

Lifestyles

9-5 MEMBERS: Tracy Squadrito (below) and Mary Blake bring business perspective to the club.

Courtesy Shapiro / The

PAST AND PRESENT

The Oviedo Woman's Club legacy lives — and gives — on

By Kelly Allen
THE CHRONICLE

OVIEDO — When six women got together in 1906 to start the Oviedo Magazine Club, they intended to increase their knowledge through reading and help the community.

More than 100 years later, the group of women — now known as the Oviedo Woman's Club — has a rich history and a flourishing present, making it a lot more than a magazine club.

The woman's club, now comprised of 140 members, is primarily a philanthropic club, having raised more than \$40,000 last year for local charities and scholarships.

The club's first recorded philanthropic act took place in 1912 when the club raised money for sidewalks in the city.

"Back in those old days they had the pigs running loose in the city," said Peggy Osborne, the club historian. "So they captured the pigs, and then they sold them back to their husbands, whose pigs they were ... and they built sidewalks with the money."

Although current members laugh about the club's early antics, that willingness to help is still the group's driving force.

Dolaine Eflin, a member since 1998, said the way the club reached out to her is what caused her to join.

"When we came in '98 and our granddaughter had leukemia and had passed away ... at that time the club had been so good to my family,"

Eflin said.

"They had given groceries, they sent Santa Claus by on the fire truck, they were there to babysit, to do anything to help. I just thought that was wonderful."

It didn't take long for Eflin to get in on the giving. She started a weekly sewing group that makes gowns and blankets for Operation Smile, an organization helping children with cleft palate.

"There's a lot of different facets and you kind of find your voice to do," Eflin said.

Tracy Squadrito, who has been a member since 1998, said how much the woman's club does. "I can't tell you how many women I meet who say they thought we were a tea club or a coffee club or a whatever, and no one really realizes how much we really do," Blake said.

The club raises funds through its two main events each year: Great Day in the Country and the Tasting Luncheon. While the proceeds of the luncheon go toward operating costs for the club, almost all proceeds of Great Day are given away.

The club gave about \$6,000 in scholarships to Oviedo and Hagerty graduates last year, a fact Blake says most people aren't aware of. They also give to Boys Town, Camp Boggy Creek, Elizabeth House, Safe House, Head Start, and many others.

"We try very hard to keep what we can in our community in Seminole County," Blake said. The club also volunteers at Seminole County schools and partners with the Oviedo police department.

Tracy Squadrito, a member for three years, said she joined the club because she wanted to do community service. "Every project that I'd want to be involved in in the city, they already do, they're already set up," Squadrito said. "Those ladies know how to do everything."

Squadrito decided to join after trying out a meeting with a friend. "I had heard about the woman's club, but I didn't really know what it was so I made my friend Marcia go with me," Squadrito said.

Both women joined immediately after the meeting. "We could see right away that if you're going to be involved in service that's the place to do it," she said. Now, Squadrito balances her career, her family and her responsibilities as fourth vice president.

Although the club focuses on service in the community, Blake says the social aspect of the group also convinced her to join six years ago.

"I have to say that [women join] because when you get there you are made to feel very welcome," Blake said. "You go to this club and you won't sit in the corner. Somebody will come over and talk to you — several women will come over and talk to you, they'll ask you to

■ Please see WOMAN'S CLUB (A8)

IN THE BEGINNING

One spring day in 1906, six ladies met to form the Oviedo Magazine Club. Their purpose was to dispense good reading material and improve their community.

THE FIRST CLUBHOUSE

In 1914, the first clubhouse was built, which also served as the town's first library. In 1918, they joined the Florida Federation of Woman's Clubs and changed their name to The Oviedo Woman's Club.

CLUB CONTINUES TO GROW

They joined the General Federation of Woman's Clubs in 1923. While membership was increasing, the clubhouse was no longer adequate, and it was sold.

THE NEW CLUBHOUSE

The present clubhouse was built in 1961 on property donated by former member Mrs. R.L. Gowan.



MRS. PRESIDENT:
(Top to bottom) Mrs. H.B. McCall, Mrs. E.F. Wheeler, Mrs. W.J. Lawton, Mrs. J.B. Swellord, Mrs. W.F. Carter, Mrs. T.L. Lingo, and Mrs. J. Leinhardt were presidents of the Oviedo Woman's Club between 1906 and 1973.

Young, old work together in woman's club

From **WOMAN'S CLUB** | A8

sit at their table. It's that feeling of friendship and camaraderie that you get immediately."

The diversity of the group is also attractive to many members — although some women are surprised by it.

"When you look around and you see the wide variety of people that are really in there, it changes your whole perception," Squadrito said.

"There's a whole different wave of younger people coming in, which can be a good thing, which can be a bad thing. I wouldn't want the older members to ever feel like they were being pushed out because they're the ones that set up the club, set up the procedures."

Osborne, who joined the club in 1991 after moving from New York, said she enjoys the diversity of the club. "The thing I like about the club is it has women of all

ages and it was really different," she said. "I got to learn a lot about Oviedo."

The woman's club will hold its annual Great Day in the Country in November and its Tasting Luncheon in March. If you're there, don't be surprised to find 140 women busy at work and having a blast.

"We all have the same goal, and we work very hard at that goal and keep sweet and bless the community," Eflin said.



Courtney Shapiro | The Chronicle

CLUB COLLECTOR: Club historian Peggy Osborne shows off her bear collection at home. Osbourne, the club historian, became a member after moving to Oviedo from New York.

Oviedo Woman's Club Timeline

- 1906- The Oviedo Magazine Club began and exchanged magazine subscriptions.
- 1912- \$1 dues were instituted. The club raised money for sidewalks and held a Fourth of July program on Lake Charm.
- 1914- The club started construction on its first club house, with a total cost of \$1,500.
- 1917- The club house housed the local Red Cross Unit to aid troops in Word War I.
- 1929- With a depleted treasury, the club worked to create new fundraising strategies.
- 1941- The club participated again with the Red Cross, this time during World War II.
- 1946- Now consisting of 75 members, the club focused on food drives and Red Cross efforts.
- 1950- The club began work on a swimming pool and benches for Sweetwater Park.
- 1961- Having sold the original club house for \$200, the club built their new club house—still in use on King Street—for \$5,324.
- 1964- The club paid off its mortgage and burned the papers.
- 1968- The club started a city beautification program.
- 1971- Continuing focus on the city, the club worked on the city's first library and erected Welcome to Oviedo signs.
- 1975- The club split into six departments and donated to the Oviedo Historical Society, the Oviedo Rescue Van Fund and Hacienda Girls Ranch.