

Dallas Morning News - Neighbors and friends

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Plano newcomers club gives women a place to feel at home

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The Newcomer Friends of Greater Plano is not your usual newcomers club.



Photo: JUAN GARCIA/DMN

At a recent meeting of the Newcomer Friends of Greater Plano, members hear a presentation by Carole Maxwell of Carole's Confectionery Creations. The group, which has no age or geographic limits, offers activities such as wine tastings and crafts.

Its name doesn't exactly fit.

Not all members are new residents.

And there are no geographic boundaries and no age limits.

Yet the friendships run deep.

"The group is so warm and inviting," said board member Joanne Buck, who moved to Plano from Maryland. "The women make me feel so comfortable."

Second vice president Dee Bridgewater, a 12-year resident of Frisco, said she also enjoys the camaraderie.

"I met a whole new group of friends who are smart, talented and fun to be with," Ms. Bridgewater said.

The club took root in 2001 with the intention of welcoming the newest woman to Plano.

Today, the group does much more.

More than 200 members have an endless choice of activities: monthly potluck lunches and dinners, movies, wine tastings, bridge, bunco, needlework and quilting.

The club offers annual scholarships for members' children.

Programs include "Helping Hands" to offer local information, "Caring Thoughts" to reach out to someone who's ill and "Community Outreach" to help the less fortunate.

A more unusual program drew former president Genevieve McCreary to the group.

"I was new to Plano back in 2002 and saw a notice in the paper about a program featuring the president of the Stuntwomen's Association," Ms. McCreary said.

Karleen Hoffmann, who heard about Newcomers from a retired teacher, said she feels the club is "for women in transition who have moved, retired or come to a different point in their life."

Ms. Hoffmann also emphasized how the group includes members from different races, religions and cultures. Single and married women are welcome, and some working women also find time to be involved.

"It's a real plus meeting such an interesting group of women," said Suzanne O'Malley, who joined about seven years after moving to Plano.

Susan Powrie said the group is her "social universe." The native New Yorker moved with her husband to the area from San Diego to start a home-based business.

"I couldn't stand the quiet after a while," Mrs. Powrie added about working at home after a corporate job.

Many members have moved often. And some may not be here for long.

Carol Ann Kiner moved here from Washington, D.C., with her family. She helped with the club's constitution and bylaws.

"We wanted the business side of the organization to be very professional," she said. "We take care of each other, but we also take care of the business."

At the helm this year is Sharon DeFalco.

"I can't stress enough how inclusive we are, and how we are open to all women," Ms. DeFalco said, adding that membership continues to grow.

Thirty-seven guests showed up at the January meeting.

While the activities are great, most members will tell you that friendships matter most.

As Ms. McCreary commented, "Our club is a success in part because of the variety of cultures, personalities and experiences represented in our membership. I love the stories we share when we meet."

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