

Panhellenic 60th Anniversary

February 2, 2019

Sit back

Settle in for a few moments

And let's take a trip together back in time....

The setting is Melbourne, a small community on the east coast of Central Florida founded by a handful of pioneers after the Civil War in 1867. The area really did not begin to thrive until Henry Flagler's rail road reached it in 1894, bringing tourists and a few more settlers. In the late 1950's, the government opened the Long Range Proving Ground, which later became the Kennedy Space Center. Very soon educated workers and scientists came to the area. What had once been a low tech farm and fisherman economy was suddenly transformed into a high tech engineering and computer economy.

It's now late 1958, early 1959. Radiation, Inc., an electronics firm, has established itself in rural Melbourne. A visionary physicist employed at the Long Range Proving Ground, Dr. Jerry Keuper, is having drinks with a friend in a local Melbourne bar. He expresses his desire to create a scientific and technological college to support the educational needs of the growing engineering community. The friend reaches into his pocket, pulls out all the change he had, 37cents, and pushes it across the bar telling Jerry, "Here's your first donation, now go and build that college". Today that university, Florida Tech, is also celebrating its 60th Anniversary in Melbourne.

While the men are dreaming of the future of the community in the bar, the women, who are the wives of this new engineering and computer population, are at the clothesline. Melbourne, for them, is a bit sleepy, but growing. The grocery store is an A&P Market in downtown, on New Haven Avenue. There is also a bakery downtown, a barber shop and the Brownlie-Maxwell Funeral Home which is already 70 years old. There are 2 high schools on the mainland, but no schools or grocery stores beachside. All serious shopping is done in Orlando by driving west on Highway 192, which is a dirt road. The causeways are no longer made of wood, they are now low concrete drawbridges that swing open to the side on the half hour in Melbourne, and the quarter hour in Eau Gallie. Homes are beginning to be built beachside, and many of the new families moving in decide to live there, in a town named for its location between the Indian River and the Atlantic Ocean, Indialantic. The only hospital is located in a small cluster of buildings along US1, which many years later became known as

the Colonial Motel. I know only one person that was born in that hospital on US1, and that is our President, Jan Reed. She arrived there in 1961. Her parents had left North Carolina and moved to Florida to build homes in the Satellite Beach area.

As two women in particular chat at the clothesline, Ann Smith and Scooty Gettys, they soon discover that both had been members of national sororities while in college. The idea is soon hatched to place an ad in the local Melbourne Times, asking for sorority women to gather. The first organizational meeting was held in February of 1959 in the living room of Holy Trinity Church. Fourteen charter members were present, Ann Smith was elected the 1st President, and the group called themselves PANHELLENIC ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH BREVARD. Today we are truly honored to have Irene Bush, a founding member, here with us for this anniversary!

The women make the decision to raise funds to award a scholarship to a deserving local high school senior girl attending a Florida college or university. They hold a dance in 1960 at the Tradewinds Hotel and Club in Indialantic, the grand Mediterranean style hotel that attracted the rich and famous in the 1920's and 30's, and was now enjoyed by military officers and space scientists. Two hundred people attended the dance, and enough funds were raised to award their first scholarship that year in the amount of \$150. Two more dances would be held at the Tradewinds in 1961 and 1962, until the party was then moved to Cocoa Beach where new hotels and clubs were being built, and where the engineers and astronauts partied.

Bridge was the common activity amongst the Panhellenic ladies and formal groups were organized for morning play, afternoon play, and evening play. Bridge Luncheons were also held to raise funds and recruit new members to Panhellenic. The membership meeting took place regularly in the evening on the first Wednesday of the month. I think you have heard this before, but it really is true that it was VERY DIFFICULT to schedule a hairdresser appointment or find a babysitter on the first Wednesday of every month!

After 2 or 3 years, the membership number had grown to 75 ladies. More activities were added including cookouts for couples. Rush Parties were hosted to inform high school senior girls and their mothers about college life and sororities.

By 1965, the Panhellenic Dance had become the "Panhellenic Ball", and was the THE social event of Melbourne. The 1965 Ball was one of the first events held at the brand new Melbourne Civic Auditorium. I can remember my parents attending the Panhellenic Ball in 1966. I was in the 3rd grade, and my mother and I traveled to Orlando to shop for her dress. She found a beautiful silver brocade gown adorned with gemstones at the neck. It had a matching full length coat with $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves and a mandarin collar. I had never seen her look so

regal and beautiful! My brothers and I listened to the local radio station, WMMB, which held a live broadcast as they spoke to couples arriving for the ball. It was Melbourne's "red carpet" event! You can imagine the shock and excitement as our parents were interviewed and my mom's dress and coat described as they entered the dance. These Balls continued for 13 years, until 1979, when a "Diamonds and Furs" cocktail gala was held at the newly built Holiday Inn Oceanside, the first large oceanfront hotel.

By 1967, Panhellenic scholarship funds had increased drastically to \$5,600 dollars and three scholarships were given at the annual scholarship banquet. A second yearly fundraiser was added to sustain the growth, and Easter Village was born. This was a large holiday event which included arts and craft booths, retailer vignettes, and fashion shows with children. Easter Village continued at the Melbourne Civic Auditorium for 11 years.

By 1973, almost \$15,000 in scholarship funds had been awarded to 25 local girls. A name change took place, this time to SOUTH BREVARD CITY PANHELLENIC. The couple's gourmet dinner activity was introduced, and this activity continued regularly for over 30 years. In 1976, the Panhellenic singers made their debut under the direction of Gene Threadgill. The group was later conducted by Betty Simms. Do you remember how wonderful it was to hear those ladies sing? I always looked forward to their performance at the December meeting! I think we all miss the Panhellenic singers!

Another name change takes place in 1977, to SOUTH BREVARD ALUMNAE PANHELLENIC. A cookbook committee was organized, and a year later, "Favorite Recipes from our Best Cooks" was published. It, too, was a financial success, and by the 20th year of Panhellenic in 1979, over \$30,000 had been given in scholarship funds.

In 1981, Panhellenic fund raisers take a new turn with large production, Broadway style, follies performances. "Paint the Town Red" was the title, a director arrived here from New York, and weeks of song and dance rehearsals for Panhellenic members, husbands, and friends resulted in a 2 night production the first year at the new Palm Bay High School Auditorium, and a 3 night production the following year. I was in the audience on a date at one of those performances. The Follies were so well done, so much fun to watch, and the Panhellenic ladies were stars of the show.

By 1984, a second cookbook had been published and fashion shows at Ivey's had taken over as the fundraiser. The membership had grown to 140. A 25th Anniversary Dinner Dance was held at the new, elegant John's Island Club in Vero Beach. Since Ann Smith had been the founding President in 1959, the group felt it was appropriate for her to begin the next 25 years so she was elected President once again. Barn Dances, hoe downs, and hayrides were held as parties, wrapping paper was added as a fundraiser, and the First Ornament Exchange

took place at the Christmas meeting along with the reading of “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” by Michele Everett. We have kept this Christmas tradition alive for the past 34 years!

We changed names one more time in 1990 and settled on MELBOURNE ALUMNAE PANHELLENIC. Do you think we finally have it right? By now the group was awarding individual scholarships yearly in the range of \$5500 and several incentive awards in the range of \$800 to \$1000. At the time of the 40th Anniversary in 1999, over \$117,000 in scholarship funds had been distributed. The years continued fast and furious as young mothers with children joined the ranks of Panhellenic and fundraisers geared toward little ones began to take place. “Breakfast with Santa Clause” was held several times followed by years of “Bunny Brunch.”

”Really Good Stuff” rummage sales also were held over these years. Some of the best treasures I ever found were bought at those rummage sales!!

Panhellenic marched into the new millennium with another round of creative and energized fundraisers known as “River Rendezvous”. Six of these water location parties have taken place in our Melbourne community. The initial one was held at the home of Mary Meeks, three were held at my home, and the last one was that incredible “Cheeseburgers in Paradise” party in the riverfront backyard of Michele Everett. These parties continue to invigorate our scholarship funds, and at the time Panhellenic celebrated its 50th milestone anniversary in 2009, over \$200,000 had been awarded.

Group activities have always been an integral party of Panhellenic fun, and certainly help to solidify the bonds of friendship and sisterhood. The Bookers Book Club will celebrate their 20th year of reading together next year. This group was founded by Sally Young and Renee Allen. (I miss Renee, she was so much fun!) BUT, this is NOT your AVERAGE book club! These industrious ladies follow up their reading selections with both national and international travel that highlight the novels they have read! For instance, after they read *Under the Tuscan Sun*, they arrange a group outing to Florence, Italy. Diane O’Brian’s daughter hosted them in her home for 10 days. They had their own tour bus and driver taking them around the countryside. The ladies even cooked a large Thanksgiving-style turkey dinner complete with pecans brought along by Jane Hamilton to make the pumpkin pie, for all the Italian friends. Can you imagine? After they read *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, they took a 2 night trip to Savannah where they explored the local cemeteries and the house where the story took place. I accompanied them on one of their “local” outings, to Winter Park, after they read *Clara and Mr. Tiffany*. A private tour of the works of Louis Tiffany had been arranged at the Morse Museum on Park Avenue. We ate lunch, saw the beauty of the magnificent glassworks, and shopped a bit on the avenue. I now send many of my Yankee

visitors over to Winter Park to re-create the day the Panhellenic ladies had planned. And I do get excellent reviews for this suggested outing!

Panhellenic ladies actually began organized activities in the 1960' and 70's and over the years have participated in dozens and dozens of amazing events! The ladies have gone to Micanopy to visit the home of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and lunched in the Yearling Restaurant, they have picked strawberries in the fields of SW Palm Bay that are now completely developed, they have paddled kayaks among the islands of Cocoa Beach, and driven across the state of Florida on a one day "sunrise to sunset" road trip. And, of course, the milestone events in their own families have always been celebrated together such as weddings, baby showers, anniversary parties, and retirement parties.

We cherish these memories of Panhellenic fun and laughter as we remember those sisters who shared these times and are no longer with us today. Over the years we have said goodbye to treasured ladies who have moved away and, sadly, passed away. As I collected my thoughts to speak with you today, I reminisced about them, and remembered how much I enjoyed being in their company. There are many. We lost Ann Smith some time ago. Names such as Ivalee, Mary Lou, Joy, Martha, Betty, Janet, Barbara, Carolyn and Jean bring smiles to our faces and joy to our hearts. A few weeks ago we lost Dottie, one of my very favorite Panhellenic ladies. She was initiated into Delta Gamma at Lawrence University in the early 1940's. I always admired these ladies of Panhellenic who were bright and inquisitive-- you could tell that from the many interesting activities they planned and participated in. I found them proud of their educations; many had been the first in their families to attend college. THEY kept Melbourne Alumnae Panhellenic alive all these past years with their spirit for sisterhood and their desire for local women to have the opportunity to attend college. As we celebrate this 60th anniversary today, over \$300,000 has been awarded to almost 200 students in our scholarship fund. What a staggering amount! And, what a difference those funds have made in the lives of the young people who received them!

And now, what do the future years hold for Panhellenic? Well, to begin with, we look around and see several new faces that have joined the group. We look forward to the enthusiasm and creativity that they will bring. And, we see several of you who have been with us in the past and we are delighted that you have returned to celebrate this 60th anniversary with us today. We thank you once again for your loyalty and friendship. Two of our newest members, Rae Bain Darby and Marcia Cochran, are introducing us to our newest fundraiser, "Girls With Pearls". Pearls, you say? How appropriate! Pearls have become a metaphor for something rare, fine, admirable and valuable. We ourselves understand that these are the qualities that describe Melbourne Alumnae Panhellenic: rare, fine, admirable and valuable.

Panhellenic has enriched the lives of all of us! We think back to that 1959 clothesline and the ladies chatting as the laundry dried in the breeze. Who would have thought their conversation that day would have such a profound effect on OUR lives? Fashions and styles come and go as Judy Davis and Cindy Earp have so kindly shared with us today. But the bonds of sisterhood and friendship--- THEY NEVER go out of style!

Thank you!

Thank you to Ivalee Simmons, she wrote a synopsis of our Panhellenic History in 1999 for our 40th Anniversary, and to Michelle Everett who compiled a hard back book of Panhellenic photos and memories a few years back.