



MODELING CHRISTMAS HATS in 1988 were (seated, from left) Rosella Meitl, Fern Wenger, Nora Bearley, Nila Brunk and Eileene Grose; and (standing) Ellnette Rydquist, Pat Wright, Eunice Martin, Marty Olson, Ila Ray, Janette Votapka, Eris Young and Margaret Young.

Ten young mothers gather 60 years ago to start social club

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Many new things were happening in the world when Eris Young and Nora Bearley, the only living charter members of the Pi Alpha Club, and eight other young mothers gathered 60 years ago to form the new organization.



Eris Young



Nora Bearley

The hydrogen bomb had been tested in the Pacific, a truce reached in Korea and President Truman had fired Gen. Douglas MacArthur. On the lighter side, Margaret Truman made her radio acting debut, and a full-color television broadcast was made from the Empire State Building. The average income was \$3,515, but that was OK because a new car cost only \$1,500 and a home about \$9,000. Bread was 16 cents a loaf and gas 19 cents a gallon. One of the popular songs was, "Getting to Know You."

Members will celebrate the 60th anniversary and honor the two charter members when they gather for a luncheon Saturday at the LandMark Inn. Theme will be, "Take a Little Time for Tea With a Friend."

"I remember getting together with Loretta Lyons and deciding we needed to form a club for young mothers," Mrs. Bearley recalled. "Back then, church and clubs were the only things going on. We had 10 charter members, and each was to ask others to join. The meeting started at 8 p.m. so we could get supper over and put the kids to bed first."

Other charter members were Nadine Anderson, Jodiennne Baker, Nila Brunk, Hazel Guinn, Mrs. Lyons, Ellnette Rydquist, Fern Wenger and Donna Wenger.

The club chose the name Pi Alpha for Pollyanna. The first club meeting was held May 15, 1951. The group began as part of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Assisting with its organization were Minnie Roshong and Mary

Rasmussen, members of the JCC, or Jolly Classical Cultural Club. The club meets on the second and fourth Mondays of the month from September through April.

Other present members are Elaine Bryan, Joan Evans, Kristy Evans, Cecil Hess, Rachelle Lytle, Eunice Martin, Mert McEvoy, Rosella Meitl, Gerry Neff, Marjorie Olson, Marty Olson, Joyce Ploussard, Ila Ray, Joy Russell, Virginia Spratling, Janette Votapka, Estella Waldo and Pat Wright. Associate members are Eileene Grose, Margaret Lund and Doris Sloan.

Members have had many "fun times" together, including when Mrs. Bearley played "The Old Woman in a Shoe" in 1952 — with all the children of club members participating — in the Oberlin Lions Club Talent Show. The production won first place in the adult division and the club received a check for \$15.

Mrs. Young's son Gary said he remembers well looking out one of the windows of the huge shoe.

"We always had fun when we entertained our husbands," said Mrs. Young, "and I especially remember the time we had a Halloween party at our house and how hilarious it was watching all the men trying to hold a piece of fruit under their chin in a game."

Another favorite production was "North Atlantic," a parody of the popular Broadway musical "South Pacific" when a group of lovely (or was it lonely?) ladies were looking for the finer things of life (that is, MEN). Lounging around in their red flannel nightgowns, they sang, "Any Gruesome Evening." When at last their vacation was over and the disappointed travelers pulled away from Iceland Isle, they sang out their firm belief, "There is Nothing Like a MALE."

Mrs. Rydquist was their faithful pianist for many years and wrote the music for an inspirational song, written by her husband, Ken Rydquist, titled, "You Must Believe." It was sung at the club's 50th anniversary.

Mrs. Bearley's children also have memories of when their mother had club at their house.

Her daughter, Montine Alstrom said, "We didn't like her to have club at our house. She would clean for weeks, scrub and wax floors and even wipe down the walls. She wanted us to keep the house spotless

— a hard task for us five kids.

"I guess she wanted the 'club girls', as she always calls them, to think that's the way we lived! We always had to go to the basement with Dad and be quiet as we could, but we could always hear the 'club girls' upstairs laughing and having a good time.

"My sister Sandy recalls Mom having club at our house and going down the clothes chute in our bathroom because she didn't want to walk through the ladies at club. She got stuck and Dad had to get her out.

"My brother Bob remembers how caring the club was and what an impression that had on him. He said there was a man in town, Ross Gaines, who had polio and couldn't get around. The club donated money to get him an electric cart that he could drive around town. The club also donated a clock for the swimming pool and even replaced it after the first one was stolen.

"Club has always been a highlight to our mother and she is very proud of it. We really appreciate everyone being so kind to her and helping her out. Everyone in club has a special bond. It seems like we, as mother's children, have come to love the Pi Alpha Club. After all, it was our life, too."

Cecil Hess said that her kids, Jean Ann, Steve and Danny, always looked forward to club night, because that meant they got to have Boston Cream Pie, prepared by their dad.

The most important project of the city club federation at the time the club organized was raising money for a new city library. A total of \$2,500 was presented to the library board in 1956 for half the purchase price of the Art Wilbur lots, the location of the present library.

Through the city federation, clubs also supported the new Decatur County Hospital, city swimming pool, Good Samaritan Center, high school addition, county museum, low-income housing, the Pioneer Family statue, the Decatur County Hospital Hospitality House and The Gateway.

Over the years, Pi Alpha members also supported many other community projects, including Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, Snoball dances, After Prom activities, Scholarship Loan fund, Good Samaritan Center and Cedar Living Center, Decatur County Hospital, city Christmas



NEW OFFICERS INSTALLED in May 1953 included (from left) Cecil Hess, president; Nora Bearley vice president; Ila Ray, secretary; Eris Young, treasurer, and Mart Swalley, parliamentarian. Pi Alpha Members (below) in the musical production, "North Atlantic," a parody of "South Pacific, in 1959 (from left, front row) Nadine Anderson, Nora Bearley, Hazel Guinn and Doreen Kolsky; (standing) Cecil Hess, Eula Waldo and Fern Wenger. They were singing "Any Gruesome Evening," a parody of "Some Enchanted Evening."



decorations, wooden park benches and tables made by the eighth-grade shop boys, donations for fire department equipment, and the "Furry Friends" project for nursing home residents.

During the Decatur County Fair, the club has operated game booths and served homemade ice cream and they also sent boxes of goodies to area servicemen during the Vietnam War, supported the library expansion, donated to playground equipment at City Park and gave a baseball scoreboard. The club had a cook book printed as its first money-making project.

Mrs. Wright wrote on the club's

50th anniversary: "We enjoyed our families and each other and through the years have shared family picnics, Halloween parties and potluck dinners, barbecues and steak dinners with our spouses at the shelter house, local restaurants and in our own back yards. We've laughed our way through 'come-as-you-are' meetings, homemade hat parades and progressive dinners and our Christmas taste-tea and the spring breakfast are always highlights of our year."

And through the years, the women all have endeavored to live their club motto, "Shun not the struggle — face it, it's God gift!"