

## President Alison's message

### Inside Out and Outside In



BROMLEY AND CROYDON's Interclub lunch on May 18 was a splendid occasion – not only an excellent presentation on “How global heating affects women in fragile and conflict-affected countries” but also a real celebration as we congratulated Peggy Duffin on her 50 years as a Soroptimist.

Peggy gave an amusing speech. It was interesting to see that though some things have changed in the past half-century (we are certainly a lot less formal now, which suits me well) the Soroptimist Vision and Mission have not – we are still standing up for women and girls in this country and around the globe.

I do hope that many of you are able to attend the June regional meeting at the new venue (see page 02).

Our keynote speaker will be Dr Rolande Degazon-Johnson, an Executive and Career coach for, among many other prominent organisations, UNICEF, FAO and the WHO. Roli's interactive presentation is intriguingly entitled "How can we save them?". Then Chris Corless, Federation Director of Finance, will give us an update on, the Strategic Plan and answer any questions we may have. The final morning session will be a performance of one of Alan Bennett's Talking Heads monologues: “Soldiering On”, by Dot Pullan (originally enacted by Stephanie Cole). I am sure you will agree this is an attractive and engaging programme.

As we no longer have any surplus from the registration fee to raise monies for the National Benevolent Fund, I am planning a (Re) Gift Shop. The idea is that all those attending bring a donation of an unwanted but “good as new” gift (worth say £5-£10) and then hopefully purchase something in exchange. Even those not joining us can contribute and no member need put her hand into her pocket without receiving something in return. Also recycling goods – win, win!

I am pleased to confirm that Roxanne St Clair, SI Croydon, has been nominated as Vice-President but we do have vacancies on our Executive for next year so members are invited to seriously consider whether they might take on the role of secretary or treasurer – both these vital posts becoming vacant at this year's AGM, now on September 14.

I am looking forward to Eastbourne's 70th anniversary lunch on June 01, by which time I will have visited all 11 clubs in the region, some more than once. To meet members I've not seen before and learn about the wonderful work you are all doing to “stand up for women and girls” has been the major highlight of my year. Thank you everyone for your hard work.

YOURS IN FRIENDSHIP, ALISON DRISCOLL

## What's in this month's newsletter?



Soroptimists embrace Civic Duties, pages 02 and 03.



Region hosts visit from Cambodian Soroptimists, seen here on a sightseeing day in London, page 04.



Taking up the challenge to knit 90 Forget-Me-Nots, page 04.



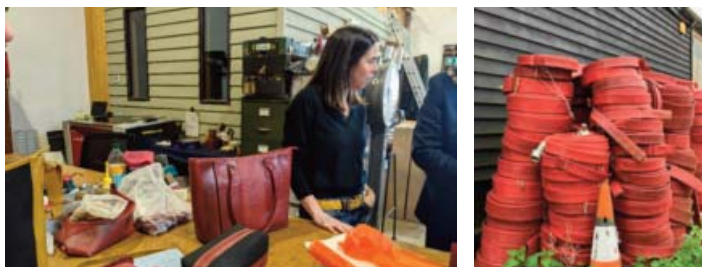
## A year like no other



Visit to the Romney Hythe & Dymchurch Railway along with other local mayors for a 'behind the scenes tour' and lunch.



Belinda and Suzanna with Gary Cooke, Chairman of Kent County Council, and his wife at a dinner in Rochester on March 23, 2024.



Visit with other local Mayors for a visit to Elvis & Kresse, who make beautifully designed bags from decommissioned fire hoses and other reclaimed materials.



Attending the Mayoral Investiture in Winchelsea on Sunday, March 31, 2024.

SI FOLKESTONE'S BELINDA Walker has reached the end of her year serving as Mayor of Folkestone, and here shares her memories.

The year has been one like no other I have experienced.

I moved to Folkestone at the end of 1995 to start a new job as a Speech and Language Therapist in the community and thought I would stay a year or so. I retired from the job last year, after 27 years. Retirement didn't mean putting my feet up as I was elected as Town Mayor by fellow councillors and have been involved in a whirlwind of activity.

The role of Mayor is varied, and I would sum it up as being like an ambassador for the town. I have had the opportunity to do so many things – I have met Princess Anne, attended a memorial service for Lord Boyce at Westminster Abbey and done many local events, including judging local allotment veg-growing, opening a new dining hall at a local school and speaking to school and college students about the mayoral role.

It was an incredible honour to be able to lay a wreath on behalf of the town on Remembrance Sunday and other events, such as our Canada service in July and William Harvey service in June. I have visited other towns, representing Folkestone, and have invited mayors from other areas here to showcase our wonderful town to them.

I have journeyed with my 'best of sisters' at SI Folkestone. Nearly every club member has been my consort at various events and the club was able to lay a wreath at the Remembrance Sunday service along with other service clubs this year.

We have been to so many interesting events – on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, at a farm where they make stylish bags out of old firehoses, and various church and civic services. A fascinating and unique year which I have been glad to share with my very supportive club.

BELINDA WALKER, MAYOR OF FOLKESTONE



Finally, Belinda's 1940's Tea Dance Party a fitting finale to a wonderful year as Mayor of Folkestone.

### Closing Date

for the next edition of SEE News  
Monday, June 24, 2024

2024 Closing Dates are:

July 25; August 25; September 24;  
October 25; November 24; December 27.

Email your text and photographs to Patricia at  
pat.painting@btinternet.com 020 8668 2681

### Dates of the 2024 Saturday Region Meetings

June 22; September 14 (AGM note change of date)  
both to be held at the Holiday Inn, Rochester  
Maidstone Road, Rochester ME5 9SF

December 07 via ZOOM (to be confirmed)

### Proposed dates for 2025 Region Meetings

March 15; June 21; September 20



**Selsdon Primary School flourishes with generous stationery donations to help the Students be Equipped for Success!**  
All delivered by Croydon member Pat Dale



**Congratulations Keji and well deserved!**



SI CANTERBURY are overjoyed to let everyone know that Keji Moses, our President, has been elected as Sheriff of Canterbury.

Keji is the first ethnic minority woman to be elected to this post since the 1400s. Carol Reed BEM, one of our former presidents, has been chosen as Keji's escort.

During nomination speeches by city councillors in our beautiful Guildhall, Keji's reputation for always representing people less fortunate, supporting colleagues, patience and careful listening to all viewpoints was celebrated.

We wish President Keji the very best in her new appointment!

MARY ADAMS, SI CANTERBURY

## SI Sevenoaks programme update



DURING THE PAST year members of SI Sevenoaks have been busy raising funds for the education of women and girls in rural Africa (CAMFED), as well as for local charity Arts Without Boundaries.

Over the summer months we will be supporting Sevenoaks Women's Refuge and Dasghara Girls' College in West Bengal. Soroptimist Paramita Biswas, who founded the college, tells us that financial help towards their travelling expenses would be greatly appreciated by the students, who live in remote villages. We continue to enjoy weekly zoom conversations with the girls and would be glad to hear from members of other clubs in the region interested in participating.

We were hoping for fine weather for our main fundraising event on May 28, a coffee morning hosted by Sandie Higgs, but there was a lack of sunshine (see page 05).

PAULINE PAYNE, PRESIDENT, SI SEVENOAKS



SI SEVENOAKS PAST member Isobel White, who moved to Blackburn in April 2024, had left us with a donation for the South East Region President's charity.

Our Club Treasurer Margaret Nicholson took the opportunity of presenting the money to Regional President Alison Driscoll on May 28 at Sevenoaks' new members and fundraising coffee morning. Pictured are Margaret Nicholson, President Alison Driscoll and PAO Sandie Higgs.

SANDIE HIGGS, PAO SI SEVENOAKS



## Supporting Forget-Me-Not Medway during Dementia Action Week

THIS YEAR THE Dementia Action Week campaign was held from May 13-19. The focus being to bring the UK together to act on improving dementia diagnosis rates.

In Medway, Nucleus Arts invited people to take part in Forget-Me-Not Medway. This was a community project supporting dementia awareness. They provided a forget-me-not pattern and asked us to just make one or a hundred forget-me-nots.

It was an opportunity to be part of something big by making something tiny.

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists Jane and Stella Barnes accepted the challenge. They decided to make 90 forget-me-nots to also meet President Ruth's 90 challenge.

Each flower took 10 minutes to make and so the task took 15 hours of knitting to complete.

The hundreds and thousands of knitted, crocheted and paper forget-me-nots made by individuals and organisations from across Medway were displayed at the Halpern Gallery, Chatham, during May 16-29.

The simple arrangement has an extremely impressive impact when you see it laid out before you.

Visitors are invited to become a Dementia Friend ([dementiafriends.org.uk](http://dementiafriends.org.uk)) and help change people's perceptions of dementia and transform the way the nation thinks, acts and talks about the condition.

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE



## A Friendship Event at Hotel 63



PASSING THE FRIENDSHIP and hospitality baton to our Region (SISEE), we welcomed six Soroptimists from Phnom Penh (the only Soroptimist Club in Cambodia) who had been staying with members of SI Chester who had developed a great itinerary for them including visits to SI Rhyl, Liverpool and Chester. Their programme covered workshops on stress management, membership, from retention to new members, as well as exchanging information regarding local and Cambodian Programme Action activities, smattered with some great social events!

How did this all come about? A Chester Soroptimist visited Cambodia and made contact with the Club. Then Lewes Club member, Larisa Dorman-Gajic, made contact when travelling in Cambodia. A plan was hatched to host the visitors who were to spend from April 22-25 (their last few days) in London. They stayed in Camden with Larisa and the Gajic family who put together a London itinerary. Vera Gajic (SI Lewes) was instrumental in facilitating the visit along with her daughters, husband and sister.

On April 23, Hotel 63 were delighted to host an afternoon tea in the Board Room to hear first hand about the North West visit but more importantly the Programme Action they have been working on. It is quite incredible what they have been able to achieve. Conversation flowed with much laughter as we got to know each other.

Members from SISEE Clubs and London Clubs joined in the afternoon: Croydon Pat Dale and Roxanne St. Clair; East Grinstead Sue Edgar and Maureen Briggs; Lewes Vera Gajic and Larisa Dorman-Gajic, Greater London Barbara Diamant and Angela Elkohly. Allison Driscoll, the current SISEE President sent her apologies.

The next day the group had a full day sightseeing in Greenwich, the City and Southbank (see cover photo). Helen Byrne and Jane Slatter (Pinky) from St Albans joined Soroptimists from Lewes during the day and Molly Robinson from Greater London joined the group for an evening meal in a Camden Pub near where they were being hosted by Larisa. The Greater London Cub covered the cost of the Cambodians' meal and Lewes club gave £100 towards travel and food expenses.

We were inspired by the long list of projects the Phnom Penh Club is supporting or developing, including toilet building in rural schools and buying bicycles for rural malaria outreach workers. They have also been involved with the Soroptimist International President's education project in Cambodia. They are also supported by Clubs in Australia.

SUE EDGAR, SI EAST GRINSTEAD



## The Value of Friendship Links



ON MAY 08, MEDWAY and Maidstone Soroptimist Julia Search hosted a Zoom Get Together with four of our Friendship Link clubs. We were pleased that members from Heswall, Chaguanas, Osnabruck and Voorburg clubs were able to join for part or whole of the meeting.

It is always great when we all get together to share what each club is doing to improve the lives of women and girls throughout the world.

We heard from SI Voorburg about initial plans to mark 'Orange the World' working with partners, such as the social sofa project in Europe.

SI Heswall are busy this year as they celebrate 75 years of service to the community.

Whilst our newest Friendship link SI Chaguanas spoke of their work to produce a comic for schools on solar power. Also, in May as Membership month, we heard about those clubs who have successfully recruited new members.

Finally, we reflected on whether there is still value in Friendship Link clubs meeting this way.

There was unanimous support to continue and so we look forward to the next Get Together later in the year.

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE

## Sevenoaks' member Sandie hosts a coffee morning



SEVENOAKS MEMBERS WITH guests from Bromley and Tunbridge Wells clubs enjoyed a coffee morning at the home of Sevenoaks PAO Sandie Higgs on May 28.

Despite the absence of sunshine a pleasing turnout resulted in the raising of £310 for the local Refuge and the Dasghara Girls' College in West Bengal.

PAULINE PAYNE, SI SEVENOAKS

## A big welcome to Agatha



AT THE MEDWAY and Maidstone May club meeting, we had two reasons to celebrate with Agatha Okwudinka, who had recently become a member.

Agatha became a Soroptimist when she joined SI Apapa, Nigeria in 1999. She was club secretary and President during her time with the club. On moving to Kent, Agatha joined SI Canterbury and took over the presidency for 2022- 2023.

However, she then moved to live in the Medway Towns and so earlier this year, transferred her membership from Canterbury to Medway and Maidstone club.

Carol Infanti, Membership Officer welcomed Agatha by presenting her at the meeting with her new Medway and Maidstone club badge. In addition, Carol also awarded Agatha with her long service certificate from the Federation, for her 25 years of outstanding service as a Soroptimist. Well done Agatha.

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE

**Croydon Soroptimists gather to lay the foundation for Empowering Change in their Community for the year ahead. Let the Planning Commence!**





## Soroptimists Volunteer at Dandelion Time May Fayre



ON A BEAUTIFUL sunny Saturday in May, six members of Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists attended the Dandelion Time May Fayre in West Farleigh.

Members had agreed to help for the second year running and this year were asked to assist with running the two refreshment stalls.

They had made a range of cakes to sell, then helped set up and run the refreshment stalls. These stalls both proved to be popular and extremely busy throughout the day with the many visitors to the Fayre.

A total contribution of 29 hours was made by the Soroptimist members volunteering for Dandelion Time.

Dandelion Time is a Kent based charity that helps children with very challenging emotional issues, often resulting from adverse childhood experiences, such as domestic violence, abuse or neglect. They focus on the family as a whole unit, helping them effect change to create new beginnings and improve relationships.

We were pleased to receive the following message:

“Thank you and your brilliant Soroptimists for volunteering your time at the May Fayre this weekend. You were so vital in ensuring our refreshments and cake stall ran so smoothly, thank you all so much! We really appreciate you coming along, and I hope you had a brilliant day and a chance to experience the day.”

The support given by so many volunteers enabled Dandelion Time to put on an event which not only brought the community together but encapsulated what it is that makes Dandelion Time so very special.

They were certainly blessed with the weather, and it was wonderful to welcome so many Dandelion Time families on site and see them enjoying the Fayre and reuniting with their case workers and session volunteers.

It is understood that the May Fayre raised a fantastic £6,918 on the day and this amount could increase with sponsorship and match funding, so overall an enormous success and a lot of fun for all!

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY  
AND MAIDSTONE



## Croydon Club is 97 years old



AT THEIR MAY 23, meeting, the Croydon Soroptimists celebrated their 97th Anniversary with a talk on a serious issue from the Regional President Alison Driscoll.

A team is currently working on plans for the Centenary celebrations in May 2027.

## Canterbury Soroptimists and the Cathedral City's street furniture



IN THE CENTRE of Canterbury, in the bus station area, five large flower boxes were placed some time ago, probably to prevent taxis from parking badly. The planters languished full of weeds and debris until Canterbury Soroptimists who live nearby investigated and found out that the boxes belonged to KCC.

The SI members applied to the council for a Cultivation Licence. Once this was promised, three members cleared the planters of weeds early one Saturday morning. A couple of days later they planted them up with as many pollinating insect attracting plants as they could find, buy, or receive as donations. Result? The environment near Boots and the bus station has been improved.

Hopefully, local passersby will be cheered by this action and will not be tempted to throw their vapes, cigarette stubs or energy drink cans in the planters. We will keep you posted as to what happens next!

MEMBERS OF THE LAND AND SEA TEAM, CANTERBURY SOROPTIMISTS.



# Bromley and Croydon Annual Inter-Club Lunch



Ruth presenting Roxanne with the Region Vice-Presidents chain.

THE TWO CLUBS shared a very enjoyable lunch at Chelsfield Lakes Golf Centre, attended by over 40 people.

Paul Knox Clarke, the guest speaker, talked about the impact of global heating on women in fragile and conflicted countries, shocking us all by detailing how much more vulnerable women are in a climate emergency and outlining measures that need to be taken to mitigate some of the effects.

Ruth Healey, SIGBI President, was a guest and presented Peggy Duffin with a badge to mark fifty years of membership. Peggy treated us to a very nice amble down memory lane with stories of her years in Soroptimism.

Roxanne St Clair, member of SI Croydon, was inaugurated as Regional Vice-President by Ruth and given her chain of office.

Ruth also spoke to us about the impact of Soroptimism at international level and our role in United Nations fora.

Bromley and Croydon would like to thank all those who worked to make it such a successful event and the staff at Chelsfield for their excellent food and service. The raffle raised almost £300 for club charities.

CHRISTINE THOMAS, SI BROMLEY



Ruth Healey presenting Peggy with her 50 years badge.



Speaker Paul presented with a gift from Dinah, who also gave the vote of thanks.



Ruth with Region President Alison and Pat Dale



SI Sevenoaks members Wendy Metcalf, Sandie Higgs, President Pauline Payne and Jenny Webb, send congratulations to SI Bromley and SI Croydon on their successful Friendship Lunch.