

Suburban Life

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Club marks 75 years of cultural unity

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

of a group of northern Italian immigrants and their descendants. Like similar organizations, the club was formed 75 years ago to help a group of immigrants weather ill health and the death of family members in a new country.

As years passed, the club evolved into a social concern where older members can still hear the French-influenced Piemontese dialect of their youth.

TODAY, AS the group prepares for its anniversary banquet on Sept. 18 at Vladimir's in Farmington Hills, the children of the founders are the senior members. The last surviving charter member died in the mid '70s.

While their children and grandchildren may belong to the men's club, the younger generation's commitment to it has yet to grow as strong. Older members say that in part it's because their young counterparts don't need the social and economic support of a tightly knit ethnic group.

"The Piemontese Club and another club were all our social life," said past president, Elmo Tibaldi, 74 of Farmington Hills. "Originally, we had fantastic picnics on Ryan Road."

Joined together by their ethnic background and their religion, they would attend Sunday services at a Roman Catholic church as a club and then spend the remainder of the day together, Tibaldi recalled.

ALTHOUGH ONCE a year the group gather to hear a memorial Mass said by one of their members, a Roman Catholic priest, those weekly get-togethers belong to the past.

"The younger generation, that's our biggest problem," Tibaldi said. His three sons are members but most of the time, they can't make it.

"It's a very serious problem. When they get older, they come back and

they're like new blood. They get active," he said.

For him, the club means more than a building on well kept premises and a swimming pool. "It's one of my pride and joys."

It was hardly a joyful occasion that prompted the founding of the club on Sept. 23, 1913. One member of a group of young immigrants from the northernmost province of Italy had died. They were all young and poor and pooled their money to pay the funeral expenses.

FROM THAT time on, the club kept together. They struggled to learn English together and lived near other. Most members still live in the same general area. Today, instead of living on the west side of Detroit, they live in Farmington Hills, Bloomfield Hills and Novi.

Most of the first members found jobs making concrete. Like other immigrant groups, they helped each find jobs. Eventually they and their sons became contractors. In turn, the sons urged their sons to attend college and go into a profession.

Throughout the years, they've kept the club small. Membership is limited to 250 men. Newcomers must prove, by presenting a passport, that at least one parent or grandparent came from the Piemonte region, or they must be married to a descendant.

Originally, the bylaws required that both parents of the club's members come from Piemonte. It was a regulation that according to Cordisco caused one outsider to comment, "That's the most exclusive club I've ever seen."

But Cordisco says he's the reason that regulation changed. Shortly after World War II, the older men in the group invited the younger ones to



cultural collage

join them. Before that, the young men met on their own. "We had a hard ball team and bowling and we thought, why should we hang out with the old guys," Cordisco said.

WHEN HIS friends joined the group, he couldn't. Only his mother had been born in Piemonte. "They said, don't worry, we'll get in and then we'll get you in," Cordisco said. "And they changed it for me."

Cordisco has served as club secretary for 30 years. During that time, he and Tibaldi have seen the group change. It's moved from meeting in the Santa Maria school hall in Detroit before World War II to building its own facility on Puritan in Detroit.

In the early '70s they sold that building and met at a bowling alley in Southfield until the old Randlewood Swim Club, set on 10 acres in Farmington Hills, was for sale. It seemed perfect. In addition to the building and the pool, the property had tennis courts, a baseball diamond and ground spacious enough to accommodate picnics.

The city, according to Cordisco didn't welcome them with open arms. One of the club's chief means of support in Detroit had been a catering business. Although they eventually won in court the right to buy the building, it was upon the condition the club didn't alter the building or start another catering business.

ness. "THAT'S A shame because we have some great cooks," said Cordisco. He obviously relishes telling the story of how Napoleon, on his victorious swing through Italy, took the Piemontese chefs home with him to teach the French to cook.

Dropping the catering business hurt the club financially, according to Tibaldi. "It's a struggle because our membership is small, considering the expense of the pool," Tibaldi said. "Some of the older guys wanted to fill it in. The baseball diamond, that's gone to pot but it'll come back again."

Made up of two career families, the new generation can't find the time to devote to the club, Cordisco says.

Nonetheless, it endures with its annual events like its wild game dinner, a potluck cookout and children's Christmas party. It endures because older members insist that one member shouldn't grab the spotlight. Cordisco and Tibaldi both insisted on talking about the club as a whole.

It endures in a faster paced society because for many members, it continues to be home.

"Whenever I'm at a gathering there I know I'm among friends. Whether I know everyone or not, I feel everyone is respected," Tibaldi said.



THOMAS ARNETT/staff photographer

Dominic Cordisco, secretary of the Piemontese Social Club, pauses in front of the club's pool. Like other members, Cordisco says, he prefers that the club and not an individual member take the spotlight.

Community Women show helps home town causes

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

From the tree house in the Farmington Community Library's children's room to the playground equipment in the city park, chances are many of the area's residents are touched in some way by the work of the Farmington Area Community Women.

An outgrowth of the Jayceettes, the group was formed in 1985 by women who didn't want to be incorporated with the Jaycees. They enjoyed the Jayceettes tradition of sponsoring projects intended to raise money mainly for community based causes.

The 22-member group's working on its latest fund-raiser, a fall fashion show set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 22, in the Farmington Community Center, 24705 Farmington Road. Tickets should be reserved by Sept. 21 by calling 476-3977 or 474-3633. There is a \$5 donation requested for each ticket.

Two downtown Farmington stores, Dress Barn and Hilt or Miss are providing the fashions and accessories. Some of the shoes are from

another downtown store, Payless Shoe Source. It isn't an accident that the businesses featured in the show are located in downtown Farmington.

"We wanted to use the fashion show to show off the revitalization of the downtown area," said Denise Holmes, fashion show chairwoman.

THROUGH SUCH events, the group annually raises about \$5,000. From those earnings, it keeps \$50 for operating expenses and donates the remainder, according to Linda Lawrie, president of Farmington Area Community Women. Funds raised this year already have been earmarked for Farmington Nursing Home, the Community Living Center and Louise Hall, the wing of Merriam Hall devoted to teenage mothers who've decided to keep their children.

In addition they're supporting the newly formed Farmington Area Neighborhood Assistance.

Projects from the recent past include donating money to Providence Hospital for a grieving room for parents of infants who've died. The group paid for one of the new circus

wagons in Shilohwasee Park.

Some of the equipment for Alameda Early Childhood Center's playroom for handicapped children also was purchased with money from the Farmington Area Community Women, according to Delilah Treitnik, a past president. Money for that project was raised through the group's Buckle Up Babies program which rents infant car seats for a nominal fee.

Although they regard themselves as a continuation of the old Jayceettes, they've done away with the former group's upper age limit of 35-years-old. "Many of us couldn't belong to the Jayceettes today," Lawrie said.

Members range from former Jayceettes to professional women who've taken time out to have children and intend on returning to the work force. In addition for women like Holmes, it's become a way of coping with a new area. Holmes, a native of Great Britain, and her family have been transferred around the world by her husband's employer. When she arrived in Farmington Hills, she didn't know anyone in the country let alone the area.



THOMAS ARNETT/staff photographer

Farmington Area Community Women member Becky Spaulding of Southfield poses beside the circus wagon in Shilohwasee Park which was donated to the city by the group. Spaulding is wearing a gray plaid suit by Casper from the Dress Barn featured in the group's fall fashion show. Her royal blue mock turtle neck blouse in polyester is made by Kristina.

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