

# It's been 'Our Night Out' for 60 years

TRACEY COVEART The Scugog Standard

When a group of women got together in 1950 for a night away from the house and the kids, they had no idea their get-together would become a monthly outing that would still be going strong six decades later. But on Saturday, June 5, 74 past and present members of Our Night Out (ONO) met at the Blackstock United Church for their 60th anniversary dinner, with great food and entertainment and a lot of reminiscing.

Three of those women - Gwenyth Thompson, Kathleen Dorrell and Jean Kyte (Noreen Malcolm, another charter member, was unable to attend the reunion due to the death of her husband) - were at that very first meeting in Florince Collins' garage. There were six ladies there: Florince, Gwen Ballingall, Gwenyth, Kathleen, Noreen and Jean Kyte. At that very first meeting, the only order of business was to decide upon a name for the club - which would give young mothers a night out once a month with other women who lived in the Blackstock area - and Our Night Out was born.

Donna Kyte, a club member for 44 years, will never forget her very first Our Night Out meeting. "It was just after our daughter Karen was born. The phone rang just as we were all laughing it up, having a relaxing night out. It was my husband, Dave, saying that get the baby to stop crying. Lunch hadn't even been served yet and I had to go home!"

With their membership growing, the ladies soon realized they needed a little seed money. So they started catering local events.

The first was a wedding at Emmerson's Farm in North Neslleton. The ONO members gathered together their best dishes, silverware and crystal and loaded the food into their cars.

"From then on," said ONO member Donna Kyte, a 44-year club veteran, "everyone wanted our services. Weddings, anniversaries, funerals, farm sales."

Elaine Bailey, an ONO member for 55 years, remembers the endless banquets.

"Banquets and banquets and banquets! High school, elementary school, all men's events - you had to take twice as much food for those."

But it was a group of road men she recalls most fondly. "We passed around the hat and they gave us a tremendous tip. In fact, that's the only tip we ever got!"

And even though the banquets "were a lot of work," said Elaine, "we always had a good time. It is such a good group of girls."

The ladies also turned to acting to generate funds. "We had a drama club and the cast was the talented, fun-loving ONO girls," said Donna. "Way back in 1950, the first play was called 'Sweet Sally Brown,' and the cast and crew travelled to audiences in Blackstock, Norland, Burketon, Tyrone,



**THEN AND NOW: An undated photo of Our Night Out presidents (above) and past and present members at the ONO reunion on June 5 (below).**



Raglan, Brooking and Yelverton."

The money the ONO members raised never stayed with the club long. It was spent in the community.

"Our first donation - \$40 - was to Valley Signs in 1951 for the Welcome to Blackstock and Please Call Again signs," said Donna.

As the ONO catering 'business' took off, the ladies began to equip the Blackstock Recreation Centre with dishes, silverware, coffee urns, pots and pans. "Then we needed storage," said Donna. "In 1955 the 39 members had cupboards built for \$290. In 1972 we purchased royal blue drapes for the stage for \$1,000, a new stove, a dishwasher, a beautiful crystal chandelier, a sprayed white ceiling and a new \$2,600 floor built for dancing, with carpet around the edges for the tables and chairs."

That same year, enough money was raised to make donations to the Port Perry and Bowmanville hospitals, The Salvation Army and Easter Seals. "Through the years," said Donna, "we have kept up our donations to The Canadian Cancer Society, the Auxiliary to Lakeridge Health Port Perry, Children's Aid, the Tuberculosis Association and local agricultural fair contests - including a memorable watermelon eating contest in 1965 - the hospital Doll Draw, Cartwright High School's 'At Home' Dance and Commencement, Cartwright

Public School graduation, Operation Scugog, The Heart and Stroke Foundation, Cubs, Scouts, Girl Guides, Brownies, Rangers, Pathfinders and many, many more."

The ONO ladies purchased their first playground equipment in 1953 and after receiving a provincial grant for children's recreation in 1975, started sponsoring a bus to take local kids swimming at Uxpool in Uxbridge every day for a month during the summer.

And ONO tried its hand at social activism, too. "The ONO girls travelled as a group to the hospital with diapers on the end of broomsticks when they threatened to close our 'Stork Department,'" said Donna. The girls also organized a committee to protest the closing of Cartwright High School.

Although the ONA is "just a social club now," said Elaine, "we did do an awful lot of work over the years."

But it wasn't all hard labour. There were the ONO dances in the early years. "We had a New Year's Eve Dance and dances to celebrate Spring, Valentine's Day and Halloween," recalled Donna. "But my favourites were the family dances. An orchestra or band played and tickets were always a sell-out. I remember going with my parents and learning to square dance. My dad, Roy McLaughlin, played his violin and Brian

Hamilton was the caller."

Extraordinary memories include a visit from Betty Kennedy in 1965. "I even remember the navy and white suit I wore," said Donna. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime event and each lady got to take home the china cup and saucer that was used for her tea or coffee." And Jessie Bowles, now 80, teaching a baking class at the Blackstock rec centre sponsored by Robin Hood Flour. "Ladies from the community were so happy to purchase a ticket to learn new recipes and techniques," said Donna.

Fun times include skating parties, trips to the Ice Capades, The Little Theatre in Lindsay, Kawartha Race Track in Peterborough - "when all the ladies ran down onto the track to congratulate Neil and Noreen Malcolm on having their horse come in first place," said Donna - and a Blue Jays game in Toronto sitting at the very top bleachers in the Sky Dome. "The bus broke down on the way home and we had to wait a long time for another bus to come and get us," recalled Elaine with a laugh. "That's why I prefer small-town adventures!"

Those escapades included 'Hobo Teas,' an early fundraiser. Members would dress up like hobos, fill a car with warm bodies, and descend upon an unsuspecting hostess. "I put newspapers on the table and folded up old things for serviettes," recalled Elaine, when it was her turn to be surprised. "I served soup and cheese and crackers. Someone else might serve a bowl of Cheerios. Everyone chipped in a dollar or two and all the money went into our ONO fund."

Once a year, the ladies still have an ONO sleepover at a member's cottage on Lake Scugog. Even though that member has passed away, her husband honours her memory by having the ladies back every summer for a little lakeside enjoyment.

The work might have gone out of the club in the last 10 years, but the fun certainly hasn't. The meetings are held at member's houses on a rotating basis, with the hostess providing lunch or dessert. And roll call is still the highlight.

Elaine's favourite was 'Wear your Wedding Dress.' "Some of us could get them done up and others couldn't. I was one of the ones who couldn't!"

Today, the happy Thursday nights continue monthly with 18 members (restriction on membership have been removed, so any ladies are now welcome to join), ranging in age from their 60s to their 90s.

"What keeps us coming back month after month, said Elaine, "is just the fun that we have."

"We've made a bond," said Donna. "We're like a little family."

And families that play together, tend to stay together.