

Loveland hosts Epsilon Sigma Alpha

Service group members say group has changed with the times

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

BY MICHELLE VENDEGNA

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The Rocky Mountain Regional Chapter of Epsilon Sigma Alpha hosted the organization's international convention in Loveland last week at the Embassy Suites Convention Center. "Every one, there is something different. They always have something for ESA Foundation, always have something for St. Jude's," said Bonnie Gilmore, member of the local Gamma Chi chapter of ESA for 40 years. Then there is the local project. At the convention Friday they made valentines for their Hope for Heroes project to be sent in February with the Loveland cachet and postmark.

The convention had 375 participants from 35 U.S. states as well as few people from Australia.

To become a convention host, each regional chapter puts in a bid and then it's reviewed to see if there are sufficient accommodations for the group.

The nonprofit service organization internationally raises funds for St. Jude's Research Hospital, started by Danny Thomas, and Easter Seals. To date, they have raised \$222 million for St. Jude's.

Rita Hodap from Tucson, Ariz., has been part of the group for 42 years. She joined when she moved from Chicago, Ill.

"I met my next-door neighbor who was in it and I wanted to meet other people," she said. She started traveling to different conventions, more so after her kids were grown and her husband passed. She said her favorite part is getting to see all the people she has met from other places. She also has great memories from when she first started and was elected St. Jude's chair for Arizona.

"I was at conventions when Danny Thomas was there. I met him. I talked to him," Hodap said. The international convention is not only a chance to see each other again but to also appoint new international board members and gives the groups a chance to talk about their local projects.

"Each chapter does local things that help for their community," said Pam McGee, a Gamma Chi member for 25 years, "Our chapter has been doing a lot for Project Self-Sufficiency, Community Kitchen, WINGS, the list goes on."

It's been 20 years since Colorado has hosted a convention and a lot has changed since then for the group both on the local and international scale. Since then, the predominantly female group has seen its first men join, they have joined Facebook and had to alter how they do things to coincide with the times.

McGee said when it started it was a way to get those women at home out into the community.

"Probably when this started more women were home during the day. Not all, because we have always had working women, but there were more I think at home that wanted that outlet," she said.

Chris Dostal of the Loveland Sigma Rho chapter has noticed changes in just the 10 years she has been a member. When she joined the group's primary focus was catering to raise funds but as the older members retired from the group and the younger members didn't have time, they had to change their focus to other things.

“As you get older change is harder,” McGee said, “What I am really seeing is that we are going to have change. Change, I don’t want to say drastically, but enough to make this for the younger women who want to join.” McGee said that compromises may have to be made while trying to keep the traditions intact.

“We are no different than any other organizations. We are just having to try new things for membership,” said Gilmore.

The goal of the group has always stayed the same. Gilmore said she joined to help the community. McGee and Dostal were both invited by friends.

“I think when it’s friendly like that,” said McGee, “and they say come and see what we do, you’re more apt to do that than if you get the feeling you have to know somebody.”

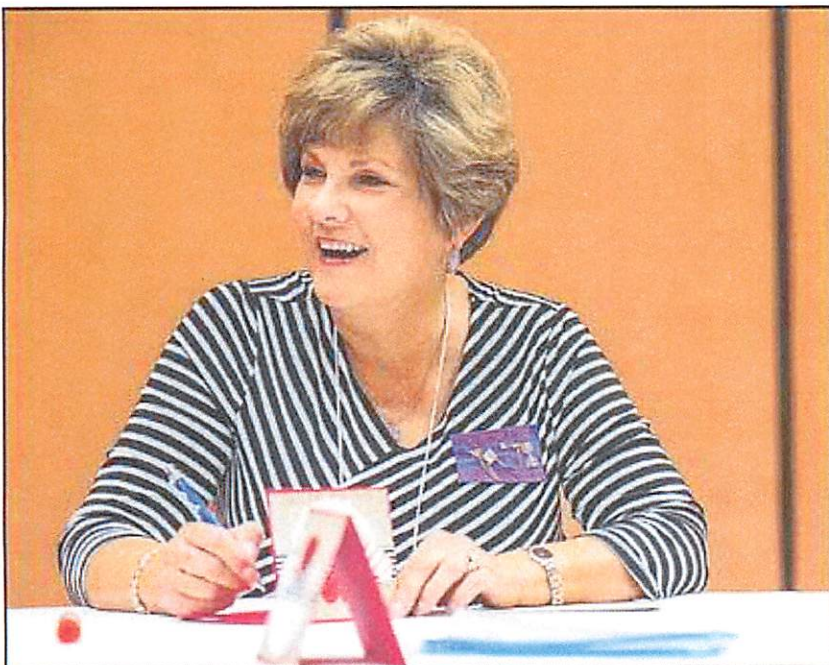
The group has offered camaraderie as well as a chance for members to use their skills.

“I am one of those that is more comfortable in the back of the room. I’ve progressed to being state president. It gives you the opportunities to use your talents,” Gilmore said.

It offers its members a chance to socialize outside of their family or work.

“All of it’s social, not only the women you work with but the public. That’s always fun,” McGee said.

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Christine Bishop, from Claremont, Fla., writes in a Valentine’s Day card Friday afternoon at the Embassy Suites in Loveland during the international Epsilon Sigma Alpha convention. The cards will be held until the holiday in 2017 and will go to active members of the military and veterans.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BRIAN / Loveland Reporter-Herald



From left, Linda Conrad, Susan Moffat, Michelle Herring and Cindy Magelky work on Valentine's Day cards Friday afternoon at the Embassy Suites in Loveland during the international Epsilon Sigma Alpha convention. The cards will be held until the holiday in 2017 and will go to active members of the military and veterans.

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Pam McGee Gamma Chi member for 25 years

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