

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF MIDLAND CHASE(3)

October 2008 to March 2009

The Informal Change of Insignia took place on Friday 21st November 2008 at the Drayton Manor Park conference suite. Tamworth member Pauline Wright was installed as the new Regional President and we said a sad goodbye to immediate past President Heather Stern. Pauline was determined to bring Barbados to Midland Chase as she and many other members had been unable to attend the Barbadian conference. The banqueting suite was duly decorated by Tamworth Club in suitable style with Palm trees and some members wore exotic outfits and were escorted by suitably attired pirates! We all 'walked the plank' into the banqueting suite to enjoy what was a thoughtfully developed menu with many Barbadian flavours. It was a night to remember and to welcome our new Regional President Pauline.

Six clubs have contributed to this our third Newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading the snippets of news and hope eventually to have all clubs participating.

BILSTON CLUB

An award winning nurse who inspired Bob Geldof to raise millions of pounds through Live Aid came to speak to a large audience from across the Midland Chase Region. Claire Bertshinger was the central figure in Michael Buerk's news report on the famine in Ethiopia.

The report, broadcast in 1984, prompted the former rock star to put together the Band Aid charity recording. Claire Bertshinger spoke to 200 people at Coven Village Hall. As a young nurse, Claire ran two feeding centres in Ethiopia. She was charged with the task of deciding who would be lucky enough to receive food, knowing those she could not help and those who had little hope of survival. Claire has worked across the world spending time in Lebanon, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Kenya and Sudan.

CANNOCK AND DISTRICT

Cannock Club welcomed new member Betty Morgan. Betty is a director of a property management company. She was warmly welcomed by President Lakhwinder Thompson. Cannock members have supported the Dragon Boat event at Chasewater in August. The Club raised funds through this event for President Lakhwinder's charity, The Railway Children.

The Club prepared themselves for their forthcoming visit to the International Conference

in Barbados by holding a Caribbean flavoured evening for socialising, friendship and fun!

In August, the club was honoured to welcome International President Margaret Lobo who is a member of SI Perth, Western Australia.

During September the Club hi-lighted the work of the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the team of volunteers who keep the service going.

A garden party was held in support of two charities and the sum of £460 was raised and was divided between The Benevolent Fund and the Railway Children.

The Club applied for a grant through their local Cannock and District Council Local Members Initiative to enable them to purchase a laptop and equipment to enable them to make presentations and for use by visiting speakers to the Club.

Members are also busy knitting bears for optometrist Beverley Ricketts to take when she visits South Manilla. Beverley will also take spectacles for use by local people to be distributed during her two-week stay.

Members of Cannock Club provided numerous beautifully wrapped Christmas gifts for the women and children who are supported by the Pathways organisation which looks after victims of domestic violence. Donations from members also provided funding to provide a Christmas lunch at the Soup Kitchen in Mill Street. Members prepared, cooked and served a full Christmas meal for 50 people at the Soup Kitchen. The Cannock

Club was also delighted to make a contribution of £210 to this year's appeal 'Restoring Dignity, Securing a Future.'

Cannock Club also had a hand in providing 5000 items of school clothing which had been donated by Newlife Foundation, a charity superstore based in Cannock. Shirts, jumpers, trousers, polo shirts and many more basic essentials suitable for children of all ages. Before any of these items could be given away, every item had to be de-labelled. Soroptimists were amongst the volunteers who have worked to de-label 5000 items of clothing. Parents were invited to visit the store bringing with them up to two standard-sized carrier bags to fill with this clothing!

Governor Simon Cartwright of Featherstone Prison gave a talk on all aspects of prison management and duties. The prisoners are expected to work, giving many of them the opportunity to learn skills which can lead to employment on their release.

President Lakhwinder welcomed 105 guests to the 54th annual dinner. Ashley Blake, Midlands Today presenter was the guest speaker. Ashley spoke of his love of journalism and how much he owed to his Mother who had always supported him in the development of his career.

STAFFORD CLUB

An evening of mixed emotions was held by the Club in October. Past member Margeth Lingwood had been inspired to create a piece of embroidery from the scenes she witnessed from the dreadful fires that occurred on Cannock Chase in 1976. Margeth developed the picture with a mixture of traditional embroidery stitches and techniques including quilting and padding. The picture combines dark rich velvet and suede with brightly coloured chiffon and organza with heavy stitching and beads. Margeth was a founder member of the Staffordshire branch of the Embroiderer's Guild. She died in 2006 aged 91 years. The embroidery can now be seen in Staffordshire County Council's visitor centre.

Katherine Carder (daughter of President Judith Carder) performed a dare devil stunt by undertaking the worlds highest bungee jump from the Blourkrana Bridge in South Africa (700 ft) to support Project Sierra. Kathryn was in South Africa for three weeks as part of her veterinary training and decided to take the opportunity to fund raise. She raised £300 for Project Sierra. A full-page profile of President Judith Carder was published in the August edition of the

Staffordshire Newsletter. It tells of Judith's many interests and how she manages to put family first but also includes her love of music around other needs. Judith held a very successful garden party at her home in Stafford during August and raised £628 which was divided between three charities: Project Sierra, Staffordshire Blind and the Oak Tree Farm Rural Project.

In November the Club welcomed Panto dame Richard Westcott who makes his own costumes and jewellery. Richard demonstrated his make-up techniques and recounted many amusing stories about his career.

Eight Stafford members took to the Street of the town centre armed with collecting boxes to collect donations for Staffordshire Women's Aid. The Stafford Club have supported the project for the past 15 years.

Stafford Club held a service of thanksgiving at St Chad's Church to celebrate 70 years of Soroptimist activity in the town of Stafford. A meal at the Swan Hotel followed.

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS CLUB

During the last part of the 25th anniversary year activities were again focussed on some of the traditional with some new activities in the Club.

October saw the Coffee Morning which again raised funds for the Air Ambulance. The Candle Lighting was again a sight for sore eyes as candles were lit to represent all 125 countries actively taking part in Soroptimist activities.

A delightful Christmas evening with delicious food was held at the home of Mary Sotheran, Secretary to the Club. This was organised as a Jacobs supper and a good time was had by all.

A Big Quiz night was a successful activity and raised around £300 for the Click Sergeant Children's cancer appeal. The 25th anniversary Celebration supper is to be held on 31st March and is to take the theme of Black and Bling! Our speaker Roger Trimbell may have his eyes opened to see our members decked out in all of their sparklies!

SUTTON COLDFIELD CLUB

President Gill Bailey welcomed past Regional President Angela Reynolds who spoke on 'women's health - and some myths and legends.' Angela's talk was based largely on her personal experiences as both a nurse and a teacher. The talk covered many areas from headaches, midwifery and health education to young people in schools nowadays.

The 63rd annual dinner was held at The Terrace Restaurant in Brownhills. Members were reminded of the many activities during their year from an Antiques event in aid of local charities to a record of 500 shoe boxes from members and friends to send to victims of Chernobyl nuclear accident. There had been involvement in the domestic violence unit and co-operation with the Salvation Army who run the unit. The guest speaker was Lucie Martin who works for the charity Water Aid, which is also supported by the Club. Lucie spoke of her time in India where Water Aid has made a difference to the lives of many people.

At a supper meeting to mark Human Rights Day Mr Glyn Constantine and his wife Mrs Angela Constantine were welcomed as guests. Mr Constantine works as a gynaecologist and his wife as a nurse. During the past four years they have made fortnightly visits to the Kamali Mission Hospital in Uganda, one of only five hospitals in the country specialising in the treatment of vaginal fistula, an extremely distressing and debilitating condition which affects one in 40 Ugandan women, with 3,500 cases being reported every year. Two per cent of women die in childbirth. Repair surgery and aftercare nursing is difficult and not well-paid so few African doctors and nurses train for the specialism, preferring to work in more complex and financially rewarding areas of medicine.

A Burns night supper was held in January and entertainment was provided by the Birmingham branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. An enjoyable night was had by all.

TAMWORTH CLUB

SI Tamworth celebrated World Peace day with a special service held in Tamworth Parish Church. More than 100 children attended the service from local schools. The children contributed to the service by giving vocal performances. Tamworth Ladies' choir also sang. 12 doves were released at the end of the service. All schools have been invited to take part in a competition in painting or poetry on the theme of Peace.

Fashion, Style and a touch of glamour helped to raise more than £2000 for the Tamworth Special Needs Nursery at the event held at The Tower Suite, Drayton Manor. The fashion show also featured catwalk models with unique hair styles by Rage hair salon of Tamworth. More than 200 guests attended.

Members took the opportunity to learn how to Line Dance instead of having a speaker at their meeting.

Tamworth went back to Georgian days when Mr John S White came along to talk as a Georgian butler. He dressed in authentic uniform and laid a dining table exactly as it would have been laid in a rich household in mid 18th century. An excellent meal followed the talk

which was served 20th century style by Soroptimist Tamworth members.

Professor Ian Booth who is the Leonard Parsons of Paediatrics and Child Health and Dean of Medicine at the University of Birmingham came to speak on behalf of Wellchild. He explained to members about his work as a Gastro-enterologist and as a Genetic Epidermiologist. The majority of the club had little knowledge of this but Prof. Booth explained just what was involved in the work. Rev Denise Burgess was supported in her fund-raising sky dive. She did a 6000 ft freefall after jumping out of an airplane at 12,000 ft to raise money to help keep a cash strapped group of Parishes in the Mease Valley open for worship.

A Knit and Natter day was held recently to make garments for third world children. Lots of garments and squares for blankets were completed for this project organised by the PAC.

WOLVERHAMPTON CLUB

A picture has recently been unearthed and published in the local Express and Star newspaper, showing the laying of the foundation stone for Soroptimist Home for the Elderly in 1978. The management committee were extremely thrilled to see this picture. The home has developed over the years and anyone who would like details can visit the Wolverhampton Club website on www.soroptimist-house.org.uk.

Wolverhampton member Marjorie Wedge is a shining example of a woman who had the vision to see the need within the community for affordable care for men and women who could no longer care for themselves and/or had no one to care for them.

The early days of the project saw a need for funding and it was Marjorie Wedge, with the support of club members, who negotiated the mortgage which was no mean feat 40 years or so ago. Marjorie negotiated the purchase of the land and the building contracts. Although no longer the chair of the management committee, Mrs Wedge keeps an active eye on the home and is a regular visitor.

More recently Marjorie Wedge has been instrumental in the setting up of the Wolverhampton Bereavement service, a one-stop-shop where bereaved people can get the help and support they need, notify those who need to know, arrange probate, and not have to trail around from one place to another. This is a fantastic initiative under the auspices of the council but Mrs Wedge's brainchild. Marjorie listens to what people need, sees beyond the immediate problem and is forward thinking and assertive in fighting for the rights and needs of those less able than herself. This tribute to Marjorie Wedge epitomises Soroptimism and the ideals for which it stands. 'the joy of achievement, the dignity of service, high ethical standards etc' Marjorie Wedge, a woman before her time who worked in a man's world, raised three sons and served her community.

The above piece is a tribute written by Ann Dawson.

