



Club Helped Widow Make New Friends

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In 1989, Lorraine Cole had been widowed eight years and, although she didn't mind being alone, she missed doing things with other people. When her husband was

alive, most of their friends were couples. After he died, the couples continued to want to include Lorraine in activities, but "I felt like a third wheel."

She realized she needed to find single friends, but where? "I didn't want to go to bars," says Lorraine, who was 60 at the time. "I was a school secretary and everyone around me was younger."

The singles clubs were geared to people less than half her age, and those groups mostly focused on dating. She wasn't as interested in finding a new husband as she was finding new friends.

She spotted a notice in the newspaper for widows and widowers to meet at a restaurant happy hour. That was the beginning of a group that "has changed my life," she says. Out of this gathering grew a social club for widows or widowers called WOW, which will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in November. Lorraine was one of the founding members.

When WOW was young, "we used to have potlucks in people's homes, but we're too big for that now." Membership tops 350. Instead of a happy hour and potluck once in a while, there are several activities each month. The group's October newsletter includes three walks at different places each week, dance lessons, a "Movie & Meal Group," a dining-out event, a luncheon, a mixer, a Halloween party, as well as a happy hour. WOW also offers discounted trips to members, plus there are group rates for theater and music events. Different subgroups have developed based on interests, such as bridge. That's where Lorraine met her companion of four years, Ron.

When widows or widowers "re-couple," they generally remain members of WOW. But the organization continues to outreach to single seniors, Lorraine says. WOW has created special events primarily for singles (or "solos" as they call them).



The group welcomes new members all the time. There's a \$25 membership fee per year, plus proof of widow/widower status is required. Usually new members have been without their spouse for a while before feeling ready to socialize.

"Everyone handles it differently," she says. "And if anyone wants to talk about what they're going through as a widow or widower, there are a lot of people around who have been through it." She recalls one newly widowed woman to whom she said, "Some day, you will be happy again." The woman said that she didn't believe that was possible, "but a few years later, she was remarried and very happy."

Lorraine says that the greatest value from WOW for her has been building a network of friends. "I'm now so busy socially that when my family (son, daughter, three grandsons and six great-grandchildren) want to get together, my daughter says that she has to check with my schedule first because I'm the busiest!"

To become a member of WOW, to receive a copy of the monthly newsletter or for additional information, see www.wowsd.org, or call Marie at (619) 461-7652.