

# The Gift and Secret of Sisterhood

by Susan Demler Catalano, Organizer, New York State Chapter

New York State Chapter is constantly being called upon to revitalize its chapters. Just as New York grapples with its ever-worrisome economy, employment woes, foreclosures and large number of citizens leaving our state, this reality has trickled down to P.E.O. Our board of five travels this long, thin state looking after chapters large and small, and our tireless membership committee reaches out to mentor as many as possible. When

someone shares that a chapter may be considering disbandment, our answer is: "Not on our watch!"

As state organizer, my travels on behalf of New York P.E.O.s have revealed something else to me: New York State, regardless of membership numbers, is a wonderful place to be a P.E.O. I'm proud to say that the New York State P.E.O. Chapters, from A to CO, understand the true meaning of sisterhood and loving concern so unique to our progressive organization.

Regardless of how many new ideas are put forth through workshops, seminars or the P.E.O. website, something unique happens which shows the best ideas have been with us all along and there is no special secret to revitalizing membership: the secret is Sisterhood. After four years of board service, nothing has moved me more than what Chapter AO in Syracuse has accomplished over the course of the last year: Chapter AO made a joint and selfless decision to share a priceless gift with

Chapter AD, Syracuse, New York, (seen here) was revitalized thanks to the sisterly care of Syracuse Chapter AO



Chapter AD, also in Syracuse—the gift of its own sisters.

Membership committee member Missy Shipman of Chapter AO had been following Chapter AD as its mentor for well over a year. When she took the assignment, she made it clear she would not leave AO, but she was happy to care for AD. The journey has not been without peril. From time to time, we found ourselves faced with disappointment. Then, seemingly out of the blue, Missy shared her “DREAM BIG” idea with me and with her chapter. Missy reflected that AD was a dear group of sisters, who loved the Sisterhood and valued the heritage—but the day-to-day tasks and paperwork were becoming overwhelming. AO, on the other hand, was growing by leaps and bounds. In its effort to share the Sisterhood—AO was outgrowing meeting spaces and holding back on membership because its numbers were too large.

Missy approached her chapter and earnestly inquired if some of AO’s members might thoughtfully consider lateral transfer to Chapter AD. She said “This expression of loving concern for our sisters in AD would be a great gift to our sisterhood. Chapter AD needs new energy in the form of sisters who are able and interested in serving as officers and eager to grow the chapter’s membership.” Missy worked with Chapter AD to change their meeting time from a weekday afternoon to a Saturday morning, with hopes that the option of a weekend meeting and the desire to assist another chapter might appeal to a very specific group of AO’s members. Missy believed that

by organizing a voluntary transfer of five or six members, AD would revitalize and AO would again have room to grow.

What happened next is yet another mystery of our sisterhood. The sisters initially targeted for transfer made the decision to stay with AO. In an interesting twist, seven younger women took the leap of faith. These professional women in their 20s, 30s and 40s with a sprinkling of 50s – 70s on top, were intrigued by the idea of joining a much smaller chapter of a very different generation. They were able to make the commitment because of the shift to a weekend morning—no longer a conflict in a working woman’s schedule. Anna Kudak, Ph.D., coauthor of “What Happy Women Do” writes: “Bridging the generation gap not only increases the friend pool, but it also expands and supports mental well-being. Friendships with older and younger people help broaden your perspective,

in Syracuse. Now, each chapter will grow because of AO’s sisterly care. They know the secret: sisterhood.

I simply cannot imagine the gift AO has given AD. In New York, this kind of a happening is unique and exemplary. The change has come about rapidly and there will continue to be a learning curve as, almost overnight, AD doubled in size and became a chapter with an age range of 25-101. Each member is truly young at heart. The infusion of new members brought to AD an energy it had been seeking for years. AO was a chapter which didn’t just talk about doing something—they did something! Who would have expected anything less from P.E.O?

One might question if an infusion of fresh young professional women used to implementing change rapidly might upset the quiet balance of a small and aging chapter. Not in this story. The seven women who transferred value intergenerational

## Chapter AO made a joint and selfless decision to share a priceless gift with Chapter AD, also in Syracuse— the gift of its own sisters.

which in turn allows you to have compassion and empathy in your day-to-day life.” Whether with older or younger women, intergenerational fellowship connects you to where you have been and where you are going.

Chapter AO is a shining star in New York State—not just because it is flourishing, but because it understands that by suggesting a new meeting day and time for Chapter AD and providing some of its own sisters, AO has the opportunity to share P.E.O. with a greater number of women

fellowship and understand that careful consideration of feeling so integral to our organization. In fact, after their third meeting as a group just today, I received a picture and a brief note that said: “There is lots of work to be done—but we’ll take baby steps and honor these lovely ladies.” The email was signed in her usual way: “With a glad heart, Missy”—one of the seven transfers, and the new president of AD, Syracuse, New York. 🌸