women's clubs have been forced to sell properties they were unable to maintain as membership declined. Instead, the club holds its general membership meetings at churches and other public spaces, always on the first Tuesday of every month.

Dues have risen with the times from \$6 to \$28 annually, but many other

things remain the same. At least two major fund-raisers continue to be staged each year, and the Juniors continue, as they have for 17 years, to deliver Meals on Wheels to local people who are elderly or disabled. Many members serve on several committees, but the number of committee options has been scaled back to: Fund-Raiser Organization, Breakfast with Santa, Easter Egg Hunt, Social, Publicity, Gourmet Lunch Group and Scholarship.

MLJWC's tradition of philanthropy began in its very first year, when members sponsored the St. Paul's Day Care

Center in Beltzhoover, collecting toys, clothing and furniture to equip the space. Another early project was Artifact, a weekly show of original, regional art work that was held at Mt. Lebanon Community Center, then on Washington Road.

Other enterprises included Art Fair, a juried art show held inside and outdoors at the Kaufmann's parking garage (now the Galleria); Circus Fun Urkus, a carnival; Garden Patch, a Mother's Day plant and flower sale; a fall craft show; a spring fashion show, which continues annually; and the most recent addition, a fall art auction.

Among the agencies that have received grants as a result are Parent and Child (formerly South Hills) Guidance Center, Outreach South, Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, Carebreak, Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, South Hills Interfaith Ministries, Family Hospice, Performing Arts for Children, SIDS, Mt. Lebanon Public Library, Southwinds, Mt. Lebanon Extended Day Program and Bower Hill Braille Foundation.

When women started back to work, the desire to volunteer was replaced by the desire to put their feet up at the end of the day.

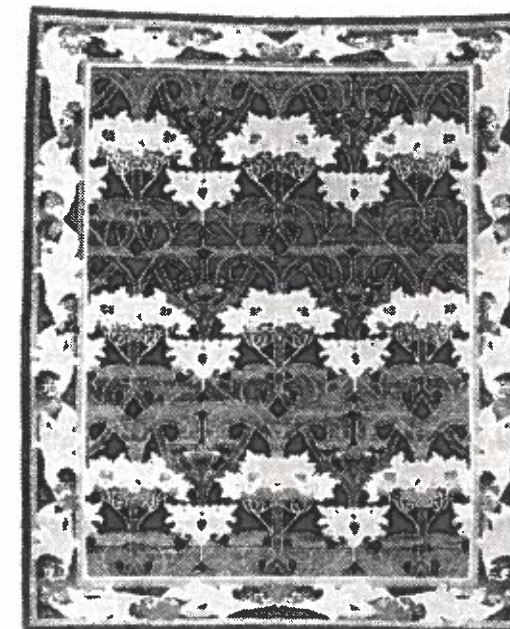
Aside from the philanthropic and social aspects, the club has helped many women develop leadership and organizational skills that they have applied later in meeting other volunteer or career challenges.

"Juniors nurtured my talents to go on to offer something of myself to other organizations," says Gerry Stoner, who was active with the Junior League of Pittsburgh, served on the board of directors of the Parent and Child Guidance Center, became the co-owner of a children's bookstore and now works for Outreach South. "It helped me gain self-esteem and enabled me to go on."

Many other former Juniors have equally impressive resumes (see sidebar).

Continued

THE ART OF THE CRAFT



KENTWILLY 1993 From a 19th century William Morris design

O'BANNON ORIENTAL CARPETS

5666 NORTHUMBERLAND STREET, SQUIRREL HILL

PATRICIA FORBES—OWNER

The region's exclusive source for AZERI • BLACK MOUNTAIN LOOM • ODEGARD ROSNER

PHONE: 412-422-0300

FAX: 412-422-7760



David M. Wilson

Your Professional VOLVO Consultant

We provide our 1994 purchasers with:

- Evening Service
- FREE Loaner Cars with Scheduled Maintenance

Buy your new VOLVO from Cummins, the dealer rated by VOLVO #1 in the USA for showroom satisfaction.

1993 Dealer of Excellence Award

CUMMINS VOLVO/SAAB

100 East Pike Street • Canonsburg
(20 minutes from Mt. Lebanon)

I-79 South—Exit 10

800 745-2110

Lunch at

cafe' georgio's

- Yellow Fin Tuna BLT
- Smoked Salmon Riviera Pasta
- Our Famous Flatbreads



George Ward Grace Hopwood

Tues. - Fri. 11:30 - 2
Serving Dinner Mon.-Sat.
starting at 5 p.m.

24 Donati Road
833-7000

Past Presidents and Founding Members Where Are They Now?

Julie Agar: Several years after helping form the club in 1968, she got her master's and doctorate in art and museum education. She served as art supervisor for Pittsburgh Public Schools and is currently assistant professor of art at Slippery Rock University. A past vice president of the Junior League of Pittsburgh, she serves on the board of the Society for Contemporary Crafts in the Strip District.



Marilyn Erwin: After two years as the club's second president in 1969-70, Erwin helped found Performing Arts for Children and joined the board of South Hills Child Guidance Center. She volunteered to raise funds for the American Wind Symphony Orchestra, which eventually led to a position as the symphony's director of community development. She has owned a plant shop, served as public relations director and director of publications for Chatham College and operated her own desktop publishing business. She is currently publications director of Western Pennsylvania Historical Society.

Barbara Frantz: Frantz was the first president to actually be elected, in 1970-71. She later joined Junior League of Pittsburgh, where she served on the board and chaired the Thrift Shop. She also served as board president of the Parent and Child Guidance Center. Today she is vice president of finance for TEDCO construction company and is active on the national level with the Construction Financial Management Association.



Continued on page 44

hair salon
la pomponnée
day spa

B Y A P P O I N T M E N T
5 6 3 • 3 9 9 0

633 Washington Road • Mt. Lebanon • 15228

Mt. Lebanon Junior Women's Club

Continued

"I grew up so much as an individual through those times," says Frantz, now an officer of TEDCO, her family's company, and active in church and other community work. "Lots of us went on to take responsibilities in the workplace as a result of volunteering."

With the variety of different lifestyles represented by current members, the perception that the club is "for mothers only" is fading, but the misconception persists that the club is "a bit uppity," and this bothers many members, says 1993-94 President Tammy Yakovac. "Many people think that we are a group of yuppie women — they think you have to come to meetings wearing a skirt with a whale on it... That's one image we've had to fight," she says.

Celeste McWhirter, a Broadmoor Avenue resident and the club's only two-time president (1988-89 and 1991-92), is representative of the club's growing diversity. Not only doesn't she wear whales — she's single. "I was looking to be busier in the evenings," says McWhirter, who heads the local mortgage credit branch of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Since I didn't have kids to worry about, I needed another outlet." She has been a mainstay of club fund-raising, and just last year, spearheaded a successful drive to save "Breakfast With Santa," which was in danger of being abandoned due to insufficient volunteers.

During McWhirter's tenures as president, the club raised a healthy \$14,000

plus. Members praise her enthusiasm and organizational skills, but McWhirter attributes her lucrative years to good committee work, something that also sustained the club's most popular project, Art Fair.

Art Fair had something else going for it, however, which today's members are taking a second look at as they grow weary of competing with other organizations for the limited pool of charitable dollars:

"The reason it (Art Fair) did so well is that it relied on the public to be a success," Yakovac says. "Now, events rely on members selling tickets to friends and neighbors. We rely on our membership too much in an age of deficit reduction, when everyone is seeking donations." The members have considered resurrecting Art Fair, but so far finding the right time of year and a good site has proved to be a problem.

Mt. Lebanon Junior Women's Club has survived to celebrate its silver anniversary, but what about its future? Today's leadership faces the challenge of meeting the needs of women for whom leisure time is at a premium. Lawyer, teacher or accountant moms aren't available during the day and have little time or inclination for evening meetings, let alone for planning and executing huge fund-raisers. And the women who are at home full-time are faced with a profusion of organizations vying for their volunteer time.

"When women started back to work, the desire to volunteer was replaced by the desire to put their feet up at the end of the day," says Erwin, who added to the tasks of full-time mom those of full-time employed.

"Women are spreading themselves thinner and thinner," agrees Yakovac, a wife and mother of two boys who also serves on a number of area boards and will be a Pittsburgh Symphony Association director next year. She acknowledges that the MLJWC is going through a transition. "We're no different from any other club," she says.

MLJWC members have themselves taken the lead in coming up with new ways to keep the club growing and active. Some would like to enhance the

club's social role, planning more events that include husbands or guests. Others would like to sponsor projects that benefit the community more directly, such as helping fund an outdoor play area similar to the Dormont Park's "castle," or raising money for Mt. Lebanon Public Library's expansion. Raising money for tangible results that members can appreciate on a daily basis might inspire more women to get involved, says Sandy Caruso of Scott Township, who will become president when Yakovac's term expires this spring.

Once perceived as a club "for mothers only," the "Juniors" have gained diversity — a two-term president, for example, is single.

Recognizing its members' limitations, the club has begun to approach fundraising with a closer eye on the bottom line. If it becomes clear at the outset of a project that the membership cannot commit the number of hours required to reach its goal, the concept is revised. Last fall, for instance, members sold tickets and helped run the art auction that raised \$3,000 for the benefit of the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation, but they farmed out most of the time-consuming work to a company that supplied the art and ran the auction. Similarly, when Breakfast With Santa failed to materialize last year, the committee scaled the event back to a "Snack With Santa," and the happy children never knew the difference.

"We want women to be a part of Juniors without feeling they have to be overly committed," says Caruso. "A member should be able to get out of it what she wants to get out of it."

Erwin is pleased — and somewhat surprised — that younger women are carrying on the MLJWC tradition of service and friendship that she and her friends launched 25 years ago. "I'm sort of amazed that the club has managed to continue through the years," she says. "You just can't come up to that level of involvement any more. It's a different world." ■



specializing in ladies large size apparel

the theatre • 5520 Walnut Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15232 • 412-683-2290

Where Are They Now?

Continued from page 42.

Marlene Milik: In MLJWC for 10 years, Milik served as president in 1973-74. She worked as a volunteer for the American Wind Symphony and for the last seven years has owned and operated a Hallmark shop in Crafton, Gateway Hallmark.



Jan Phelps: A founder, Phelps got her first job in fund-raising nine years ago and today is director of development for McKeesport Hospital Foundation. She has also served on the boards of Pittsburgh Teen Hotline, Chartiers Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center, the Marionette Theater Arts Council and the Sheldon Calvary Camp. She is pursuing a master's degree program in science and health administration at the College of St. Francis.



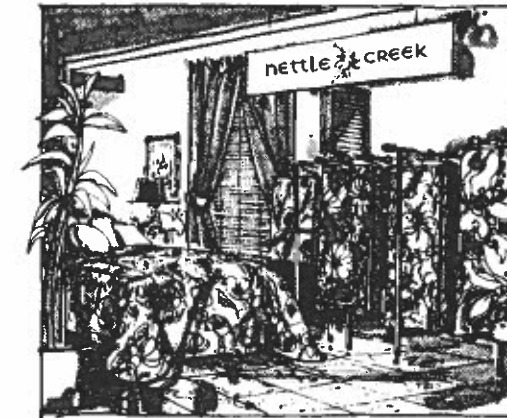
Gerry Stoner: Stoner was president in 1979-80. She later was active

with the Junior League of Pittsburgh and served on the boards of the Parent and Child Guidance Center, the Mt. Lebanon PTA, the Blue Devil Club and Uptown Mt. Lebanon. For seven years, she co-owned Tall Tales Children's Bookstore on Beverly Road, during which time she served as president of the Beverly Road Business and Professional Association. She currently works for Outreach South. ■



Nettle Creek

Your Source for Quality Bedding & Windows



Bedsprads at Affordable Prices. Nettle Creek select bedsprads at "Everyday Low Pricing." Special Purchase Bedsprad with Designer Fabrics.

PURIST: A collection of Bed and Bath Linens in natural untreated fibers.

Mt. Lebanon • 695 Washington Road • 341-4500
North Hills • 7599 McKnight Road • 366-8280