

HISTORY AND HOPS

The Lost Art of Nursing

By **KATHERINE LACAZE**
For Seaside Signal

Melodie Chenevert became a museum owner and curator more or less by chance. She started collecting nursing memorabilia more than three decades ago, which led to her eventually opening the Lost Art of Nursing Museum in Tolovana Park.

"It was an accidental museum," Chenevert, who retired from nursing after serving more than 50 years, said during her History and Hops presentation at Seaside Brewery on Oct. 31.

In honor of Halloween, she showed up for the presentation decked out in an elaborate, handmade Queen of Hearts costume and wove metaphors related to Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass" into her discussion about the healthcare system, her experiences in nursing, and the history of her collection. Embodying characters, she said, has long been one of her methods for increasing the entertainment value of her presentations and workshops, which she has given in 49 states and numerous countries.

A lifelong passion

Chenevert received her diploma from Methodist-Kahler School of Nursing in Rochester, Minnesota, in 1963. The members of her tight-knit nursing class still gather to this day, having celebrated their 55th reunion last year.

Chenevert also has bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Washington-Seattle, with a clinical specialty in psychiatric nursing, and a master's in journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madi-



Katherine Lacaze

Melodie Chenevert, a retired registered nurse, author, and public speaker, gives a tour of her Lost Art of Nursing Museum in Tolovana Park. Chenevert opened the museum about seven years ago.

son. Over the course of her long career, she worked as a staff nurse, play therapist/child mental health clinician, and nursing instructor. She also set up the nursing program at Clatsop Community College in 1982 and published several books on nursing. Now, Chenevert directs a personal company, PRO-NURSE, which provides products and services designed to increase professional pride and productivity.

Her passion for nursing as a vocation spread into her personal life. When visiting rummage sales, antique stores, auctions, and other venues over the years, she would ask for any items related to nursing. Slowly, she developed a large collection of vintage artwork, pins, books, dolls, music, uniforms, and other memorabilia from the past century.

"Nursing continues to evolve, hopefully getting brighter and brighter," she said. "We have a long tra-

dition, we're just part of the passing parade."

While living in Maryland, people would visit her office and comment on what a nice museum she had, and it gave her an idea. When she moved with her husband Gary, a nuclear physicist, to Cannon Beach in 2012, she worked with the city to establish an actual museum. Even though her property is in a commercial zone, a museum was not a permitted use within that zone at the time.

Chenevert called her new establishment the Lost Art of Nursing Museum because many of the posters, magazine covers, illustrations, advertisements, poems, sheet music, dolls, toys and books have vanished, according to her website. As hospitals and schools of nursing modernized and redecorated, artwork celebrating nursing traditions and its history wound up in the trash.

The Cheneverts admit

guests to the museum year-round by appointment, giving tours for free and selling reproductions of vintage artwork, books, posters, greeting cards, and pins. They also celebrate Nurses Week in May and do a drawing for a \$1,000 cash scholarship for nursing students who sign up at the museum. The winner — which is selected at random by Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn during a ceremony in May — can use the money for textbooks, childcare, new tires for their car, or "whatever they need," Chenevert said.

Planning for the future

Chenevert's main focus right now is secession planning, which is made more challenging without a board of directors, or other partners. Being in her late 70s, she wants to have a plan in place for her wealth of memorabilia to ensure it's preserved.

"This is now my mission, to find a home for it," she said.

There are certain organizations — such as the Mayo Clinic — that might be interested in certain pieces of the collection, but she is hesitant to split it up and parcel it out. Ideally, her goals are for the collection to stay in the Pacific Northwest; to be donated to a university or a nursing organization; to stay primarily intact; and to be on display, not in storage.

She's been looking around and hasn't yet found the perfect — and sustainable — home, but she continues to make that a primary objective. One idea is to open an ice cream parlor that she could decorate with the memorabilia, with the sundaes and other treats named after historic nurses. "Stay tuned," she said.

Girls: Girls in the Hood share support, successes

Continued from Page A1

engage in often raucous conversation, give one another referrals for local businesses or service providers, and share ideas and emotional support. Occasionally, they will host guest speakers, and two sub-groups or clubs, a book club and a knitting/crocheting club, have sprouted from the main social network.

'A place to go'

Although Sawyer established the group — for which the other members give her due recognition — she doesn't take ownership of it. Rather, she said, "It's reflective of the women." Sawyer takes a hands-off approach to her leadership, allowing each member to take ownership in the group and maintaining it so they have "a place to go to support each other," physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally.

Cat Sellars remembers spotting the group through the window at the golf club about a year and a half ago and thinking, "I want a group of friends like that." She was later invited by a member and has since experienced a deep bonding with the other Girls in the Hood.

"We come together as a group of women who appreciate each other," Sellars said. "This has been a

wonderful situation for me, because I'm meeting people I never would have met otherwise."

Now, she uses the occasion to get dressed up for a special, entertaining night out with her friends. The beauty of the group, she said, is that if any member was in need, she doubts the others would turn them down.

Denise Dailey, another member, agreed the group has seen her through several difficult situations. When she and her husband divorced after a long marriage, she landed in Seaside with only her suitcases and her dogs. As she settled in and searched for ways to get acclimated, she found The Girls in the Hood, which plugged her into a supportive community.

"There's always someone available to get you through," she said.

When visitors come to the meeting for the first time, Dailey said, it can be a little overwhelming. However, they try to incorporate new people seamlessly so they immediately feel welcome and included.

Sellars agreed, adding, "If you come in and embrace it, the rewards are wonderful."

United for a cause

The group members not only support each other when they're facing diffi-

cult circumstances, but they also celebrate each other's successes. When Dailey rescued a struggling child in the ocean during the summer, she didn't feel like it was a big deal, believing that despite not being a swimmer, she did what she had to in the situation.

The other Girls in the Hood, however, would not downplay her heroics, praising her for saving the life of a stranger and taking no credit for doing so.

They also take advantage of opportunities to unite over each other's passions or shared causes. They've gone

as a group to sing carols to residents at retirement communities during the winter holidays. In the summers of 2015, 2016, and 2017, they collectively raised money for the Northwest Parkinson's Foundation, and they hosted a boot at the Seaside Farmers Market in September 2015 to distribute information to people with Parkinson's disease and their caregivers.

"Always on the lookout for additional ways to help women engage more fully in our community, we encourage new ideas from our participants," Sawyer said.



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