

A Chapter Success Story: Chapter VA, Irvine, California, Strengthens Chapter, Avoids Disbanding

by Gayle Meltzer, Past President, Arizona State Chapter

New initiates and transfers, project recipients, fundraisers, social events, informal get-togethers and a shared love for P.E.O. have created a dynamic, exciting, healthy and fun P.E.O. environment for Chapter VA, Irvine, California.

However, that wasn't always the case. Twenty-three years ago when Chapter VA met to elect officers, the nominating committee reported they had been unable to find a candidate for president. Many of the charter members had held office and were advancing in age, including several in their late 70s. In 1988, Irvine was a young, rapidly growing city with new industry and business. The chapter had initiated younger members and accepted unaffiliates; however, many of these new members or their husbands had transferred to other communities as they advanced up the corporate ladder.

Possibly, the first P.E.O. chapter family meeting was held that election night. The members were determined they would keep Chapter VA alive, active and growing. Disbanding was not an option! Irvine needed a night chapter for those career women and young mothers who could not attend a day meeting. Tears flowed while chapter members searched their consciences, each asking herself if she could do more for her chapter. Finally, an early initiate who worked fulltime and had recently given birth to a baby stepped forward to accept the presidency. She only asked for the help and



Jane Mullen, organizer, presided for the organization of the California's 562nd chapter, June 24, 1980. Lucille Titman, who held the consent to select a charter list, read a brief history of the chapter comprised of 21 dimitting members and three initiates. **Members are pictured, first row from left:** Sharon Brubaker, Geraldine Davis, Martha Blixt, Betty Jo Cowling, Lucille Titman, Helen Randolph, Susan Wehmüller **Second row:** Sue Cochran, Margaret Pitcher, Mildred Rich, Faith Webster, Laura Macy, Margaret Cable, Robyn Covey, Jane Mullen **Third row:** Patricia Gorden, Dorothy Shanks, Judith Kincaid, Evelyn Marley, Louise Fisher, Terry Young, Susan Richard, Linda Adams, Dianne Lochemy, Carol Schmidt, Marilyn Harvey

dedication of her sisters for the coming year.

Reflecting recently on that evening, charter member Terry Young, shared, "We had to make a decision. Were we going to be an active chapter or not? Over the next few months, we charted our course. We ran with it and haven't stopped!"

During the ensuing years, Chapter VA members have worked together to strengthen and grow their chapter. Experienced unaffiliates and new initiates offered creative ideas and enthusiasm as well as provided a source of family and friends to consider for membership.



VA members celebrate their chapter's 30th birthday

Today at nearly 31 years of age, the chapter is 53 members strong. Many of the living charter members are still active in the chapter. An early initiate into the chapter shares that she loved becoming part of a group that supports education for women

while also promoting friendship and support of one another. She was so impressed with the age range of the members and that the chapter did not have cliques. This range continues today with members from 30 to 90 years of age.

With growth comes the need for counseling and mentoring. Chapter VA conducts in-depth preacceptance and postinitiation counseling for all new initiates and transfers into the chapter. While the chapter membership has stabilized as the Irvine area has matured, all members are aware of the need to educate and mentor their new sisters to ensure their active and continued participation in chapter life.

Chapter members believe a key to the chapter's success is the fun P.E.O. brings into their lives. A relatively new member always tells visitors, "This is a fun chapter." With the fun comes fundraising. This is a creative effort and is enthusiastically pursued by all VA sisters. In the early years, the efforts included holiday boutiques, rummage sales and a cookbook. A vintage tea was expanded to a luncheon fashion show featuring vintage fashions from the collections of Norma Vallee, a former California state chapter historian. As the demand for luncheon tickets grew, raffle baskets and door prizes enhanced the proceeds. The chapter treasury and resulting donations to P.E.O. projects grew while establishing P.E.O. as a presence in the community.

Recently, the chapter borrowed an idea from a Record article and held an auction of gently used purses spearheaded by an awesome VA member auctioneer. From that auction came the idea for an accessories party. Chapter members invited friends and family to participate in a live auction and sale of accessories ranging from jewelry to purses to decorative home items, all donated by chapter members.

Light desserts and beverages were served. The success was overwhelming and members looked forward to a second event in the future. The funds from one event were barely tallied before the chapter members were off with another effort, including an annual fall sale of holiday greens.

Adding to the fun have been socials including a barbeque, holiday parties, soup and luncheon events, and the annual chapter birthday party. Many of these social events become mini-fundraisers, too. A "Hot August Night" featured drinks and appetizers while Neil Diamond music played in the background. At a Veteran's Day

party everyone wore red, white and blue and music from the 40s was played. All veterans and veteran family members were recognized. Often chapter members will meet informally at a local coffee shop for beverages or meet for dinner prior to a movie or other outing.

Today, at nearly 31 years and counting, Chapter VA continues to flourish and all members look forward to decades of success!

Note: Gayle Meltzer was a member of Chapter VA, Irvine, California, for approximately 12 years prior to moving to Arizona. 🌸

Inspiration for Struggling Chapters

by Debbie Clason, Coordinator of Membership Development

If your chapter is struggling, your state, province or district board officers are there to help you. That's what Chapter Y, Lafayette, Louisiana, discovered in October 2007 when the Louisiana State Chapter stepped in to help revitalize them.

The chapter routinely couldn't make quorum, hadn't initiated anyone in several years and was having difficulty finding new volunteers to serve in leadership positions. "Our spunk was missing," Gilda McBride, Chapter Y's current president, said. Resources from the Louisiana State Chapter put Chapter Y back on the road to recovery:

Family Meeting. A Louisiana State Chapter board member visited Chapter Y to discuss the state of the chapter and to help members decide what they wanted to do. "They told us we could either disband or take the ball and run with it," Gilda said. "It really woke the members up." Gilda, who had been a P.E.O. for more than 17 years, volunteered to serve as president for the first time.

Chapter Survey. Chapter Y members took a chapter survey to help determine likes and dislikes. Gilda chose from several surveys the state board sent her and added some of her own questions. The answers helped Chapter Y set attainable goals and determine social activities.

Goal Setting. After watching a motivational and challenging DVD suggested by the state board officer, Chapter Y did some goal setting. Members have a personal goal to nurture each other better by contacting a sister every month and a chapter goal to double their contributions to the projects. Goals are displayed on a sign that sits on the table at each meeting as a reminder.

Since the family meeting in 2007, Chapter Y has initiated 18 new members! Sisters enjoy a nurturing, enthusiastic environment that extends beyond their meetings. In addition to the great mentoring they received from their state board, Gilda says the chapter employs the following strategies to keep them moving forward:

1. They embrace the state convention theme each year.
2. They participate in state chapter challenges.
3. They attend convention, take notes and bring convention resources back to the chapter.
4. They intentionally make meetings fun.
5. They communicate with every member on a regular basis.

Above all, Gilda recommends you start slowly and keep it simple. "Chapter Y has survived many challenges and is looking forward to the future. We are alive!"

To learn more about any of the resources mentioned here, please contact your state, province or district organizer or membership committee.