

## FRIENDS FOR LIFE'

Members of Roosevelt High School Class of 1947 still gather regularly to keep in touch, support one another

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'Friends for life' is more than just an expression for these women. Fifty-seven years ago, a group of 21 girls from Roosevelt High School had its first informal get-together that consisted of food, gossip and plenty of laughter.

Last Wednesday, the same group met to celebrate the holiday season. Although the roster has decreased over the decades to 13, energy and good cheer radiated through constant laughter and sparkling eyes. 'The Girls' include: Mary (Maar) Slattery, 72; Frances (Slattery) West, 72; Marilyn (Mo) Tyson, 72; Donna (Rhoades) Stewart, 72; Frances Severt, 69; Janet (Halloway) Snodgrass, 72; Marge (Trost) Arnold, 72; Janet (Meadows) Harding, 72; Betty (Miller) Parsons, 72; Connie Amand, 72; Rosemary (Harrison) Severt, 73; Faye (Hayre) Chance, 62; and Myrna Moorman, 73.

The group gathered at the Milton Athletic Club for dinner and a gift exchange.

'We have been through all kinds of stuff,' said Slattery, 'but we have stuck together through everything.'

Chance, one of the group's 'adoptees,' reflected on the emotional support the group provided for her in tough times. 'When my husband died in 1978, I was so depressed. I have never met a more wonderful group of girls. They are always there when you need them.'

The years since graduation have been marked by many turning points and milestones in their lives: Weddings, babies, and for a few, the loss of husbands and other friends. Through the ups and downs, they have always counted on an outpouring of phone calls extending helping hands and words of support.

'We used to get together every month,' Slattery said. 'Now we try to meet about six times a year or so.'

The gathering isn't always within the confines of a restaurant.

'We've had a really great time. We went to Indian Lake twice during high school, and Mary's mother chaperoned,' Moorman said. 'We used to paint our name and our boyfriend's name on our leg and then lay out in the sun. When we took the paint off, the names would still be there. It worked out well, because if we broke up with them, we could just tan over it.'

The laid-back atmosphere 'The Girls' provide is welcoming, informative and entertaining. A younger visitor listening to their stories might gain an appreciation for what life was like years ago, especially during the days of World War II, still vivid in the women's memories. Pearl Harbor was attacked while the group was in elementary school, but the war's effects lasted well after their graduation in 1947.

Many of the longtime friends married men from Roosevelt High, some from Chaminade. As a few of their husbands sat at the bar of the Milton Club, their wives reflected on the hardships they faced during the war.

'A lot of our husbands were in the war. Everything was rationed,' said Stewart, the group's event coordinator. 'The boys went right into the service after high school. We worked at DP&L and Rike's, and

then got married. We had children right away.'

Tyson said, 'The girls got out of school early, at 1:10, to go work downtown during the war. All the women were busy working in the factories, so we had to go work in the department stores.' All members of the group agreed that this is the first time since WWII that there has been such national unity.

But their get-together wasn't all somber reflection. Although small gag gifts were exchanged at the Christmas dinner, the group donates money to local charities instead of exchanging gifts. For the past couple of years, the group has donated to PALS for Life, a breast cancer awareness charity. Moorman and West are breast cancer survivors and active in PALS.

'When we get together, it's like we saw each other yesterday,' said Severt.

The group's number has dwindled as some members have moved from the area and others have died. 'Four members have passed away, and we have bought a brick at Hospice for each one in memory of them,' Slattery said.

The group copes with the death of a friend together, each helping by making food and offering emotional support during the funeral. They are still in contact with those who have moved away and look forward to seeing them again at the 55th class reunion next July. Upon the mention of funerals, Stewart chimed in: 'Don't cook for me, I'm not dying.'

'I'm not dying, either,' Slattery added. 'I've got too much to do before I go.' Amidst giggles from around the table, Slattery announced, 'I don't have time to die.'

Over the years, they have all made new friends and lived separate lives, yet their bonds run deep. Parsons is always reminded of her favorite poem when reflecting on the role of 'the girls' in her life:

Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, and the other's gold.

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**Illustration:** COLOR PHOTOS: (#1-6) THE GROUP OF WOMEN from Roosevelt High School's Class of 1947 have been meeting for 57 years. Their latest outing was at the Milton Athletic Club last week for a Christmas party.

PHOTO CREDIT: JAN UNDERWOOD/DAYON DAILY NEWS  
JANET SNODGRASS (left photo) along with Frances West (left in right photo) and Mary Slattery renew acquaintances. FRANCES SEVERT (left) watches as Donna Stewart opens a gift-exchange package. MARILYN TYSON (left) can't contain her delight as she visits with longtime friend Frances West. CONNIE AMAND and her friends had many laughs during Wednesday's Christmas gathering.

PHOTO: JANET HARDING, 72, examines the ornament she received in the gift exchange with her Roosevelt classmates.

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