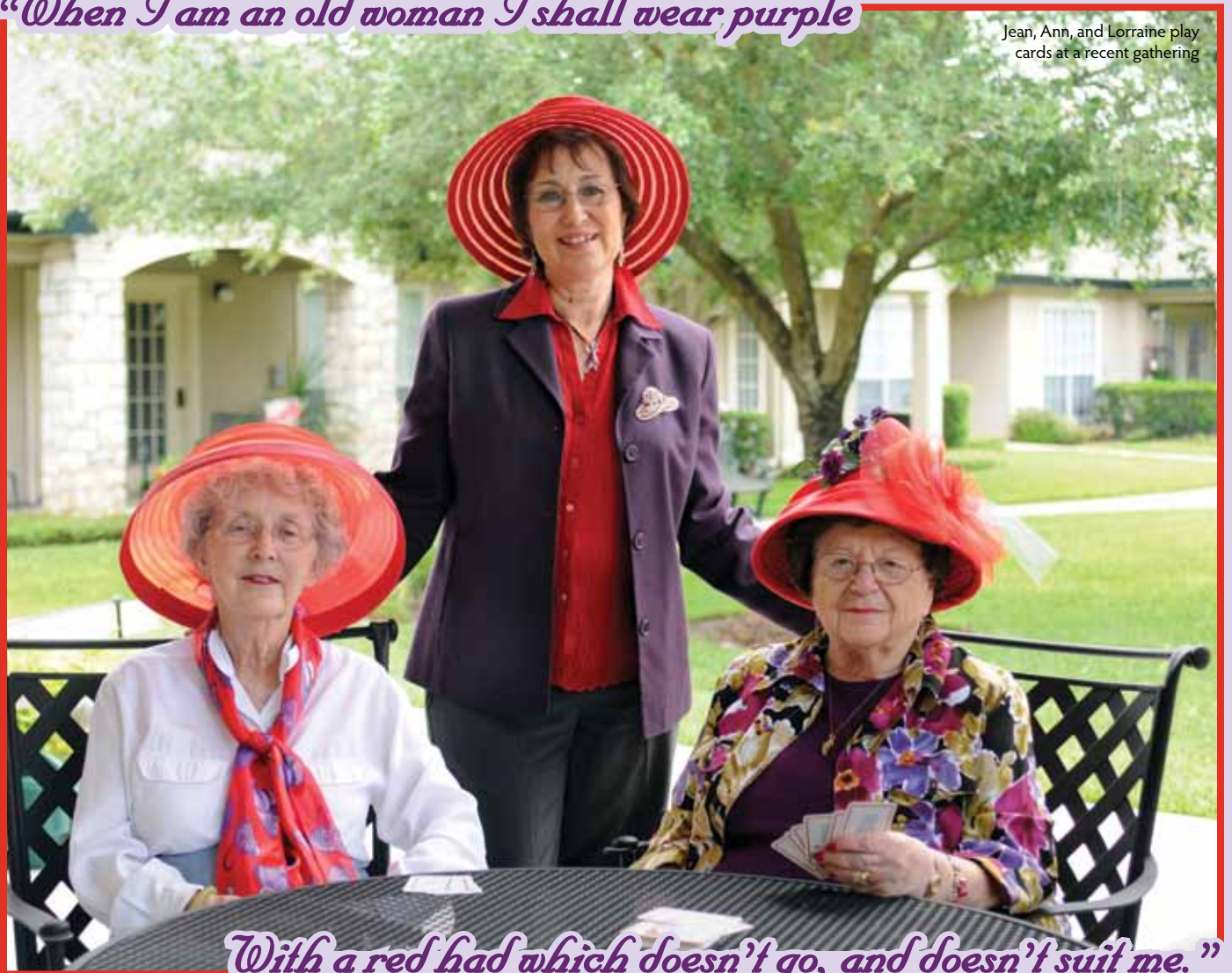


The Red Hat Society

CELEBRATING THE “OVER 50” LADIES OF KATY

“When I am an old woman I shall wear purple

Jean, Ann, and Lorraine play cards at a recent gathering



With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.”

Written by Noreen Stavinoha
Photography by Suzanne Box

Those opening lines from the poem “Warning” by Jenny Joseph were the inspiration for the Red Hat Society’s choice of costume. Exalted Queen Mother, Sue Ellen Cooper of Fullerton, California started what would become an international phenomenon in 1998 when she and a few friends began meeting for lunch regularly in red hats and purple dresses. The group’s stated purpose was to “connect socially and emotionally and support each other in the pursuit of vital, active living through middle age and beyond.” The sense of fun and friendship, not to mention the red hats, caught the attention of other women everywhere they went, and they wanted to know how they could join.

The publicity generated by that group soon spurred interest across the country, and eventually spread beyond our borders to more than twenty-five foreign countries. It's the world's largest social networking community for women 50 and beyond, with 30,000 chapters. Katy has at least two chapters of Red Hatters who are dedicated to celebrating the four "Fs": fun, friendship, freedom, and fulfillment.

The Do Little Ladies

Ann Shafel started the Do Little Ladies Red Hatters at the retirement community of Carriage Inn, where there are currently twelve ladies who have joined hands and hearts to celebrate life. Shafel is also the oldest member, but she has the spirit and appearance of someone much younger.

Red Hat Society chapters don't have traditional officers. The leader is designated Queen instead of president, and if there is another officer it might be treasurer to keep track of dues, if they have them. The Do Little Ladies don't have dues, so no treasurer is needed. However, Bettie Muckleroy is considered second in command and is chief recruiter and planner.

The group has assumed the responsibility of welcoming new residents when they arrive at Carriage Inn, and Muckleroy invites the women to join the Do Little Ladies for one of their lunches. A couple of hours of get-acquainted food, conversation, and laughter (and gentle persuasion by Muckleroy) are enough to bring most of them into the fold.

Socializing Among Groups

It isn't unusual for two Red Hat groups to get together for lunch, and the Carriage Inn group often meets with the La De Da Ladies from the Sealy/Bellville area. They take turns being hostesses, and they choose a different restaurant each month, but will go back to ones they especially like. One restaurant owner decorated their reserved table with red and purple in their honor.

"Our transportation to and from lunch is always the Carriage Inn



limousine," says Muckleroy, "and who wouldn't like to go to lunch in a limousine?"

The Do Little Ladies are looking into expanding their sphere of influence by volunteering somewhere. Hospitals take note: They love the notion of being surrogate grandmas and rocking those newborns. Whatever their final project turns out to be, they're belying the "do little" in their name.

Carriage Inn Activities Director, Danielle Harris, is a Pink Hat member of the group. Pink Hatters are under fifty years of age, so they don't qualify to wear a red hat. That just shows how open-minded these women are. It's not an exclusive club, but a strong sisterhood.

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Bettie Muckleroy is second in command for the Do Little Ladies and is responsible for recruiting and planning



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KT Classic Chicks

At about the same time the Do Little Ladies began, in another part of town Carol Pless became the founder and Queen of the KT Classic Chicks, a Red Hat Chapter of a totally different stripe. Her group, 40 members strong, has no real organization to it. They do something together about once a month, but with no set date. Whenever a member gets an idea for a fun place to go, she contacts Pless and the word goes out about when and where to meet for whatever it is. They have visited the castle in Bellville, gone to the dinner theater in Columbus, visited Brenham, and spent the day in Gruene, to mention a few of their adventures.

"We're a very dysfunctional group," jokes Pless, "but we're very close. We're like family."

These two groups provide an example of just how free each chapter of Red Hatters is to create its own version of the sisterhood.

Red Hatters have been featured in national magazines such as Newsweek, Good Housekeeping, and Women's Day, and in newspapers across the country. Last year there was even "HATS! The Musical" at Harrahs Resort & Casino, in Las Vegas. Conventions of Red Hat ladies have gathered in Orlando, FL, Grand Rapids, MI, Savannah GA, and London, England.

Ever conscious of health issues affecting women over 50, the Red Hat Society, Inc. has joined the American Heart Association's "Go Red For Women" campaign. For more information on the society, visit redhatsociety.com. **KM**

NOREEN STAVINOHA is a Katy resident who enjoys writing about interesting people.