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Moraga Women's Society's swan song, a fond farewell to an ending era

By Sophie Braccini



Past Moraga Women Society presidents, from left: Roberta Klaproth (current president), Nancy Comprelli, Bea Cunningham, Jean Glaser, Ree Hardy, Jackie Reising, Judy Ayres, Donna Sumner, Rachel Riddle, Colleen Lund, Judy Butler, Beverly Matthews, Jean Macy, Roberta Cohn and Louise Milford. Photo Cindy Cattell

winter of 1966-67, when a group of ladies who volunteered at the Moraga newcomers' club wanted to create more stimulating programs serving the community. Since the club did not accommodate their desires, the women chartered a new group in the spring of 1967: MWS. The objective was to further the development of Moraga - a county unincorporated area at the time - and find ways to raise money for the schools, parks and recreation, and local nonprofits. Moraga, unlike today, was developing at a fast pace. The women also wanted a place to make friends.

The MWS became a place to become involved when moving into one of the many new Moraga homes. Nancy Comprelli, who joined in 1978, remembers that rules were strict and that she needed two sponsors to be admitted, as well as an immediate commitment to one of the three committees: ways-and-means, service or social.

From the start, MWS created some signature events that enlivened the social life, such as the Holiday Homes Tour and Boutique that continued until 2009. Comprelli, who remembers working with friends on building intricate dollhouses that were big auction items, says that nowadays people hesitate opening their homes for visits.

One of the signature events that the MWS created was the Honorary Mayor Races that were held before the town incorporated. Each "candidate" fundraised to "buy" votes at 10 cents a ballot; the funds were raised to subsidize the future library and parks. The campaign led to the creation of multiple fun events where candidates made outrageous speeches. Lund told how the community brimmed with energy and fun as each candidate created occasions to collect "votes." Elinor Dickenson, Postmaster, was the first Moraga honorary mayor. Some \$6,000 was raised during the campaign.

Lund remembers how the society was filled with creativity when all the members put on a variety of fundraisers. They established the dog parade that still goes on for the Fourth of July, an arts and crafts festival that was quite vibrant until Lafayette started its own, a fashion show, a Bridge-brunch and Bunco event, and more. A total of \$400,000 was raised that helped fund the Campolindo football field, equipment at the Commons, computers at Campolindo, the outdoor garden at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate, the Walk through California and Walk through the Revolution programs in the elementary schools, refurbishing the fireside room at the Hacienda de las Flores, books and programs at the library, and more. There was also a lot of hands-on volunteering, such as the decorating of the Christmas tree at the Hacienda, something that the MWS will continue.

Over the years, friendships were strengthened, but after a period, no new members signed up. A 2014 newspaper article reported that service club memberships had been dwindling nationwide, the main reason being that people are busier than ever.

Comprelli says that her own daughter, who lives in Moraga, was a member of the Moraga Juniors and that

It was a bittersweet 50-year celebration. Tea and desserts, lovely smiling faces of some 60 women, and shared memories filled the nicely decorated hall of a local church on Oct. 16, but there was a tinge of sadness since this was the final meeting of the Moraga Women's Society. Because the members have aged and did not attract a new generation of women, the longtime friends that remain will continue as a social group only, stepping back from their work as a vibrant and generous nonprofit that gave to community schools, the library, parks and organizations.

Many of the women present were in their 70s or 80s, members who joined the society in the 1970s; they were active before the town was incorporated and during the early days of the incorporation. These were times when many new homes seemed to spring up from the ground and the town was being formed. But it is now a different period, as past president Roberta Klaproth put it: a generation is saying goodbye and fading into the background. The ladies did it most gracefully.

During this final tea, Colleen Lund retold the history of the society. She focused on the very first years in the

upon leaving that group, all her energy was geared toward the schools; she says that today's parents are worn out.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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