

La Selva Beach Woman's Club struggles to keep 52-year tradition alive, relevant

By JANE PARKS-MCKAY
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LA SELVA BEACH — Forty years ago, it was hard to get into the La Selva Beach Woman's Club.

"When I joined, there were 125 members and a waiting list," recalls longtime member Nish Hoppe.

Today, the club has shrunk to 33 women who say they are determined to keep its traditions going despite a changing world.

Last year, a stern warning was issued: unless someone stepped forward to become president, the club — founded 52 years ago — would not continue. Icy Young raised her hand and things have been changing ever since.

"We know that demographics have changed," said Young, who at 40-something is among the youngest in an organization that has members in their 90s.

"There are more choices for women to get involved, women are waiting longer to have children and retirees are traveling more. The question is: How do we keep the tradition and value of the past 52 years and make it attractive for today's woman?"

Among the ideas being discussed: evening and weekend activities.

Founded by the late Mrs. Richard Mehne, the club has always revolved around community advancement and social events.

The group, which has annual membership dues of \$20, meets Thursday afternoons from May through September. This past year, the focus was women's art. Last Thursday's program featured well-known sculptor Hollis Hansen as well as art from club members and strawberry shortcake.

Fund-raisers, which finance student scholarships, also have helped purchase playground equipment. The organization also sponsors groups for members interested in art and gardens, books or bridge.

Meetings are held in the La Selva Beach Clubhouse, a striking country-red building in the upscale village.

The clubhouse is reminiscent of times long ago: hardwood floors beckon the visitor to a warm hearth and a modern kitchen.

While the club recently brought in three new members, that may not be enough to keep it going.

"I love the group and I've learned a lot about the community by being a member," said Julie Dresdner, 67, who was new to the area when she joined five years ago. "But I'm not sure it's needed as women are getting older and young women aren't coming in."

Beverley Bontadelli, a member for 48 years, wants to see the club continue.

"I think it's a wonderful opportunity to take care of each other," she said. "So many people don't have family."



Above: Icy Young, who took over as club president last year, is among its youngest members.

Cindy Passaro, who joined 10 years ago, agreed.

"It's not a place that you withdraw to, but a place that you expand from," she said. "Maybe the reason we're surviving is because we have a strong community and people feel that we're very much a part of them."

For more information about the La Selva Beach Woman's Club, call Icy Young at 684-1689.