



The Gathering Place moved over to City Park for a picnic this month in greater numbers than ever before. Special guests for the day were the seniors' grandchildren and great-grandchildren, at what is certain to become an annual affair.



Kristyn Schulkins led her grandfather, Douglas Vannier, around the picnic area testing every piece of equipment in the playground.



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# Numbers and activities just keep growing at the Gathering Place

By LORAIN McCLISH

Members from the Gathering Place scrambled for pennies, tossed shoes and blew bubble gum bubbles at a picnic for grandparents and grandchildren that brought out twice the number the event drew last year.

The size of the outdoor get-together

in City Park this month was no surprise to Loretta Conway, supervisor of senior citizens for Farmington and Farmington Hills. She was ready with ample prizes, games, clowns and additional personnel from the parks and recreation department.

"We have 130 people drop in at the Gathering Place every day now. The

numbers didn't drop off in the summer, that we could have expected. Instead, we just keep growing and see new faces all the time," she said.

Ms. Conway, who started the drop-in center for seniors in Farmington's American Legion Hall with little money and a small volunteer staff, moved to bigger quarters in Mercy Conference Center this spring.

YVONNE SILER, who started a crafts program for the seniors, is now programmer for all of the Gathering Place activities, and a full-time member of the staff.

Karen Ross is coordinator of the activities which run continuously, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays, with a special events agenda for evenings and weekends that keeps growing.

Ms. Ross originated the exercise and dance classes, now taught by Maggie Loidas, that Ms. Conway said "are now putting us on the map."

The exercise and dance classes she speaks of have traveled throughout lower Michigan for performances, mostly in colleges, and for gerontology students in particular "to counter the myth held by those not knowledgeable that these are very, very active

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Staff photos by Harry Mauthe



Five-year-old David Wilson takes some time out, after a strenuous game, under a shade tree with his grandmother, Eleonora Aquyilina.



Volunteer fireman Paul Slater turned volunteer clown for the picnic afternoon, and made friends with Deena Clemente. The youngster is the granddaughter of Mary Wilson, and great-granddaughter of Florence Clabaugh, both members of the Gathering Place.



Meredith Ray, 3, points the way to her great-grandmother Mary Wolk, who kept finding pennies in the sand after the penny scramble had ended.

# Ex-White House aide sides with consumers

By SHIRLEE IDEN

In less than a decade, Virginia Knauer has gone from city government to state government to serving two presidents and today is an independent consumer affairs consultant.

What's important to her is that in all endeavors she has been "on the side of the consumer."

Mrs. Knauer, a Philadelphia native, says she's not a Philadelphia lawyer or any other kind, but has had many attorneys serve under her.

Her government service began when she was elected to the Philadelphia City Council in the 1960s.

"I served on the council for eight years," she recalled. "In those days consumer education was sparse. Mostly it was available in home economics studies and that was not my field."

"But I had been aware of consumer dissatisfaction and I learned to sift consumer concerns as a council member."

She was recognized more and more as knowledgeable in consumer affairs and received an appointment from the Pennsylvania governor.

"We wrote strong consumer legislation in Pennsylvania and in a real sense, it was pioneering legislation," she said in a Southfield interview.

IN 1969, her name was recommended to the White House and President Richard Nixon appointed her as special assistant for consumer affairs. She served in the same capacity in the Ford administration.

"When I went to the White House, only 16 states had consumer protection laws, and, of course, Pennsylvania was one of them," she said proudly. "Today all states and other branches of government are aware of consumer concerns and address themselves to them."

Mrs. Knauer's job in the White House was of cabinet-level rank and she recalls the first time she attended a meeting in the cabinet room. "I was invited to sit at the cabinet table and I looked around that impressive room and I said to myself—'That's the president of the United States' and I looked around and Henry Kissinger was speaking."

"I remember glancing at the long narrow windows and nearly coming inering going out one of them when President Nixon looked over at me and asked me to explain my program."

"I started to speak and never felt shy again."

"I chose it that way and even though sometimes I was urged to move into the White House, I never did. Besides, walking across the street was the only exercise I ever got."

SHE LOOKS back on her White House years as "wonderfully productive."

"The treasury secretary and I sponsored a consumer conference which was a first and very successful," she said. "We had a lot of fun with promoting consumer education. We realized that we had to train consumers better."

"People on low incomes and inner city residents were so frequently taken advantage of. They just didn't perceive any basic consumer rights."

Mrs. Knauer said President John Kennedy was the first national leader to enunciate consumer rights and every president since has endorsed them and added something to the concept.

"Consumer rights begin with the right of the consumer to have information on which to base a choice in the free marketplace," she said. "Then there's the right to safety in products and thirdly, the right to be heard. Last is the right to redress if satisfaction is not achieved."

From every point of view, Mrs. Knauer concedes that consumers are far better off today than they were in the early 1960s when Kennedy first articulated basic rights for them.

"What's vital is that people speak up. I always encourage this," she said. "Today people are aware of their rights and they do tend to speak up. But consumers also have responsibilities as well as rights."

"BASICALLY, this involves using products as the manufacturer intends."

She gave the illustration of how people abuse flowers and then complain about their short life, an area she is well versed in since she is now a consumer advisor for Florist Telegraph Delivery.

"People receive a lovely arrangement of flowers and then put them on their television where they'll get cooked," she said. "Or else they put them in a direct draft."

Mrs. Knauer is the mother of a grown son and daughter and has three grandchildren. The youngest, Virginia Knauer Burdick, at age 5 has become the flower arranger at the Washington Montessori School.

Now that she is out of government and in business, Mrs. Knauer said she feels quite comfortable since her principal job in the White House was to communicate with businessmen.

"I told them to listen to consumers," she said, "that it was part of being a good marketer. Many companies set up consumer affairs offices and I was delighted."

"Consumer experts abound now and have proper training too," she said. "When I was in government, our task was to urge businessmen to accept progressive ideas so we didn't have to ask for legislation. Usually, if you get the big companies to act, the others will follow."

IN HER present capacity with FTD, Mrs. Knauer advises consumers how to best use the flower delivery service and how to report unsatisfactory service. Her other function is to evaluate the company's quality control programs and recommend any needed changes.

Her prestige as an expert on consumer affairs is usually attributed to her ability to establish rapport between government, business and consumers, and that knack is continuing to work for her.

"It's challenging," she said, "to assist in establishing the most harmonious relationships between consumer and florist."



VIRGINIA KNAUER