

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### ACTING UP!

Acting Up!, a senior adult performing group, was organized through the Outreach Program at Oakton Community College in 1977. Membership, which averaged about 15 members annually, was open to those 60 and older. Members often wrote the plays they performed at Oakton and throughout the area.

Originally organized as a creative arts exercise workshop for seniors, Acting Up! began writing material based on their adopted theme, "Life After 60 Can Be a Time of Self-discovery."

In 1982 the group performed in Washington, D.C., at the 32nd annual conference of the National Council on Aging.

Two documentaries were made about the troupe: "Learning to Enjoy," narrated by Don McNeil, and "Acting Up!"

Karol Verson, Niles resident, was the troupe's director during the 1980s.

Acting Up! disbanded in 1996.

### FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

The Friends of the Library evolved alongside the movement to open a library in Niles. Records of the Friends were donated to the Niles Public Library but have not been maintained and are unavailable.

Elaine Bergeron was president of the Friends of the Library for about 10 years from the late 1950s through the 1960s. Henrietta Livorsi succeeded her.

The Friends of the Library were active in collecting books and circulating petitions to establish the library in Niles and the Niles Public Library District. After the Niles Public Library was formally organized, they raised funds for the new library. Friends signed up approximately 200 patrons of the library with each member paying a \$2 annual membership. Friends also conducted book fairs, luncheons, and collected donations for the library.

The Friends of the Library organized activities in the library. They provided music and appropriate settings for their story hour. Frequently, tots came in their pajamas, holding their favorite blankets. Most left asleep in the arms of their parents. The Friends eventually purchased a piano for the library, which they played during the story hour.

Other activities included sponsoring operatic and theatrical presentations and donating a running-water decorative fountain to enhance the appeal of the entrance lobby to the library.

The current Friends of the Library reorganized as a group in 1985 to support the Niles Public

Library. Their principal activity is conducting a continuing year-round book sale in the library to raise funds. The sale is launched every spring and fall with an array of all new titles. When the Friends also obtain useable office equipment from the library or by donation, they arrange for a silent auction of such items. Sales from books and equipment have ranged between \$1,500 and \$2,500 for each of the past twelve years.

Since 1987 the Friends have asked the library administrator to provide a "wish list" of necessities for the library. The friends have made the following purchases for the library: 1987, an Apple computer; 1988, two dictionaries for the computer room and two 10-inch globes; 1989, a lectern, lectern light, and amplification equipment; 1989, speakers and a book truck; 1990, Macintosh computer; 1991, landscaping supplies, "T" shirts, book bags, and an anti-fatigue carpet; 1992, a piano program, Hewlett-Packard fax machine, computer terminal stand, and patron access station; 1993, an Eiki portable video projector, an art book, computer software, and fliers for book sale; 1994, Peavey public address system; 1995, 20 card tables for a literary group; and 1996, gondola compact disk rack.

The Friends of the Library also host annual luncheons and seasonal parties for the library staff. Individual Friends provide floral and other decorative arrangements for these social affairs.

The Friends of the Library have paid for promotional materials on behalf of the library when referendums were conducted. They also paid for mailings of such materials and spoke to community groups urging the passage of library referendums.

A recent major project of the Friends of the Library was placing "stripes" into individual items in the library's collections to complete the library's security maintenance for its entire collection. Work involved hundreds of hours performed by the 15 active members of the Friends of the Library.

The Friends of the Library participates in programs of the North Suburban Library Association. Members attend seminars and exchange ideas about fund-raising programs. The Friends has presented displays at such meetings and has distributed bookmarks and other items prepared for the use of the Niles Public Library.

In 1995 the Friends of the Library honored Anthony "Tony" Mette and presented him with a plaque for his exceptional dedicated service.

Frank Biga, Sr. has served as president of the Friends of the Library since 1985.

## GARDEN CLUB OF NILES

The Garden Club of Niles was established in 1944. Although the prime objective of the club was to assist in the beautification of Niles, the club's early activities were more practical.

When World War II began, there were many vacant parcels of land in the Grennan Heights area of Niles. Residents were asked to plant vegetable gardens for patriotic reasons. These gardens would help win the war for the Allies. They were called "victory gardens."

The first formal meeting of the Garden Club of Niles, then called the Grennan Heights Garden Club, was in the Niles Village Hall with 15 people present. Westfield Homes, a real estate company, donated funds to the Grennan Heights Improvement Association with the stipulation that a lawn and a victory garden contest would be conducted. Mrs. Herminia Leidner, Mrs. Millie

Westerlund, and Joseph Gels organized the contest and the fall festival that followed.

After the club was formally organized, it continued furthering interest in home gardening, promoted horticultural practices, and advocated use of decorative flowers and plant materials. The club was a member of the Chicago Plant, Flower, and Fruit Guild and in 1948 became affiliated with the Garden Club of Illinois.

Some of its early projects included participation in the Illinois Garden Club Shows and contributing flowers to Chicago State Hospital patients. Members frequently went on tours of nurseries, furniture stores, and pottery stores to get ideas for future projects.

During the early 1960s the club purchased trash baskets for distribution throughout the city and distributed litter bags for use in cars. In 1961 the Garden Club was given \$1,000 from the proceeds of Niles Days to beautify the entrances to five elementary schools in Niles. The week of May 12, 1963, was declared Garden Club of Niles Week. The club prepared a special floral exhibit at the Niles Community Church which they titled "Village Vignette." At the time there were 55 members in the club.

The club's calendar for any year reflected a variety of interests. In 1962, the club supplied a "garden-on-wheels" for Niles Days and also sponsored a stuffed animal booth. Members handled placement of entries on the junior section of the Old Orchard Show and were judges of the sixth annual flower show at the Niles Public School. The annual card party and fashion show featured the styles of Lord's of Golf-Mill. There was also a potluck supper.

In 1969, when the club celebrated its 25th anniversary, club members were able to point to the floral baskets they placed on Milwaukee Avenue between Touhy and Harlem, the flowers planted around the Village Hall, and the shrubbery planted at Point Park on Shermer and Waukegan as their current efforts at beautification. After initial planting was completed, club members maintained the displays and the flowers, plants, and shrubs during the growing season.

Presidents of the Garden Club of Niles:

Herminia Leidner	1944-1946	Ruth Mueller	1960-1961
Martha Andrews	1946-1948	Jean Basham	1961-1962
Tillie Weber	1948-1950	Marilyn Wentz	1962-1964
Dorothy Rietz	1950-1952	Rita Suppan	1964-1965
Herminia Leidner	1952-1953	Dolores Fangral	1965-1967
Betty Luecker	1953-1954	Elsie Geis	1967-1969
Eva Meyer	1954-1956	Lucille Kozanecki	1969-1970
Rose Wawrzyniak	1956-1957	Betty Cusimano	1970-1971
Lois Wagner	1957-1958	Sandy Friedman	1971-1973
Elinor Frick	1958-1960		

## GOLDEN AGE CLUB

The St. John Brebeuf seniors consists of members 55 and over. They began meeting in 1975 in members' homes. As the club grew, they decided they needed a permanent place for their get-togethers and began meeting every Tuesday in Flanagan's Hall in the church. Although at one time there were 250 members, there are now about 200, with approximately 170 of those Niles residents. They are active in their community and participate in planned social activities.

Penix Jomle	1975-1977	Matt Araszewski	1987-1989
Stanley Gozdecki	1977-1979	Henry Piontek	1989-1991
Dorothy Warmann	1979-1980	Joan Provenzano	1991-1993
George Hall	1980-1981	Michael Provenzano	1993-1995
Russell Gawne	1981-1982	Robert Bianchi	1995-1996
Michael Provenzano	1982-1984	Chester Bonk	1996-1998
Dorothy Warmann	1984-1985	Dorothy Warmann	1998-
Rose Majewski	1985-1987		

## HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS

Homeowner associations played an important role in the development of Niles. These associations were usually formed to resolve concerns which residents had about issues affecting the construction of and the materials used to build their property and other issues affecting the value of their property.

Although some of the descriptions of these associations are brief in the accounts that follow, most had several scheduled activities a month. However, such activities were almost always directed at homeowners living within the specific area of the association and had little relevance to the remainder of the village: a softball game, a shared recipe, a cookout, a baby shower, or a school graduation celebration.

Most of the associations would submit press releases to local newspapers and several had regular columns published in the local press. Some had their own newsletters. Members were well-informed of the issues that affected them directly or could affect them in the future.

Beginning in 1974, condominium owners and developers were to submit their declaration and bylaws before beginning construction. Niles Mayor Blase was quoted, saying that the village "wants to tie developers to board terms and conditions, especially in maintenance, recreation areas, and charges to condo owners to prevent a rip-off of owners or deterioration of buildings." During the building boom of the 1950s and 1960s, homeowners did not receive similar guarantees from developers.

Many of these associations are no longer active. Over the years the village has had to react to problems and concerns revealed and uncovered by these associations. Constructive responses by the village served several purposes: problems were resolved, homeowners were able to have that "pride of ownership" so frequently expressed as the reason for their association, and potential future difficulties were avoided as the village was in a position to better plan the community's development for the betterment of all concerned.

### BUNKER HILL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Bunker Hill Homeowners Association is an active group of residents dedicated to improving their neighborhood and the Village of Niles. The association was initially formed in the late 1950s to ensure the developer of the area completed all the necessary improvements.

### CHESTERFIELD HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

The Chesterfield Homeowners Association was organized in 1963. Residents of townhomes

in the area bounded by Harlem Avenue, Greenleaf Avenue, National Avenue and Dempster Street found themselves in a dispute regarding the swimming pool the builder had provided but now wanted to sell to the residents of the area. When residents indicated they would not pay for the pool, the owner petitioned the village to remove the pool and build more townhomes. Homeowners protested to the village. The builder did not receive necessary permits to build more townhomes.

Members of the Chesterfield Homeowners Association launched the Chesterfield Country Club, a not-for-profit organization, to purchase the swimming pool. A small parcel of land around the pool became known as Chesterfield Park. At first, the pool and park were leased to the Niles Park District for a nominal sum. In 1982-83, the park was formally given to the park district but the pool remained, and continues to the present day, under the administration of the Chesterfield Pool Partners.

The Chesterfield Homeowners Association was active for approximately 30 years. Its annual picnics and pool parties were well-attended. The group regularly took part in Niles Days and published its own phone book and directory for more than 200 active members. The association often encouraged its members to vote in village elections and vote totals from the area were among the highest percentages in the village.

Presidents over the years have included Abe Selman, Bill Bers, Sydney J. Mitchell, Jeff Arnold, Ed Douglow, Bruce Goodman, Bob Shufton, Sam Feldman, and Rich Barnat.

### **GOLDEN ACRES HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION**

The Golden Acres Homeowners Association was formed in November 1962. Luke V. Belgou was the association's first president. The group was concerned about zoning issues and local improvements.

### **GOLDEN TRIANGLE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION**

The Golden Triangle Homeowners Association was organized in 1972 to protest a proposed taco restaurant at 7813 Milwaukee Avenue. The group, which collected 445 signatures, also wanted to extend the park in the area of the swimming pool and recreation center. At an early meeting, members indicated they would pattern future activities similar to those of the Kirk Lane Association and the Jonquil Terrace organizations.

Ben Sosnowski, past president of the Kirk Lane Association, assisted the Golden Triangle homeowners in initial plans, which called for activities with parents and teens, block parties, and picnics. Vernon Kemp was chairman of the executive committee of the Golden Triangle Homeowners Association.

### **GREENWOOD ESTATES HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION**

Greenwood Estates Homeowners Association was organized in October 1959. Nicholas Blase was selected as the group's first president. Initial efforts were directed at correcting faulty construction in the subdivision and acquiring a new park for the area. The association was successful in attaining both goals. In 1969 Marshall Gardner was president of the association.

## GRENNAN HEIGHTS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

On August 14, 1941, a group of Niles residents met at the home of Ralph Fanning. Fanning was elected president of the group and a charter and bylaws formally established the organization as the Grennan Heights Improvement Association. The constitution stated, "The objects for which this Association is formed are to promote and encourage higher standards of community co-operation, living and dwellings, education, adequate zoning, civic improvement, utility control, transportation, and recreational facilities."

Members became influential in obtaining street lighting, house-to-house mail delivery, telephone service, playgrounds, bus service on Milwaukee Avenue, speed limit signs, zoning, and shelters for children. During World War II they planted Victory Gardens, organized paper drives, and had campaigns to purchase war bonds and stamps. They were concerned about sewer problems, firearm control, proper zoning for property, and became active on the local school boards.

The group built the Grennan Heights field house, which was used as a temporary public library and later turned over to the Niles Park District.

The Grennan Heights Association sponsored many community gatherings. An annual Christmas dance was popular for many years. The summer Grennan Heights festival attracted large crowds. In 1957, bowling, dances, and softball were advertised as attractions for the festival. Diane Kussman was selected as Queen of the Festival. The following year Little Oscar and his wiener mobile made an appearance. A helicopter landed at the 1958 festival. This is believed to be the first helicopter landing in Niles. Funds collected often went for charitable causes. Proceeds from the festival in 1958 were used to furnish a room at Lutheran General Hospital.

By 1966, when the group was preparing to celebrate its 25th anniversary, many of the objectives of the association were realized and few activities were sponsored. Three years earlier, the minutes reported, "The entertainment for the evening was a movie called Magic Highways. The speaker was Mr. Jack Guthrie. His talk was an inspiring one on Niles Sewerage." According to the minutes of the association for May 25, 1965, discussions frequently centered on the topic of, "What can we do to create interest in the Association?"

### Presidents:

1941	Ralph Fanning	1954	Joseph Rosy
1942-1943	George Martens	1955	Frank Congui
1944	Henry Kramer	1956	Henry Kramer
1945	Roy Chaffin	1957	Oscar Meyer
1946	Ted Olson	1958	John M. Peterson Jr.
1947	Lee Cress	1959	Anthony F. Castle
1948	Mrs. Andrews	1960	Frank Congui
1949	Mr. Fluecker	1961	Jack Frick
1950	Bert Westerland	1962, 1965	Stan Lowe
1951	Mr. Lazard	1967-1969	Stan Lowe
1952	Frank Hauser	1963-1964	C. O'Grady
1953	Lou Schriener	1966	F. Herberts

## JONQUIL TERRACE CIVIC ASSOCIATION

The Jonquil Terrace Civic Association was established in 1952 when Edwin A. Leith called together a meeting to establish bylaws for the group. Friendship and social events for adults and children were to be organized. In 1954 the association initiated plans for a junior chamber of commerce for Niles. The association continued throughout the 1960s. Raymond Wieser was president in 1969.

## KIRK LANE ASSOCIATION

In early 1946 a large prairie was all that could be seen between Waukegan Road and Harlem Avenue, south of Oakton. Plans for a beautiful subdivision were presented by Robert E. Reed for the site. He constructed an attractive Cape Cod brick building on Waukegan, priced to sell for \$11,000. The price was not really modest; most full-time employees were not earning a dollar an hour at the time: policemen in Niles were paid 85 cents an hour in 1946.

Reed advertised he had approved plans to build 72 similar homes adjacent to the model. They would be provided with sewer, water, paved streets, and concrete sidewalks. Postcards were sent to interested parties inviting them to visit the site and personally look over the development. Two offices were opened: one in Chicago, the other in the model home on Waukegan. In a matter of a few weeks, 53 (other accounts say 56) persons signed on the dotted line, giving Reed down payments of \$2,000 to \$3,000.

Veterans, who recently returned from World War II, were attracted to the project. They would scrape together what funds they could, sometimes borrowing from others, and gave it to the man they believed to be Robert E. Reed as a down payment. Reed handed them a contract.

None of the prospective or actual buyers were aware that Reed, using another name, had already pulled a similar scam in another city.

Buyers would come out to Niles every weekend to see how their dream was taking shape. Mounds of soil began to appear as freshly dug excavations were added week after week. However, no buildings were started for several weeks. When Reed was pressed for an explanation, a few more basement excavations were dug.

Future homeowners again became annoyed and demanded more action from Reed. Two foundations were added and four rows of bricks appeared at one building site, then nothing for several weeks, with more complaints. One house was partially finished.

The headlines in the *Chicago Herald* and *Examiner* throughout November 1949 shocked and stunned the would-be homeowners. Reed had taken off with their money. They read the details: Reed did not even own title to the property they thought they had purchased. The check Reed had written for partial payment for the land bounced. His unpaid construction workers walked off the job. The state's attorney began searching for Reed.

Owners of the unbuilt homes met in a chilly basement of one of the dwellings. They elected a steering committee who attempted to get legal aid. One attorney after another turned them down until Anton A. Smigiel listened sympathetically to an explanation of the entangled legal dilemmas they faced.

Smigiel brought all debtors together. Tradesmen who were not compensated joined the cause. The home recovery project report written at the time said that Smigiel had "all the eagerness of a gladiator ready for the fight." Meetings, scheduled for three evenings a week, often were

conducted daily as details had to be worked out to enable victims to buy back their homes which they now, legally, did not own.

After contact with 12 other institutions, 13 proved to be the lucky choice: Talman Federal Savings and Loan Association agreed to take on the mortgages with all the legal complications still to be resolved.

The owners undertook many aspects of the construction of the houses. They mixed cement, worked on the carpentry, arranged for sewers and utilities. Village officials were cooperative and helpful. To raise needed funds, they danced with their guests at Bunker Hill Country Club.

The recovery project took three years. Some families, then called the "pioneer families," were able to start moving in a year after Reed took off. Others had to be patient: there were still no streets and sidewalks in much of the area. There were unexpected delays such as a steel strike, rain or snow would cause floods, and the price of lumber took an unexpected jump upward.

Fifteen of the original 53 who gave Reed a down payment dropped the project. The other 38 were able to complete their homes and receive a rebate of 25 percent of their down payment.

Reed was arrested in California, extradited to Pittsburgh for a similar offense, and given a 10-year prison sentence.

The Niles Recovery Association, which guided the three-year battle, decided to call themselves the Kirk Lane Homeowners Association.

Smigiel remained active with the group and was selected as the first president of the Kirk Lane Homeowners. He was twice elected police magistrate in Niles, judge of the court in Niles, president of the Niles Rotary, president of the Bank of Niles, and president of the Niles Firemen's Benevolent Association. Others also took an active interest in Niles civic affairs. Leonard Ramel, a member of the original steering committee, became a trustee on the village board. Leonard Szymanski was also a trustee and a member of district 71 school board. Keith Peck went on to become a park commissioner and a member of the village board of trustees. Joseph Mollica and Joe Raymond have both served on the Niles planning and zoning board. Ben Sosnowski, who would be president of the association in 1969, conducted the book drives that resulted in the eventual establishment of a library in Niles. Leonard Szymanski was president from 1957 to 1961.

## **PARK LANE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION**

Park Lane was developed as a result of a plot of land donated by real estate agent L. B. Anderson in 1935. The area bordered Niles. A charter for an association was obtained in 1937 and by 1947 a portion of a meeting hall was completed. In 1950 the area was annexed to Niles and water and sewer facilities were available to the entire subdivision. The Park Lane Women's Club was launched in 1955 to help maintain the Park Lane Community House.

Randy Norris was president of the Park Lane Community Association in the early 1970s.

## **OTHER CIVIC AND HOMEOWNER GROUPS**

During the late 1960s and early 1970s other homeowner and civic associations were active in Niles. These included the Crain Gardens Civic Improvement Association ( J. Manning, president); Golfview Homeowner's Association (Robert Rohweder, president); Niles Gardens East



Homeowners Association (Arthur Kapchinski, president); Niles Terrace Association (Ben Mankowsky, president); North Niles Homeowners Association (James Richmond, president); Park Lane Community Association (Randy Norris, president); Ranson Ridge Civic Association (Nick Dinapoli, president); and Lake Street Homeowners Association (Sherwin Klein, president).

## KIWANIS OF NILES

Kiwanis of Niles were chartered February 27, 1965. Bill Grafke was president. In 1966, the Kiwanis sponsored a basketball tournament and purchased an exercycle for physically disabled youngsters that was installed at the Niles YMCA.

In 1970, the Kiwanis sponsored "Operation Drug Alert," a program of education about drug abuse.

Mo Wittkamper was president in 1971. A donation was made to the Institute on Narcotics and Drugs for use by the Niles Drug Coordinating Council.

During the 1970s Niles Kiwanians sent several children to a special Kiwanis camp in Plymouth, Indiana. They also donated money for spastic paralysis research at Children's Memorial Hospital and raised money to buy blankets for residents at Niles nursing homes.

In 1981 the Niles Kiwanis initiated a program conducted by the Niles Police Department. Policemen distributed sports cards with safety messages to youngsters.

### Presidents:

Bill Grafke	1965
Edward Salerno	1966
Mo Wittkamper	1971
Al Johnson	1979-80

## KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS COUNCIL 4338

The Knights of Columbus North American Martyrs Council 4338 was chartered in February 1956. John Trocki, Bill Bock, Frank Lawrence, Bob Pifke, and Don Walgren conducted initial meetings at St. John Brebeuf Church in Niles and were elected the council's first officers. Since that time the council has continued to meet regularly in Niles. Membership has grown to 290 members in 1997.

The Knights of Columbus is an international fraternal benefit society. Although membership in the council is limited to men--for several years there was a ladies auxiliary linked to the group in Niles--a renewed emphasis on family life involves the member's wife and children in the numerous activities of the council.

Throughout its history North American Martyrs Council 4338 has been noted for its community activities. In 1997 it was voted "Most Outstanding Council in the State of Illinois." It was cited for assisting flood victims, sending aid to those affected by the Oklahoma bombing disaster and supporting Rev. Anthony Chen at the St. Theresa Mission in Chinatown.

During 1997 it also provided \$2,200 to Newman centers throughout the state of Illinois.

These centers, located on college campuses of public universities, make facilities available for Roman Catholic students on the campuses.

The North American Martyrs Council 4338 is involved with numerous youth projects. It currently sponsors a baseball team. In the past it has also sponsored a girl's softball team and a hockey team. Since 1965, the council has conducted a basketball tournament for boys and girls in elementary grades in both public and private schools. As many as 112 teams participated in the late 1970s and approximately 105 teams have been participating in recent tournaments. The council also hosts a separate free-throw contest. Boys and girls between ages 10 and 14 are invited. During the past few years 50 to 75 youngsters have taken part. Winners are encouraged to enter regional and state competitions. Over the years, the Knights have sponsored teams from St. John Brebeuf in various CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) sports tournaments and activities. The Knights sponsor spelling bees and essay contests open to all schools, public and private, in Niles. For many years the council has co-sponsored a Boy Scout troop at St. John Brebeuf Church.

Concern for the mentally disabled has always been a priority for North American Martyrs Council 4338. In 1996 more than \$28,000 was collected by council members during its annual September Tootsie Roll Day. The Knights in Council 4338 were cited as the most successful council out of 370 in Illinois in raising funds for the mentally disabled.

The past three years the council has co-sponsored SMART games. SMART, Sports for Mutual Admiration and Respect among Teens, provides opportunities for teens with physical and mental impairments to interrelate with able-bodied teens. Games are played at Maryville Academy in Des Plaines. Rules are adapted so that blind teens are able to play sighted teams who are blindfolded, mobility-impaired and able-bodied teens all play in wheelchairs, deaf teens play teens who wear soundproof headgear, and cognitively impaired teams are paired with able-bodied teams to form teams who are matched with like teams.

In 1973, and again in 1974, the council presented \$1,000 checks to Jefferson School in Niles to support programs for the handicapped at the school. The commitment to support programs for disabled youngsters led to development of the Niles Park District Golf-Mill Handicapped Park in Niles. The park, built and dedicated in the early 1980s, received monies raised by the Knights in their Tootsie Roll Drives. In October 1982 a universal playground was dedicated by the Niles Park District thanks to the Knights pledge of \$11,000 for the project. This second playground in Niles, known as Knights of Columbus Universal Playground, is designed to be accessible to the handicapped. It was built over the five-year period as funds would be made available by the Knights: \$3,000 was donated in 1982 with the remaining \$8,000 donated in the following four years. Walter Beusse, president of the Niles Park District and Grand Knight of Council 4338, in 1982 coordinated efforts to make the park possible and enlisted the active support of the Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation making the park accessible to six neighboring park districts.

The council launched a program, Life Athletes, in association with Notre Dame High School in Niles. Professional athletes in football and basketball, who support a lifestyle of no drugs, no alcohol abuse, and abstinence of pre-marital sex, are invited to address elementary and high school students. The Knights provide a photo opportunity for the youngsters with the visiting professional athlete and supply lunch. In 1997 approximately 50 youngsters took part in the program.

Each month Council 4338 selects a "Family of the Month." A "Family of the Year" is also named. Selection is based, in part, on community activities of the family. In 1997, Irv and Lucille Blaszyński were the "Family of the Year." They conduct the raffle program at the annual corned beef and cabbage dinner, the principal activity of Council 4338, which raises funds to support many of the Knights' programs during the year. Irv is also active with veterans' organizations, helps organize reunions for veteran groups, and writes the bimonthly newsletter of the Knights.

The Respect Life committee of Council 4338 supports the Women's Center in Chicago. In 1997 the council provided financial aid and the honor guard for the dedication of the St. Jude Chapel at the Women's Center. This committee also sponsors programs of selected speakers at St. John Brebeuf Church. The public is invited to these programs.

The vocation director of Council 4338 provides \$500 annually to each of three seminarians to assist them in their pursuit of a vocation to the priesthood. These funds, raised from the proceeds of a spaghetti dinner, are meant to supplement personal expenses of seminarians who are still in school. One of the priests assisted, Rev. Andrew Barzyk, was assigned to St. John Brebeuf in 1994 after his ordination.

The Knights of Columbus North American Martyrs Council 4338 is very visible in community activities. It takes part in the Columbus Day Parade in Chicago, the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Chicago, the 4th of July Parade in Niles, Niles Days festivities, the Veteran's Memorial Mass at Maryhill Cemetery, and for numerous affairs when a church or visiting dignitary is invited to a religious observance at St. John Brebeuf Church.

Past Grand Knights of Knights of Columbus North American Martyrs Council 4338, Niles, Illinois:

John Trocki	1956-57	Joseph Bachochin	1978-79
William Bock	1957-58	Daniel Cincinelli	1979-80
Donald Walgren	1958-59	Matt Araszewski	1980-81
Francis Lawrence	1959-60	Edward Coudek	1981-82
Emmett Heil	1960-62	Walter Beusse	1982-83
Dennis H. Birch	1962-64	Paul Dahlgren	1983-84
Richard E. Burton	1964-65	Robert Bianchi	1984-85
Thomas H. O'Donnell	1965-66	Edwin Zalesny	1985-86
Thomas W. Christian	1966-67	Joseph Paine	1986-87
Irvin Blaszyński	1967-68	Walter Zalesny	1987-88
Stanley M. Ptak	1968-69	Carl A. Ferina	1988-89
Stanley P. Niski	1969-70	Tad Lesniak	1989-90
John J. Quedens	1970-71	Nick Vasile	1990-91
Charles V. O'Grady	1971-72	Ray Restarski	1991-93
August F. Pranske	1972-73	Gary K. Warner	1993-94
Joseph Bradtke	1973-74	Lee Gerstenberger	1994-95
Robert Komos	1974-75	Andrew F. Beierwaltes, Jr.	1995-96
Kenneth Piasecki	1975-76	Robert E. Galassi	1996-97
John Imber	1976-77	William Chase	1997-98
Kenneth Lee	1977-78		

## LIONESS CLUB OF NILES

The Lioness Club of Niles came into existence in 1976, one year after the International Board of Directors of the Lions International approved the concept of the Lioness organization. Activities of the Lioness clubs were to be conducted independently of the Lions International. However, once a year, Lionesses sponsored a "men's night," a social gathering with male guests.

Although independent, the Lioness Club of Niles worked for and supported causes Lions had long been associated with: large-print books were purchased for the visually handicapped patrons of the Niles Public Library, a subscription for the large-print magazine *Dialogue* was

provided for the Trident Center, and a blind bowling league and all-star band were sponsored. Lioness members also worked with the Lions on Candy Day and worked at Camp Lion during the summer assisting visually impaired children.

Lioness members assisted physicians in screening for glaucoma at the Trident Center and purchased benches for Golf-Mill Park when it was adapting facilities for handicapped children. For several years club members served refreshments during the Maine Township Special Olympics and assisted in Maine Township special education classes. In 1980, members worked with Maine Township special education classes by preparing and marking letters for visually handicapped students.

Money was raised in 1980 to send Niles ice skater, Patrick Moore, to the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York.

Presidents:

Carol Hansen	1977-79
Gloryana Angus	1979-80
Carol Angus	1980-81
Grace Willert	1981-82
Muriel McAndrew	1982-84
Carol Wollenberg	1984-85
Judith Nivens	1985-86

## MORTON GROVE - NILES LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

The League of Women Voters, established in Morton Grove in 1961, was fully certified in 1963. Joan Goldberg and Mary Pionke, Niles residents, were active members of the League at this time. In 1967 Mayor Nicholas B. Blase appeared before the League when he was a candidate for an elective office in Maine Township. Also in 1967 candidates for the Niles Village Board of Trustees sent their responses to the League regarding their candidacies. Edward B. Berkowsky, Erich M. Buck, Angelo G. Marcheschi, Edwin D. Mitchell, Richard Harczak, and Mandy Honold explained their educational background, occupational experience, types of training they had, and indicated two problems facing the village. The League sent these candidates' responses to Niles newspapers for publication.

In the mid-1960s the League of Women Voters of Morton Grove launched a major campaign strongly supporting a council-manager form of government for Morton Grove. Although rejected by Morton Grove in 1968, the following year the League published a 34-page booklet, "League proposes the trustee-manager plan," and continued to support a council-manager form of government. Niles approved the position of a village manager in 1967.

By 1969 Niles residents numbered 22 in the League's membership of 94. Niles sought more formal identification with the League. The League undertook a study, "Know your town." This resulted in a 64-page publication about Niles which included the following: village history, census figures, village government, village board and commissions, finances of the village, village services, the library, park district, schools, other governmental districts, the Huntington, churches, voter services, public meetings, and a map. With this type of publication completed, Niles was able to complete its prerequisite for affiliation with the Morton Grove League of Voters. Since 1970 the name of the organization has been the Morton Grove-Niles League of Women Voters.

The purpose of the League is to promote informed and active citizen participation in government. The League studies and then supports or opposes issues. A newsletter is published and

forums with candidates for public office or on specific issues are conducted. Several booklets have also been published. Topics range from information necessary when considering running for public office to a listing of business establishments which are handicapped accessible.

In 1976 the League completed a two-year study of Niles and made the following recommendations: open budget hearings, providing access to public buildings and a public bus for the physically handicapped, a day-care center under the auspices of the Niles Family Service, appointment of an appearance commission, voluntary tree planting on private property, major tree planting on public property, and a statement of village objectives. Other activities included a study of the Niles Public Library and support of a Niles Park District referendum. In 1985 the League produced a video, "Grandma was a Suffragette." It was awarded first prize by Women in Cable.

The League arranged a drop-off center for recycled items at Milwaukee Avenue and Waukegan Road. It was dedicated on Earth Day in 1990. The League also introduced waste-free lunches for the elementary schools in the area and E-Challenge, an environmental game for students.

Within recent years the League has advocated abolishment of township government and supported efforts regarding the accountability of local Cable TV franchises.

Presidents:

(\* indicates Niles resident)

Betty Hanson	1961-1963	Co-presidents	1982-1983
Evelyn Cartwright	1963-1964	Marilyn Kramer *	
Gloria Potter	1964-1965	Ruth Hibnick	
Miriam Barlett	1965-1967	Pat Horn *	1983-1985
Shirley Keller	1967-1969	Co-presidents	1985-1987
Charlotte Adams	1969-1971	Fern Anderson	
Ruth Baum	1971-1973	Monalu Meyers *	
Carol Panek *	1973-1975	Co-presidents	1987-1989
Mary Marusek *	1975-1977	Maggie Kohls	
Barbara Blonz	1977-1979	Helen Barrow	
Co-presidents	1979-1981	Co-presidents	1989-1991
Joan Goldberg *		Lyn Warmack	
Sue Kravis *		Elizabreth Matteoni *	
Ruth Hibnick	1981-1982	Sue Kravis *	1991-1994
		Joyce Herter	1995-1997

## NILES ART GUILD

The Niles Art Guild was founded in October 1963 by Marge Berles and Edna Walger. Other charter members of the guild were: Marilyn Alden-Brown, Robert Berles, Estelle Boyk, Kay Groh, Diane Huisel, Marcia Keith, Raymond Koll, Henry B. Ray, Dorothy Taylor, Helen Tempera, George Waiflen, and Edward Walger.

The stated objectives of the guild were "to promote and stimulate interest in the graphic arts in the community and to offer scholarships to worthy recipients to encourage them in the field of art."

Edna Walger, the guild's first president, was the chairperson of the art department of the Woman's Club of Niles. In March of 1963 she organized an art fair at Grennan Heights that was very well-received.

In October 1963 the Lawrencewood Shopping Center Management expressed its interest in hosting an art fair in celebration of its first anniversary. The shopping center indicated it would provide room for a gallery the sponsoring organization could use for the remainder of the year. As it turned out, the guild was provided two locations at the shopping center in the following six years.

The Niles Art Guild, with some 44 active participating members, made its debut art exhibit for the first anniversary of the Lawrencewood Shopping Center in 1963.

Interest and support for the group quickly mushroomed. Art classes for youngsters and adults were scheduled at the "229 Lawrencewood Gallery." An exhibit was scheduled for 1964 and the Village of Niles established a \$100 purchase award, which it would continue to make available for more than 20 years as the guild continued to sponsor art fairs.

By 1967 a monthly program for members and guests featured demonstration sessions, films, and lectures. Members and invited guest artists were featured.

The first Niles Art Guild scholarships were awarded in 1966 to Janet Soby and Sue Beverly. They would attend the junior school at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1967 Daniel Boyk won the same type of scholarship. Kandy Diakoumis and Nancy Wahle were awarded scholarships in 1968. Other scholarships were for a 10-week course at the Village Art School in Skokie. These scholarship winners included Marianne Kuchta, who went on to earn an internship with the Association of Medical Illustrators, Barbara Kramer, Linda Kargol, and Kandy Diakoumis. The guild also sponsored art exhibits for these and other young artists at the YMCA.

Maurice Chambers was the winner of the first village purchase award at the guild's art fair in 1964. His work and the works of the other winners remain on exhibit in the new village hall. Those artists, with year of award noted, include: Stanley Marlewski (1965), Adrian Verschoor (1966), Tom St. Clair (1967), Gail Stahkel (1968), Ralph Furmanski (1969), Maurice Chambers (1970), Jim Armstrong (1971, 1972), Glenn Tammer (1973, 1974), Keith Adams (1975), Alan Yau (1976, 1978), Richard Callopy (1977), Bob Proce (1979), Lee Pikovsky (1980), Joan Munson (1981), Claudia Anderson (1982), and Frank Kruzel (1985).

The early art fairs were at the mall in the Lawrencewood Shopping Center. After the guild lost its gallery there in 1969, the guild's art fairs were held at Oak Mill Mall and Golf-Mill Park. Regular monthly meetings were conducted at the Niles Park District Recreation Center.

In 1967 the guild launched publication of a newsletter which it distributed monthly until 1993. The newsletter would usually inform members of locations secured to exhibit members' works. Two of these sites were continuous for more than 20 years: the Niles Village Hall and Chambers Restaurant. Other locations were: Bank of Niles, Howard Johnson in Lincolnwood, Knight's Pub in Des Plaines, Deerfield State Bank, Maine North High School, Tam O'Shanter Racket Club, Niles Public Library, Norwood Park Library, Lutheran General Hospital, Resurrection Hospital, Talman Federal Savings, LaVenece Restaurant, and Uptown Federal Bank.

The guild charged annual membership dues. However, major funding for the guild's activities was raised by sponsoring Christmas bazaars, bake sales, Octoberfests at Oak Mill Mall, and booth sales during Niles Days.

The impact of the activities of the Niles Art Guild was felt throughout the village. The art fairs at the Lawrencewood and Oak Mill Malls attracted 80 to 100 exhibitors. Each had a 10-foot area to exhibit works. Officials estimated that 1,000 to 1,200 guests came to view each of the annual art exhibits between 1963 and 1985.

Active membership in the guild ranged between 44 and 70. It would have been higher had the guild accepted international memberships. Several came from areas as far away as China.

Marge Berles was given a special plaque in recognition for her dedicated service in 1983. As the appointed historian, Berles continued to preserve and organize the records of the Niles Art Guild after its dissolution. The records were then donated to the Niles Historical Museum in 1996.

In 1993, Kay Groh wrote "the most difficult article I've had to write since becoming publicity chairman." A farewell dinner was announced at which final plans were approved to disband the Niles Art Guild effective January 1, 1994. The principal reason for dissolution was the difficulty in securing officers for the club.

Presidents:

Edna Walger	1964-65	Kay Groh	1975-77
Henry B. Ray	1965-66	Isabel Curtin	1977-79
Marge Berles	1966-68	Robert Berles	1979-81
James Noffz	1968-69	Marilyn Brown	1981-82
Julia Guarnaccio	1969-71	Robert Berles	1983-85
Myra Steinbrink	1971-73	Bill Dati	1985-87
Marge Berles	1973-75	Marilyn Brown	1987-93

## NILES CONCERT CHOIR AND NILES SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Niles Concert Choir and Niles Symphony Orchestra were founded by Rev. Stanley Rudcki in 1964 and 1966. Rev. Rudcki was chairman of the Niles College department of fine arts. These musical groups performed regularly at and were associated with Niles College. However, as the *Niles Spectator* wrote, they were also "an important part of musical life in Chicago." They frequently performed at Orchestra Hall, Holy Name Cathedral, and for college and university audiences for some 30 years. The chorus and symphony performed about 50 concerts per year.

The choir has traveled to Europe. In 1977 an Easter Mass was sung in a cathedral in Rome, run by English-speaking Paulists Fathers. The group sang in Germany and Spain over the next few years.

Each year the groups would perform a major spring concert at Niles College and three other concerts during the year. Rev. Rudcki often selected challenging and important works for his concerts. The Chicago premier of R. Vaughn Williams, "The Sea Symphony," was presented by the Niles Concert Choir and the Niles Symphony Orchestra at Holy Name Cathedral. Chicago audiences were also introduced to Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem" at Orchestra Hall in a concert performed by the Niles Symphony Orchestra. Guest soloists were Sarah Beatty of the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York and Bruce Schoonmaker, a graduate of Northwestern University School of Music, on the music staff at the University of South Carolina. This free concert, as were most of the concerts given by the groups, was described as an "inspiring and monumental spiritual composition set to poems by Walt Whitman." Free-will donations, The Musicians' Union Trust Fund, and Niles College provided necessary funding for the groups.

Students at Niles College were the nucleus of the concert choir. Other members included residents from Chicago and the northwest suburbs. The Niles Symphony was composed of professional musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Lyric Opera Orchestra, and the Grant Park Orchestra. Rev. Rudcki handled all negotiations with musicians, undertook the arrangements of the music, and conducted the performances.

Professional musicians were impressed by the orchestra and the response from the community. Donald Koss, a percussionist with the Chicago Symphony who played with the Niles Symphony, said that professional musicians were astonished with the complexity and difficulty of the programs the symphony and chorus performed. Koss was especially enthusiastic about the performances in the Niles College gym: "We found what they did in the gym to be an absolutely marvelous series of events. They would always pack the gym with local people from the neighborhood, most who had never heard a symphony orchestra."

After Niles College closed its campus, the Niles Concert Choir was reformed as a not-for-profit organization. An executive steering committee, selected by members, makes decisions. In December 1996 Rev. Rudcki retired and Scott James Arkenberg became the music director of the Niles Concert Choir. The choir continues to sing throughout the Chicago area and has established its home base at St. John Brebeuf Church in Niles.

## NILES GRANDMOTHER'S CLUB

Niles Grandmother's Club was organized January 15, 1964. Charlotte Prasch was elected president, Virginia Petretti was vice president, Isabelle Werdel, became secretary, and Catherine Schreiber took the treasurer's post. Ten members were present at the organization meeting. Charter 699 was obtained from the National Federation of Grandmothers Clubs of America. The aim of the group was to provide assistance to those in need.

In 1965, a set of encyclopedias was sent to the Uhlich Children's Home and a check and clothes were donated to the American Indian Center.

The following year a regular program of sending "goodies" to servicemen in Vietnam was initiated.

### Presidents:

Charlotte Prasch	1964
Virginia Petretti	1965-66
Helen Skaja	1968
Edna Guarin	1970
Irene Feichtner	1971-72

## NILES HISTORICAL MUSEUM AND NILES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Niles Historical Society was established in September 1970 as an affiliate of the Niles Woman's Club. The founding members include Mandy Honold, Estelle Boyk, Angela Giannone, Bernice M. Bay, Margaret Jacobs, John J. Boyk, Jr., Marcia Keith, Robert A. Berles, Marge Berles, Raymond S. Koll, Myra G. Steinbrink, Julia M. Guarnaccio, Columbia Hajduk, Nancy H. Saklak, Sandie Friedman, Elsa G. Koll, Marilyn K. Kramer, Richard Saklak, and Chet Hajduk. The Historical and Art Society, as it was then called, came into existence "to build a historical and cultural center in Niles."

The first floor of the proposed museum would make space available for public meetings, exhibits, performances, and other changing activities. "The second floor will contain a history of Niles and artifacts from our villagers and duplication of rooms in the early homes of Niles," proclaimed some of the society's early literature.

In November 1971 the society adopted its own constitution. The stated purpose was: "To



provide the opportunity to those persons interested in history to participate in the history of the village of Niles."

The major function of the society was, "To discover and collect any material which may help establish or illustrate the history of the area: its exploration, settlement, development, and activities in peace and war; its progress in population, wealth, education, arts, sciences, trade, and transportation. It will collect printed materials such as histories, genealogies, biographies, descriptions, gazetteers, directories, newspapers, pamphlets, catalogs, circulars, handbills, programs and posters; manuscript materials such as letters, diaries, journals, memoranda, memorabilia, rosters, service records, account books; and museum material such as pictures, photographs, paintings, portraits, scenes, aboriginal relics."

The constitution also stated that the society "will provide for the preservation of such material and its accessibility...will disseminate historical information and arouse interest in the past by publishing historical material in the news media, holding meetings, and sponsoring exhibits."

The site selected for the building to house the society was a parcel of 1.5 acres of the former Tam O'Shanter Country Club, west of the Chicago River, south of Howard Street. Some said the area was a flood plain. Other opposition developed.

By 1973 Mandy Honold, who was spearheading the building project, decided: "To go ahead and build our center on this site, in the face of so much opposition, would be foolhardy."

The society was offered the Kadlec home in 1972. It was the oldest home in Niles. Some considered it as a possible site for the Niles Historical Society. However, the Niles Historical Society would have to pay costs of moving the home. It was located at 7254 N. Milwaukee. These costs were prohibitive and a vacant site for the home was not available. Another site had to be selected.

In its early development, the Niles Historical Society, Woman's Club, and Niles Art Guild would frequently stage theatrical productions to raise funds. In 1971, a press release of the society announced the staging of "The Merry Widow" at the Niles Elementary School. Tickets were three dollars each; a full-page ad in the program book cost \$100. Proceeds were to benefit the establishment of a historical and cultural center for Niles. This initial public fund-raiser was such a success that a repeat performance of "The Merry Widow" was staged at Henrici's O'Hare Inn, July 11, 1971. Four other theatrical productions were later staged for the benefit of the future Niles Historical and Art Society and Cultural Center.

Specific requests from the proceeds of Niles Days for a historical museum were turned down during the early 1970s. Lack of information was cited as reason for the refusal. However, the idea of a historical museum did receive considerable support and \$6,435 was to be held in trust, as of October 16, 1975, for the Niles Historical Society until a definite site was selected. The funds were from proceeds of Niles Days. The Woman's Club of Niles also presented the society with a check for \$2,993.90 from the proceeds of their bicentennial theatrical production.

The Niles Historical Society purchased glass cabinets and began displaying historic items at the Trident Center in 1977. Some of the early exhibits featured bathing suits from the 1920s, early telephones, a patchwork quilt, Orphan Annie memorabilia, shaving paraphernalia, a kerosene heater, and a doll and her baby buggy. These exhibits proved to be so popular that others were arranged: christening gowns, tapestry purses and wedding photos. A third major exhibit featuring the military and military items was shown in the early 1980s.

In April 1985 the Village Board of Niles passed a resolution to lease the former sheriff's



*Niles Historical Museum*

facility from Cook County at 8970 N. Milwaukee Avenue. The lease was for 99 years at \$1 per year with the understanding that the facility would be used by the Niles Historical Society for a museum. Niles was willing to pay \$50,000 to repair the roof. The Niles Historical Museum would have its own home.

Columbia Pictures came along just at the right time. They requested permission to shoot several scenes for a motion picture, "Date Night," at the Niles Historical Museum. Columbia renovated and painted the second floor and stairwell and put in new venetian blinds. When the Niles Historical Society started moving into the facility in March of 1985, there was still much work to complete before the former sheriff's office could be used for a museum. When built in 1923, the 3,600 square feet were used to house the medical examiner's office, the adult probation office, and the north investigations and vice units. There were also some jail cells.

The Niles Historical Museum was open to the public in September 1986. Permanent exhibits included a replica of 1910 vintage rooms of a farm house, a typical 1910 kitchen, and a covered wagon. The covered wagon, donated by Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Horath of Arlington Heights who found it on a Wisconsin farm, has proven to be an extremely popular attraction. It was restored and was the centerpiece for a "Chuck Wagon Day" fund-raiser October 25, 1986. Marilyn Brown, president of the Niles Historical Museum, said that well over 300 attended. "It went over real big for a nasty rainy day," said Brown. A few years later it won first prize as the best float in a Niles Days Parade.

The Niles Historical Society has sponsored numerous fund-raisers to meet expenses. Bake sales, holiday bazaars, card parties, and promotional shopping at Jewel, Dominick's, Subway, and Columbia Bank allowed the museum to share in the sales. The Village of Niles has also been supportive. The village maintains the utilities, assists with major repairs, and allocates grants for necessary major items. Niles Events continues to support the Niles Historical Museum; a fund of \$5,000 was established to purchase and maintain a window air conditioner for the museum in 1990. The museum also received a \$200 community grant from F & M Distributors, \$500 from the Lions Club for track lighting, and special funds from life members. There is no admission or entrance fee to the museum, although donations are appreciated.

The major source of funding is members: their payment of dues and their constant support

of the programs of the museum. In 1982 there were eight members. By 1990 membership had risen to 300. The museum has been hosting programs, almost monthly, throughout each of the past 20 years.

Volunteers, who put in some 50,000 hours of work since moving into the present facility, have made the Niles Historical Museum one of the most viable in the entire Chicago area. In 1991, formal recognition programs were launched acknowledging those who contributed time and work for the museum. An account of the many hours of work has been maintained since March 25, 1991. With records updated to the end of 1996, this partial list of those who contributed their work to the Niles Historical Society is indeed impressive.

Marge Berles and Marilyn Brown have each spent more than 10,000 hours working for the museum.

The following were also cited: Howard Brown (over 3,000 hours), Tena Wiegand (over 3,000), Adolph Foss (over 2,000), Willis Kretschmer (over 2,000), Bob Berles (over 1,500 hours), Katherine Nelson (over 1,000 hours), Ethel Garry (over 1,000), Virginia Ludwig (over 500), Walter Beusse (over 500), Matt Laskowski (over 500).

Each item that arrives at the museum is evaluated. Those selected for the museum's collection are identified, described, and are then available to researchers, guests, and other interested parties. The variety of items in the museum's collection reflects accurately its mission as stated in its constitution cited above.

The museum receives approximately 100 calls and written inquiries for information annually. In 1996 it greeted 860 regular visitors on Wednesdays and Fridays when the museum is open to the public and during scheduled programs which are usually on Sundays.

A core staff of 10 works every week at the museum. Docents include Marge Berles, Marilyn Brown, Isabel Peterson, Dorothy Kretschmer, Will Kretschmer, and Adolph Foss.

The Niles Historical Society is a member of the North Eastern Illinois Historical Council and has been recognized by the Illinois State Historical Society. It has also received several certificates of recognition from School District 71 where it has established and helps to maintain a Niles History Club.

#### Presidents

Mandy Honold	1971-74
Judy Czyzewicz	1974-78
Sandie Friedman	1978-82
Marilyn Brown	1982-98

### NILES JUNIOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Niles Junior Historical Society was launched in 1979 thanks to a donation from the Knights of Columbus North American Martyrs Council 4338 at St. John Brebeuf Church. The donation was given to the junior historical society so it would be able to obtain its charter and become a member of the American Association for State and Local History.

During the two years the society conducted activities, 15 members were enrolled. Aims of the society were to preserve, study, compare the history of Niles to similar communities, promote community pride, and assist in community projects.

Members of the society did participate in several essay contests and prepared a slide presentation of historic buildings and sites in Niles, which was presented to several audiences at area churches and at the Niles Public Library. The slides were donated to and are now part of the collection of the Niles Historical Museum. The group also participated in Niles Days and in the 4th of July Parade in Niles.

John Matuszak was the society's first president, Brian Farrell, the first treasurer. Judy Czyzewicz and Nick Adami served as advisers.

## NILES LIONS CLUB OF ILLINOIS

The Niles Lions Club of Illinois was organized March 26, 1953, at the Lone Tree Inn in Niles. Charter night was June 14, 1953, at the Bunker Hill Country Club. The club enlisted 30 members in its first two months. A \$35 profit was recorded that night and a long and fruitful history of community service and assistance to the needy began.

By 1960 membership had risen to 88; the following year, member No. 100, Dr. John McMahon, a dentist, was enrolled. Fund-raising activities were in full gear by 1960: of the \$10,000 raised by projects and dues, \$9,600 was spent on the needs of others. By 1961 the Niles Lions Club twice won membership contests for villages the size of Niles.

One of the first community projects the Lions sponsored was designing and printing a map of Niles. It was distributed without charge throughout the village. Since the boundaries of Niles were rapidly expanding in the early 1950s, the map was marked "accurate as of October 1953." In 1961 the Lions joined the Village of Niles in promoting a slogan for the city. Mrs. Helen Jorgensen's words--"Don't hurry by, hurry back"--were posted on signs welcoming people driving into Niles.

Christmas baskets were prepared for Niles families in 1962. There was also a fund drive to purchase an ambulance for the village. With Lions Club support, a polio clinic was set up and the Sabin oral vaccine was given to youngsters in 1963.

The first of many pancake breakfasts, prepared and served by Lions members, began attracting hungry customers in 1964. By 1970 it was serving well over 1,000 breakfasts with profits for that year reaching \$1,900. A month later a good crowd came out for the Lions rendition of a St. Patrick Dinner and Dance. To bring attention to their causes, the Lions would prepare floats and parade during Niles Days celebrations.

Everyone who would attend a meeting of the Niles Village Board after 1965 would be reminded of President John F. Kennedy's words--"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." These words were placed on the village chamber wall in large letters as a result of a Lions' initiative.

The Lions launched a Niles bowling tournament in the mid-1950s. By 1964 more than 500 bowlers were vying for a \$1,000 first prize.

In 1961 the Lions joined with Junior Achievement in promoting a community project called Sho-way for Niles. A business company was structured. It was composed only of teens from Niles. They would be responsible for the entire production of the Niles Village map from survey to graphics to printing and distribution. By 1965 well over 500 were participating.

In more recent years a Lions Club was started at Notre Dame High School and the used eye-

glass collection project is now handled by Notre Dame students. In 1955, 500 pairs of used eyeglasses were collected at 14 sites in the Niles area.

The Lions sponsored a band contest in 1966. Several dozen school bands participated with Niles Elementary winning in division I ratings. In 1967 the Niles Lions hosted the Junior Miss finals at the Mill Run Theater.

In November 1953 a kickoff campaign for the blind was launched. At the following year's installation, a seeing-eye dog was presented to Franz Boudreau. Later the same year a mass vision-testing machine was presented to Clarence Culver, Niles school superintendent, for use in the schools. In 1956 "Eyes for the Blind" billboards were posted throughout the village. Bobby Kascher of Chicago, without sight since he was born, received a Braille typewriter from the Lions.

Frequent donations have been made to the Niles Public Library of large print books or equipment that enables magnification of regular print materials. In 1995 two table top magnification units were purchased for the library along with one portable unit.

The major annual Lions fund-raising project in the community to assist the blind was the Candy Days. Lions members, wearing their colorful yellow jacket vests, would distribute candy and solicit donations. Funds would be used to purchase leader dogs for the blind. In 1965 the Lions would provide funds for blind youngsters to attend summer camp. They also made a direct contribution of \$450 to Illinois Camp Lion in 1965 and almost tripled that amount the following year. In 1967 the Lions donated a Braille writer to the Hadley School for the Blind. Three years later the Lions arranged for a glaucoma screening unit to visit Niles; 420 were tested.

A more recent project, initiated in 1993, were contributions to CRIS (Chicagoland Radio Information Service). Fourteen visually impaired people in the area were provided with special radio receivers. They will be able to hear the local news of the area as printed in local newspapers being read to them. Arrangements have been made with the Niles Public Library, which enrolls the visually impaired and arranges for the reading of the *Niles Bugle* that can be heard on receivers provided by the Lions.

Since 1994 school children and local residents have been able to receive free eye examinations at Lens Crafters in Golf-Mill.

The Lions always had time for and supported programs for youngsters. In 1954 a Little League team wore uniforms displaying the Lions emblem. Sponsorship of Little League teams would continue for many years. For teens, the following year, the Lions donated a jukebox to St. John Brebeuf Parish for use until the field house at Grennan Heights would be completed. In 1960 the Boy Scouts of Troop 45 received two 14-foot canoes from the Lions, who also hosted a fun day at Riverview with free rides for all attending.

Concerned for the safety of patrol boys and guards, raincoats and caps were donated to the schools in 1954. A "Talent for Safety" show was conducted in 1955. They promoted essay contests for youngsters. In 1961 Cathy Bergstrom from Niles had her essay selected as the best from over 5,000 entered. Her topic was: "Be alert, be aware, always drive your bike with care."

The Lions were always in the forefront of promoting fire prevention campaigns. In 1964 during Fire Prevention Month they encouraged publication and distribution of fire prevention ads. They enlisted the cooperation of the Niles Fire Department in selecting the Fireman of the Year. The same year the Lions also honored the Niles Fire Department for the recognitions they were receiving: The first-place awards in 1955 and 1957 from the Chicagoland Association of Commerce and Industry and the Grand Award in 1959 for fire prevention activities.

Lions members seemed ever ready for fun times. In 1954 a fishing trip attracted 14 members and resulted in a profit of 84 cents. At a golf day in 1963 Lions members didn't play much golf but they surprised their wives and honored them during special festivities at the Bunker Hill Country Club. During the summer they took a lot of kids to a Cubs ballgame. In 1964 they joined the Niles Chamber of Commerce for their first of many golf outings. They honored their teen sons and daughters at a special "Teen Night" in 1965.

The first international activity for the Niles Lions, in 1964, was assistance to the School for Korean War Orphans. In 1972 the Niles Lions were hosts to a student from Japan, Naomi Fukui, for eight weeks.

Niles Lions Club hosted the All-America City news conference and luncheon with Lion President Angelo "Ginger" Troiani and Mayor Lion Nicholas Blase acting as Co-Chairmen in 1965.

Two Niles Lions distinguished themselves on the international and state levels of Lionism. Lion Angelo "Ang" Marcheschi, after serving on the state level as Zone-Chairman and Deputy District Governor, was elected to the International Board as District Governor for the year 1966-67. Lion Marcheschi served as Lions of Illinois Blind Activities Chairman for five years and headed the ad-hoc committee to form the new Lions of Illinois Foundation. Lion "Ang" was elected the first President of the Lions of Illinois Foundation to help the visually and hearing impaired people of Illinois and the World of Lionism. He also served for four terms of office as the President of the Lions of Illinois Foundation. Upon retiring he was appointed to the Office of President Emeritus for all his great work in activities for the blind and devotion to their needs.

Lion Angelo "Ginger" Troiani, after serving on the state level as Cabinet Secretary-Treasurer, Zone Chairman and Deputy District Governor, was elected to the International Board as District Governor for the year 1974-75. Lion "Ginger" was elected as trustee of the first Lions of Illinois Foundation Board of Directors. After his year as District Governor, Lion "Ginger" served at the state level with the Membership and Retention Committee and was appointed as its chairman in the Lions Year 1976-77.

The Lions Club of Niles honored Angelo "Ang" Marcheschi and Angelo "Ginger" Troiani by having them appointed life members of Lions Club International.

Past presidents of the Lions Club of Niles:

Ronald Pankau	1953-54	Edmund Zielinski	1970-71
Ted Lafeber	1954-55	William Wetendorf	1971-72
William Keating	1955-56	Anthony Hubick	1972-73
Ben Frankenberg	1956-57	Dominick LoVerde	1973-74
Joseph Dimaria	1957-58	Charles E. Pickup	1974-75
Joseph Conti	1958-59	William Angus, Jr.	1975-76
Charles Giovannelli	1959-60	Steven Dawiec	1976-77
Angelo Marcheschi	1960-61	Frank Hanson, Sr.	1977-78
Herbert Adler	1961-62	Dennis Burns	1978-79
Thomas Conklin	1962-63	David Angus	1979-80
Clifford Eickhoff	1963-64	Russell McAndrew	1980-81
David Hoppe	1964-65	Walter Beusse	1981-82
Angelo Troiani	1965-66	William Cornelius	1982-83
Carl Rathje	1966-67	George Kauffman	1983-84
Frank Troiani	1967-68	Walter Zinn	1984-85
Rudy Hill	1968-69	Roy Bergquist	1985-86
Todd Bavaro	1969-70	Thomas Argyrakis	1986-88

Harry Kinowski	1988-90
Valentine Engelman	1990-92
Walter Beusse	1992-95

Thomas Arzt	1995-96
Cary Frick	1996-97
Thomas Arzt	1997-98

## NILES MEMORIAL V.F.W. POST 7712

During World War II Friday Night Bingos were organized by Joseph Jozwiak and Frank Stankowicz at the Niles Elementary School to raise funds to support the 70 Niles residents who were serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. After the war ended, this fund had approximately \$7,000. A decision was made to ask the returning veterans how to appropriate these funds. Veterans decided to use the money to launch a V.F.W. Post in Niles.

Niles Memorial Post 7712 of the Veteran of Foreign Wars (V.F.W.) Post 7712 was chartered June 22, 1946. Since its founding the post has conducted public ceremonies every Memorial Day and every Veteran's Day in tribute to members who participated in the U.S. Armed Services in foreign wars.

Membership was over 800 in the years following World War II. By year-end 1997 it was approximately 250. The V.F.W., over the years, has involved itself in numerous community, social, and civic events. The group frequently wins a prize for the imaginative floats it has presented in many Niles parades. Golf outings at Bunker Hill Golf Course were very popular, with hundreds of members participating at these annual events.

A Ladies Auxiliary assists in observances of holidays such as Christmas, Easter, New Year's Eve, and Thanksgiving. Other activities include dances, picnics, rib nights, and bingo, which was popular for 15 years.

The Niles Memorial Post 7712 honors deceased members with a formal honor guard and escort.

### V.F.W. Commanders:

Joseph H. Jozwiak	1946-50	James Callahan	1971-72
Lubert Saunders	1950-53	Al Tomzak	1972-73
David Henningson	1953-54	Oscar Meyer	1973-74
Arthur Schmidt	1954-55	Tom Berg	1974-75
Edward Arends	1956-57	Emil A. Theodore	1975-77
William Biel	1957-58	Tom Davidson	1978-80
Henry Green	1958-60	Russell Hansen	1980-81
George Bolek	1960-62	Dick Graham	1981-82
Leroy Krueger	1962-63	Eddie Majka	1982-83
John Gersh	1963-64	John Vallas	1984-85
Russell Hansen	1964-65	John Krettler	1985-88
James Callahan	1965-66	Ernie Loberg	1988-89
Paul Dobbs	1966-67	"Ginger" Troiani	1989-91
John Stack	1967-69	Walt Beusse	1991-92
Henry Symer	1969-70	James Callahan	1993-97
Thaddeus Jakubowski	1970-71	Tom Davidson	1997-98

## NILES-NORTHTOWN AMERICAN LEGION POST 29

Niles American Legion Post 29 was formed November 17, 1964. The first officers included: Ray Illian, First Commander; Jack Schmidt, Sr. Vice Commander; Dick Bennett, Jr., Vice Commander; Ed Zalud, Adjutant; Carl Swanson, Finance Officer; and Kenneth Berg, Sgt-at-Arms.

In 1965 the post was able to send young men to Premier Boys State, a camp which fostered strong support of the concept of Americanism.

The *Niles Bugle* wrote July 8, 1965, that membership doubled in less than a year after the founding of the post. Current members recall that about 15 members were present at the founding and membership increased to about 35 within a year.

Early activities of the post included working for Niles Days events. Money raised at Niles Days in 1965 was appropriated to American Legion Post 29 for use at the Niles Youth Center in the Lawrencewood Shopping Center. Equipment was purchased. American Legion members also worked at the center in assisting the youth with various activities. When the center flooded one year, Legion members cleaned and rebuilt the center.

In 1977, the Niles American Legion Post 29 merged and has remained as the Niles-Northtown Post 29 until the present day. They have continued to sponsor Christmas dances and spaghetti dinners and make donations to the Niles Community Center, Gifts to the Yanks, and needy families in Niles. They also purchase medals which are presented to outstanding ROTC students at Lane Tech and Roosevelt High Schools in Chicago.

Joseph L. Battaglia was the commander of the Niles-Northtown Post 29 for 1997-98.

### NILES RECOVERY, INC.

Niles Recovery, Inc. was initiated in Niles in 1962 and has been meeting on a regular weekly basis in Niles for more than 40 years. Recovery, Inc. is an international organization with hundreds of branches throughout the United States. It is a non-profit group which presents a systematic method of self-help developed by the late Abraham A. Low, M.D., to prevent relapses and chronic conditions in people suffering from mental or emotional problems.

Weekly meetings are conducted at St. John Brebeuf Church. Since 1994, monthly attendance has averaged 35 to 40 participants.

### NILES SENIOR CENTER MEN'S CLUB

The Niles Senior Center Men's Club celebrated 20 years of service to the community in 1998. The original purpose of the Men's Club was fellowship with the original group of just six or seven growing to over 400 members at the present time. Now the group is geared toward fellowship and philanthropy. The Men's Club sponsors many social activities each year, such as the biannual barbecue, the St. Joseph/St. Patrick lunch and dance, and the Gala Christmas Party. The club has bowling and golf leagues and an exercise program.

Presidents of Niles Senior Center Men's Club:

Gene Mowinski	1980-81
Ralph Lieske	1982-84



Lambert Binder	1985-86
Carmen Mazzuca	1986-87
Ray Grochocki	1988-89
Lou Kokinis	1990-91
Walter Krause	1992-93
Peter Finan	1994-96
Adolph Foss	1997-98



*Included in the photograph are past Niles Senior Center Men's Club Presidents along with the mayor of Niles. Pictured from left to right (years as president) are: Walter Krause (1992-1993), Louis Kokinis (90-91), Gene Mowinski (80-81), Adolph Foss (97-present), Mayor Nicholas B. Blase, Ralph Lieske (82-84), Carmen Mazzuca (86-87), and Lambert Binder (85). Not pictured are Ray Grochocki and Peter Finan.*

## NILES SISTER CITIES

### PISA, ITALY

Niles officials and other interested parties first heard about the Sister Cities program at an introductory meeting September 26, 1985, at the Leaning Tower YMCA. Initial exploratory talks and contact with Pisa, Italy, did not bode well for Niles and Pisa becoming Sister Cities. In fact, in 1987, the National Organization of Sister Cities advised against Niles and Pisa becoming Sister Cities. Pisa, with its population of 100,000, was regarded as a thriving tourist and manufacturing center. Niles, with its population of 30,000, was viewed as a middle-class suburb by the Sister Cities organization. When Niles officials wrote to Pisa, with letterhead stating "Village of Niles," Pisa officials did not picture a cosmopolitan center.

Niles Mayor Nicholas Blase would not accept such analysis. Blase insisted, "the two cities are a match." Blase had strong support in encouraging the pairing of the two cities. Village trustee Angelo Marcheschi was an early booster. The Northwest Italian Club in the persons of Ray Giovannelli, Chief of Police in Niles; Charles Barbaglia, senior vice president of the First National Bank of Niles; Anthony Bartolomei of Park Ridge; and John Dimand, director of security at W. W. Grainger, personally went to Pisa as an official delegation to inform Pisa officials of the many benefits of becoming a Sister City with Niles. Niles officials also cultivated individuals from Pisa who had visited Niles to support their activities in Pisa.

Once in Pisa, the Niles delegation received a warm and cordial reception. Students from the University of Pisa suggested a student exchange. Numerous discussions were pursued about the

types of economic and cultural exchanges that could be developed between Niles and Pisa.

Once direct contact was established, events moved rapidly. Giovannelli was appointed to head a welcoming committee for the Pisa officials who would visit Niles. Tracy Frey, an eighth-grade student at Culver School, wrote to Mayor Blase and suggested a pen-pal program between students in Niles and Pisa. Blase quickly adopted the idea.

Money was raised to repair the Leaning Tower at the Niles YMCA. In November 1990, red, white, and green lights--the national colors of Italy -- were in place at the refurbished Niles Leaning Tower of Pisa. In 1991 a delegation of Pisa officials, including the Vice-Mayor Pietro Tremolanti, visited Niles. They toured the village, including a stop at the Culver School, signed similar documents that Niles officials had signed in Pisa, completing formalities to make Niles and Pisa Sister Cities.

The first student exchange program was in 1992. Tracy Frey, the Culver student who suggested the pen-pal program, was now attending Niles West High School. She was one of the first students selected for the four-week program in Pisa. Other students were: John Pirra, senior, and Tony Amelio and James Bay, graduates, of Notre Dame High School in Niles; and Dawn Passarella, Kathy Pieroni, and Tommy Chang of Maine East High School.

Ten students from Pisa came to Niles during the summer of 1993. They stayed with host families, as Niles students did when they visited Pisa. While in Niles, students from Pisa were taken on tours and to numerous places of interest by Niles officials. They were presented to and honored by the Niles Village Board.



In 1994, 11 students represented Niles in Pisa. These were: Jenny Wrzesinski (Marrilac High School), Kenny Callero (Notre Dame High School), Nicholas Beyer (Notre Dame High School), Jennifer Andreoni (a student from California--her parents were a host family for students from Italy), Karyna Zarate (Niles West High School), Marianne Piwko (Maine East High School),

Susanna Rio (Maine East High School), Anna LaFronza (Maine South High School), Sarah Bleeden (Maine South High School), Jamie Martello (Maine South High School), and Michael Marchi (Maine South High School).

Two years later Dawn Wrzesinski (Marillac-Loyola Academy), Stephanie Minkley (Maine East High School), Deana Strzelecki (Maine East High School), Tony Silvio (Notre Dame High School), and Giulio Bruni (Maine East High School) left Niles to spend a summer in Pisa on the exchange program.

## **NAFPLION, GREECE**

With the success of the Niles-Pisa Sister City program, there was interest in similar arrangements with other cities. Several businessmen of Greek heritage and members of St. Haralambos Greek Orthodox Church had active associations with Nafplion, Greece.

A 27-member delegation from Nafplion visited Niles in 1994. Mayor Nicholas Blase and Nafplion Mayor George Tsournos signed a joint proclamation which established Niles and Nafplion as Sister Cities.

A student exchange program, similar to the one established with Pisa, is planned for the near future.



*Niles Mayor Nicholas Blase and Nafplion Mayor George Tsournos*

## **SISTER CITIES ASSOCIATION OF NILES**

Niles officials used the offices of the National Organization of Sister Cities in preliminary contacts in developing a Sister Cities program. After the Niles-Pisa Sister City structure was formalized, Niles elected its own officers for a Sister Cities Association of Niles. Charles Barbaglia was elected president in 1994 and has continued in that office through 1997.

## NILES SQUARES

Over the years, perhaps no group has represented Niles in other communities as frequently as have the Niles Squares. When the club celebrated its 35th anniversary in 1990, more than 160 people were in attendance. No fewer than 10 other Chicagoland square dancing clubs were present.

Visiting other square dance clubs is a common practice for the more than 100 square dancing clubs that have been active in the Chicago area. Dressed in their club's colors - Niles' colors are shocking pink and black - two squares (eight dancers) would travel to another club and claim or "steal" their banner. Clubs which had their banner stolen have to visit the club "stealing" or claiming their banner with two squares (eight dancers dressed in their club's colors) to retrieve or re-claim their banner.

Delegations do get large. Once a delegation of 20 couples from the Niles Squares arrived in Arlington Heights to claim that club's banner. Since delegations for each of the 100 or so square dance clubs meet at least once a week, there may be as many as three banners "stolen" in any week by the different Niles Squares groups. In turn, the Niles Squares may have their own banner "stolen" three times in any week by three visiting delegations.

The Niles Squares began as the Little Squares when eight people joined together and began square dancing in the Niles basement of caller Ralph Glading in 1953. The following year the Niles Park District was organized and the group became part of the Niles Park District recreation program, providing the Park District with one of their first adult recreation programs.

The Little Squares danced at the Grennan Heights field house until 1964 when the Niles Recreation Center was opened at 7877 Milwaukee Avenue. The club moved to the Niles Recreation Center at that time and remains there.

In 1971 the club changed its name to Niles Squares. The club's colors were also changed: from the original black and white check to turquoise and white. In 1983 a third change was made to the current shocking pink and black.

To attract new members, free lessons were given every September. In more recent years, lessons have been extended and are available throughout the year. At its height of activity in 1980, the Niles Squares numbered 90 couples. An annual carousel dance called every March attracts as many as 200 couples.

Over the years most club members have also taken part in numerous activities of the club. There were knothed trips: one-day journeys to meet with another club for a day of planned activities. Badges are distributed and proudly worn for a variety of activities: an owl badge is given for dancing after midnight, particularly if the dance is at the caller's house; the snow bunny badge is given to those hearty enough to dance in snow at least a foot high; the jailbird badge is given to those who dance in jail behind bars. Other names--there are many more--of badges include: goon, square blades, square wheels, square angel, penguin, spook, kissin kuzzin, rain drops, stinkers, grasshopper, damp cracker, raft rocker, hobo, sand flea, bus hopper, rover, and sons of the beaches.

Annual trips to the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells have attracted more than 100 clubs from Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota for a weekend of dancing to the calls of nationally known callers. There are also hayrides, picnics, potluck dinners, and even being featured on local television programs. Over the years the Niles Squares have been active performing and giving lessons during Niles Days.

The Niles Squares were often invited to perform for other groups, such as senior citizens, or as an attraction to promote a local business at a shopping mall in Niles or for some special event.

Because all square dance calls are in English, Niles Squares have attended national and international conventions, which draw as many as 40,000 participants. In recent years the Niles Squares have danced in Atlantic City, Orlando, Milwaukee, and Memphis in the United States. International conventions have been held in Germany, Sweden, and Japan.

Guy Adams, regular caller for the Niles Squares, frequently invites guest callers. A caller from Sweden visited Niles a few years ago. Other callers for the Niles Squares were Al Schaffner, Diamond Jim Young, Art Matthews, and Ken Anderson. Kevin Kasper was probably the youngest caller for the Niles Squares: he started at 10 and continued calling dances for many years.

In addition to being goodwill ambassadors for Niles throughout the area and the United States, Niles Squares have also made frequent financial contributions to the Niles Park District. In 1977 the Niles Squares received a community service award from the Illinois Park and Recreation Association for "unselfish contributions of time and money over the past 20 years to the Niles Park District."

Presidents of the Niles Little Squares, between 1953 and 1970, included Walt Schroeder, Art Gorski, Ron Knill, Ernest Ceisel, Ernie Johnson, Bill Nelles, Roy Gunderson, Keith Peck, Ed Kosuth, and Mike Capellani.

Presidents of the Niles Squares since 1970:

1970	Pete and Irene Capellani
1972	Bob and Gerry Ohlund
1973	Ed and Dottie Milanowski
1974-75	Walter and Penny Schultz
1976-77	Warren and Angie Goodcase
1978-79	William and Ruth Pugh
1980	Gene and Shirley Warrington
1981-82	William and Annise Casper
1983-84	Michael and Nancy Czapar
1985-86	Larry and Linda Whippie
1987-88	Michael and Nancy Czapar
1989	David and Maryanne Lee
1990	Michael and Nancy Czapar
	Norman and Dee Leach
	Carl and Mildred Ahonen
1991-92	Tom and Basia Parashis
1993-94	Edward "Bud" and Audrey Rompa
1995-96	Michael and Nancy Czapar
1997	Winfield and Barbara Greene

## NORTHWEST ITALIAN-AMERICAN SOCIETY

The Northwest Italian-American Society was organized at a meeting in Angelo's Restaurant in Niles. Approximately 100 future members of the society gathered early in March 1964. Over the years the majority of the society's membership has been from Niles and the group met regularly at the Ballard School.

group announced it was a non-sectarian, non-political, charitable, social society, which would preserve Italian cultural traditions and take action against any discrimination directed at individuals of Italian heritage.

One of the first donations of the society was to Villa Scalabrini Chapel for the purchase of a pew. The society sent packages to sons of members and other servicemen in Vietnam, sent aid to victims of flooding in Italy, and gave assistance to Gary Stayer, an injured athlete from Niles.

The Northwest Italian-American Society float in the 1969 Niles Days Parade won first place. Their men's softball team displayed its skills at annual picnics the society regularly sponsored at the Bunker Hill Country Club. Members also displayed their theatrical interests by putting on a show with the Jefferson Theatrical Society.

In 1972 the society hosted a Christmas party at the White Eagle Restaurant in Niles for 160 women, priests, and nuns from Mt. St. Joseph. This event has become an annual tradition sponsored by the society, which also provides appliances and other necessities for the health-care center in Lake Zurich.

The society assists at the annual Niles Police Halloween party at Notre Dame High School. Thousands usually attend. Other recent projects in Niles include support for the Sister Cities Program with Pisa, Italy, assistance to Niles Family Services for abused children, purchase of a Braille computer for a Niles College student, providing food baskets for needy families, a high school leadership workshop program at Notre Dame High School, and participation in the Niles 4th of July Parade.

The Northwest Italian-American Society has initiated a scholarship program, sponsors Little League baseball and hockey teams, and works with the Niles Police Cops for Kids, and the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Bowling program.

One fund-raiser is conducted annually. In 1997, there were 57 very active members in the Northwest Italian-American Society.

Presidents:

Edward Ciccone	1968-70	Anthony Durso	1980-81
Robert Romano	1970-71	Nick Gargano	1981-82
Andy Clabattari	1971-72	Frank Baffa	1982-83
Anthony Scarlati	1972-73	Gene Till	1983-84
Thomas Imburgia	1973-74	Frank Romeo	1984-86
Anthony Gagliano	1974-75	Ed Miller	1986-88
Joseph Raymond	1975-76	Bill Darling	1988-90
John Trippi	1976-77	John Katsoolias	1990-92
Joseph Tripoli	1977-78	Emil Bertolini	1992-94
Todd Bavaro	1978-79	Larry Schweizer	1994-96
Perry Tarica	1979-80	Vince Zingarelli	1996-

## OPA GREEK FOLK DANCE TROUPE OF CHICAGO

The Opa Greek Folk Dance Troupe of Chicago originated as an outgrowth of a dance group at The Holy Taxiarchi and St. Haralambos Greek Orthodox Church of Niles. Children at the school were taught Greek dances and performed at picnics and other school activities between 1988 and

1992. Some of the dancers and adults began meeting as a dance troupe at the church in 1990. The troupe then met at the Ballard School in Niles for two years from 1995 to 1997. Georgia Kralis-Sampras organized the troupe and has been director since its founding.

## OPTIMIST CLUB OF NILES

The Optimist Club of Niles was chartered April 23, 1986. It is a voluntary organization that develops optimism as a way of life, promotes interest in government, civic affairs, and respect for the law, and aids and encourages development of youth. Membership, which is determined by invitation only, was 32 in 1986 and has grown to 36 in 1997.

Projects include sponsorship of a junior high school basketball and junior high school volleyball tournament. Approximately 80 youngsters participate in each tournament. The Optimists also sponsor a Niles baseball team and a junior world golf tournament at Tam O'Shanter Golf Club.

The group provides a safety tent for 4th of July festivities and supplies baskets of food, in cooperation with the Northwest Italian-American Society, for the needy in Niles. In 1997, some 50 baskets were distributed.

Artistic and literary skills of Niles youngsters are displayed in the annual poster and literary contests sponsored by the Optimists. The 1997 Halloween poster contest had 150 entries. The essay contest, open to junior high students, asks students to write on a selected topic. This type of contest has been conducted in Niles, off and on, for about 50 years. Winners are designated government officials for a day. They are invited to village hall chambers and each takes the seat of the village official and learns of issues and procedures involved in governing Niles.

### Presidents:

John Katsoolias	1986-88
Ron Strzelecki	1988-89
Rich Mangold	1989-90
Mark Nannini	1990-91
Dean Strzelecki	1991-93
John Jekot	1993-98

## POLONIA CARES

Polonia Cares was organized in Niles in 1982. Its purpose was to raise funds to address social welfare problems in the Polish-American community in the Chicago metropolitan area. Founder and president was Ted Przybylo, owner of the White Eagle restaurant in Niles, where Polonia Cares met and sponsored numerous activities.

Birthday Party banquets headlined by popular personalities such as Mike Krzyzewski, coach of Duke University's Blue Devils basketball team, and Francis Gabrewski, World War II American ace in the London Theater, attracted between 400 and 600 guests.

A women's chapter, which continues to the present day as a social group, also conducted fund-raising activities with its penny socials and banquets featuring a silent auction.

Ted Przybylo was president of the Polish Welfare Association from 1977 to 1981. Andrew Przybylo, member of the Niles Village Board of Trustees, was president of the Polish Welfare

Association from 1982 to 1985. A building at 2905 N. Milwaukee Avenue, owned and used for the work of Polonia Cares, was donated to the Polish Welfare Association in 1993 after Polonia Cares was dissolved.

Andrew Przybylo estimates that approximately \$100,000 was raised and distributed to those in need in the Polish-American community by Polonia Cares between 1982 and 1993.

## ROTARY CLUB OF NILES

The Rotary Club of Niles was established March 5, 1962, when 25 Niles businessmen and professionals gathered at the Lone Tree Inn. Judge Anton Smigiel was named president. Other officers included Rev. Robert Gish, vice president; Kenneth Klehr, secretary; Dr. Edward Risk, treasurer; and William L. Keeran, sgt-at-arms. Herbert Harig, Arthur Rudolph, Arthur Weller, and George Welter became directors. The aim of the group was simply stated, "to encourage and foster the idea of service." The first installation of officers drew a crowd of 500.

The Rotary would frequently contribute to the Niles Christmas decoration fund. In 1965 they presented the Niles library with a microfilm reader. In 1970 the Niles Rotary volunteered to keep Tam O'Shanter open for two last days in September so all who wanted to have a final game on the championship 18-hole golf course were able to do so.

In 1974 the Rotary was very supportive of the "See a Bike, Save a Life" campaign. Some 4,000 bikes in Niles were supplied with signal flags and reflectors. These were installed by volunteers under the supervision of the Niles Police Department. The Niles Rotary covered all costs.

The Rotary Club of Niles merged with the Morton Grove Rotary in 1974 and meetings were regularly scheduled in Morton Grove. In recent years the combined club has been active with the Boy Scouts, Food Locker, has sent medical equipment to Peru, has provided toilets for a village in India, and has supported Polio Plus.

Presidents of the Rotary Club, while it was headquartered in Niles, include Anton Smigiel, Rev. Robert Gish, Dr. Edward Rink, Herb Harig, and Burton B. McRoy, Jr. In 1980, Niles resident, Robert Wordel, Jr. served as president of the Morton Grove-Niles Rotary.

## ST. ISAAC JOGUES 55+ CLUB

The 55+ Club was started in the home of Peter and Florence Lencioni and Fr. Francis Cerniglia as founders on May 12, 1977. The club received its charter from the Chicago Metropolitan Area Senior Citizens Senate on September 6, 1977, with a total membership of 10. One year later membership had grown to an amazing 252. Today only one member of the original founding 10 members survives.

The 55+ Club is a busy, active club. They have taken many trips and have had potluck lunches, Halloween parties, White Elephant sales, Turkey Shoots, Christmas parties, St. Patrick's Day and St. Joseph's Day parties. They also help with the St. Joseph Table, Niles Day's Festivals, and Little City of Hope tag days. The club consists of happy, active people who believe in having a good time.

Past Presidents of St. Isaac Jogues 55+ Club:

Peter Lencioni                      1977-81



Charles Palkonar	1982-83
Stanley Zabski	1984-85
Frank Romeo	1986-87
Rudy Seifert	1988-89
Anne Romeo	1990-92
Bernice Tegeler	1993-94
Rudy Seifert	1995-98

## VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 311

The Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 311 was organized in 1986 in Niles. Meetings were regularly conducted at the Trident Center for the 150 members from the northwest suburbs. Marty Passarella, the group's founder, also went to area schools to discuss Vietnam and the veterans who returned from Vietnam. A plaque was presented to the Trident Center on Veteran's Day 1987.

The Vietnam Veterans coordinated the project, which resulted in six benches being donated to the Niles Public Library. Each represented a major war in which the United States participated. Each bench was engraved indicating Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War. The benches were completed and formally dedicated on Memorial Day 1990. John Slater donated the plaque that commemorated the Veteran's Walkway.



*Veteran's Walkway*

Lt. Commander James F. Haris of Niles served as a chaplain in Vietnam. He joined a battalion in October 1966 and was assigned to medical aid missions.

Richard Rogala, a member of the Pueblo crew, after 11 months in a Korean prison camp, returned to Niles in 1968 and received a warm reception at Notre Dame High School and "special recognition" from the Village of Niles.

Niles residents who made the ultimate sacrifice for their nation:

World War II  
Alvin Ruesch  
Frank Zieka

Vietnam War  
Pvt. 1st Cl. Walter Land  
Capt. Larry Peters

A plaque on display in Notre Dame High school lists former Notre Dame students who were killed or were missing in action in Vietnam.

Robert L. Bodine--Class of 1961  
Killed in action, March 16, 1968

Dennis J. Fries--Class of 1966  
Killed in action, October 26, 1967

John A. Blanco--Class of 1961  
Killed in action, December 17, 1968

Gregory J. Kasper--Class of 1966  
Killed in action, September 25, 1967

Brian J. Mathison--Class of 1962  
Killed in action, April 1, 1968

Kenneth E. Norris--Sept. 1958-Feb. 1961  
Killed in action, January 31, 1969

James T. Donahue, Jr.--Class of 1963  
Killed in action, September 22, 1967

Richard D. Kosar--Sept. 1961-June 1964  
Killed in action, May 10, 1968

Walter J. Nowakowski--Class of 1965  
Killed in action, October 23, 1967

Thomas H. Pilkington--Class of 1959  
Missing in action, September 19, 1966

## WOMAN'S CLUB OF NILES

The Woman's Club of Niles was organized on March 25, 1954. Mrs. Sterling Oakley, the retiring president of the 10th district of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs, assisted the women in Niles in launching the club. The founders of the club include Mrs. David Besser, Mrs. James W. Bialk, Mrs. Byron Ellis, Jr., Mrs. Carlyle Esser, Mrs. Medard Greenwald, Mrs. C. Richard Hanisch, Mrs. Frank L. Jacobs, Jr., Miss Emma Mamsch, Mrs. Joseph K. Mertes, Mrs. Josephine Scheel, Mrs. Helen Stec, Miss Irene Stec, Mrs. John Stieber, Mrs. Edward A. Walger, Mrs. Vincent Weber, Mrs. Ray M. Wiese, Mrs. Philip Wray, and Mrs. Henry G. Zander III.

The club's first constitution indicated, "The object of this club shall be to promote the welfare of home and community and to stimulate interest along educational, civic and cultural lines." The club adopted the motto, "Unity in diversity." Nile green and white were selected as the club's colors.

In the first year, there were approximately 100 members. Preparations began early for the philanthropy dance in April 1955. This event was to be the club's principal fund-raiser throughout its history.

During its first years, the club devoted many of its energies to establishing a public library for Niles. Books and funds were collected by club members who also set up a library structure, which provided limited library services. When a referendum vote approved a Niles Library District, the Woman's Club of Niles turned over \$1,877.31 to the district library board. During its entire history, the Woman's Club of Niles supported the library with funds, gifts, and assistance in cooperating with or encouraging the activities of such groups as the Friends of the Library.

In 1960 in a formal ceremony at the Niles Public Library, the Woman's Club of Niles presented a plaque, which read: "Niles Public Library--founded by the Woman's Club of Niles--1957."

In 1955 the club also launched home nursing, arts and crafts, and millinery classes. Sewing contests were entered and a glee club was formed.

The Niles Citizens Committee was organized in 1956 with the assistance of the Woman's Club of Niles. The purpose of this committee was "to promote unity and to solve some of the problems the community faces."

Concern for maintaining the health of the community resulted in the Woman's Club of Niles sponsoring a three-year project to administer polio serum to schoolchildren. The project concluded in 1960 with an average of 400 students benefited each year. They supplied schools with medical kits useful in detecting diseases. The Woman's Club of Niles also assisted in bringing in and staffing free mobile TB units to Niles at this time. During the late 1960s the Woman's Club of Niles expanded its work with the Niles Health Board by assisting with health screens for preschool children. Throughout the 1970s the club worked closely with the village co-op blood program.

The Woman's Club of Niles had an active calendar of activities for its members. The program for 1959-60 is typical:

September 3	Membership Tea
September 16	How to read character in handwriting Joseph Fasulo - graphologist
October 21	Magic with silks
October 29	Card party and fashion show
November 18	Poetry in everyday life Dorothy Aldis - poet
December 16	"The Nutcracker Suite"
January 20	"A Crown and a Brim Full of Fun" Sallie Sue Williamson
March 16	Cooking demonstration Evelyn Butterworth - Northern Illinois Gas Company
April 20	Election White elephant sale Fine arts display
April 23	Philanthropy Spring Dance
May 14	Annual spring luncheon

Most of the club's activities resulted in additional funds for its treasury. As quickly as funds came in, they were spent on numerous worthy causes. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the club contributed to art scholarships, music scholarships, teacher's scholarships, the Park Ridge School for Girls, cancer research, Lutheran General Hospital, Orchard School building fund and toys for the school, and Radio Free Europe.

Club members were involved in numerous activities. In 1960 the Woman's Club of Niles glee club performed at Swedish Covenant Hospital, Lutheran General Hospital, and Golf-Mill shopping center. The glee club also formed the nucleus for a mixed chorus sponsored by the Niles Park Board. It performed at many park activities. Literature promoting a fire-prevention campaign was distributed for the Niles Fire Department and the club also assisted in selecting "Miss Fire Prevention."

The first production of the Woman's Club of Niles "Thespian Players" was "Husbands are Human." The 1961 performance "was a huge success." There were also performances of "Escape to Nowhere" and the "Pent-up Party." Several years later, there were three performances of their production of "The Merry Widow." This was billed as the club's "first major fund raising event toward obtaining an historical and cultural center" for Niles. Future productions of "Naughty Marietta," "Sweethearts," "Vagabond King," and "The King and I" also raised money for the historical and cultural center. When the center was established, it became the Niles Historical Museum. In 1976 the club co-sponsored an original musical "America We Love You or a Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Bicentennial."

The "Kitchen Kut-Ups," club members who formed an instrumental group, gave many public performances.

In 1968 a company of U.S. troops in Vietnam was "adopted" by the Woman's Club of Niles. Food, clothing, and other necessities were regularly sent to the troops.

Wherever there was a need, the Woman's Club of Niles was ever ready to respond. They sponsored receptions for newly naturalized citizens. They adopted an Amurasian child through the Pearl S. Buck Foundation. They launched an ecological recycling program. They convinced Niles Mayor Nicholas Blase to proclaim an Indian Affairs Week. In 1976 they placed a plaque at Dutchman's Point commemorating the first settlement in today's Niles. A few years later, money was provided for Niles Olympic hopeful Pat Moore. Updated listings of area nursing home facilities were published and postal alert programs for emergencies were initiated. Members would serve at Loyola University's campus in Niles for the performing arts festivals and later at Niles College for the summer concert series. Veterans at Hines Hospital were given t-shirts and socks every year. AIDS babies at Maryville received supplies of diapers.

In the late 1980s the club had its own golf league, bridge club, and pinochle club.

Frequently the district or national organization of women's clubs would recognize the efforts of the Woman's Club of Niles with citations or special awards. "Breezy Briefs," the club's newsletter, received numerous first-place awards. Other awards were for increases in membership and assistance to district offices of the women's clubs. The club also received several awards as a result of participating in Niles Day parades.

In 1997, the club voted to dissolve. There may have been a touch of irony in that final vote. One of the club's last activities was sponsoring an essay contest for elementary school students. It asked students to describe "The world in the year 2000." Holly Edison, eighth-grade winner from Our Lady of Ransom school, saw many things in the world of 2000 but, like many others, probably did not foresee a Niles without an active Woman's Club of Niles.

#### Presidents of the Woman's Club of Niles:

Dorothy Wiese	1954-56	Barbara Hedrich	1974-76
Bea Petritis	1956-57	JoAnn DiCicco-Hackbauer	1976-78
Nancy Koch-Johnson	1957-58	Joyce Knapp	1978-80
Vivian D. Egan	1958-60	Dorothy Robertson	1980-82
Eleanor M. Gilardon	1960-62	Elaine Heinen	1982-84
Dorothy Zarembo	1962-63	Dorothy Krause	1984
Sandie Friedman	1963-64	Ethel Garry	1984-88
Isabel Curtin	1964-66	Geri Bugarin	1988-90
Dorothy Zarembo	1966-68	Phyllis Luppino	1990-92
Marilyn Kramer	1968-70	Marjorie Pierski	1992-94
Mandy Honold	1970-72	Nancy Niemoth	1994-96
Arlene Sawicki	1972-74		

## WOMEN'S AUXILIARY OF THE NILES POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Women's Auxiliary of the Niles Police Department was organized December 7, 1961. The stated purpose of the auxiliary was to provide benevolent benefits for members and their families. Life insurance policies were purchased for policemen, and families of policemen were provided for when policemen were unable to work. Membership in the auxiliary was about 40 members.

To raise funds the auxiliary would conduct bake sales, bazaars, candy sales, card parties, fashion shows, and demonstrations. A "mitten tree" and a "lollipop tree" for the youngsters were planted at the public library and income was harvested. In 1962 the bazaar featured a photo and letter from the White House signed by Jacqueline Kennedy.

Annual picnics were organized for members of the Niles Police Department and their families. The group also participated in the Niles Days and other civic programs. In 1962 the auxiliary received \$1,933.53 from Niles Days, about 45 percent of the proceeds of the activities.

After the Policeman's Benevolent Association was organized in 1962, the Women's Auxiliary of the Niles Police Department turned over most of the funds they raised to the Policeman's Benevolent Association. When the benevolent association became self-sufficient, the Ladies Auxiliary was informed their contributions were no longer necessary. The Ladies Auxiliary continued. It purchased uniforms for members and a \$500 death benefit fund was established for wives retaining membership in the auxiliary.

From time to time, the Women's Auxiliary of the Niles Police Department selected Citizens of the Year, made presentations of "Heroic Awards" or named a "Top Cop" for the month or year. Those selections included:

1962 Citizens of the Year	Mr. and Mrs. Lee Struebing
February 1963 Top Cop	Officer William Reid
March 1963 Top Cop	Officer Art Dvorak
1964 Top Cop	Captain Andy Cameron
1965 "Heroic Awards"	Vicki Jans, Jean Carfello, Davis Cantwell, Charles Tommins
1967 "Heroic Awards"	Scott Levi, Ken Berg

### Presidents:

1962	Mary Jane Terpinas	1971-72	Dorothy Dennis
1963	Rosemary Wisniewski	1973-74	Bernardine Reid
1964	Lois Christie	1975-76	Gloria Baltzersen
1965	Mary Jane Terpinas	1977-78	Bernardine Reid
1966	Dorothy Dennis	1979-80	Annette Dvorak
1967	Kathy Stankowicz	1981	Dolores Olbrisch
1968	Dorothy Dennis	1982	Joanne Katsoolias
1969-70	Mary Jane Terpinas		

## YMCA SENIOR CITIZEN'S CLUB

The Senior Citizen's Club of the Niles YMCA had its first meeting October 17, 1966. Interest was shown and an orientation meeting was called for October 26, 1966, to discuss activities for such an organization. It was decided that a center should be provided for seniors, activities would be planned and coordinated, isolated older persons would be visited, information and referrals would be made available to seniors, and there would be continual and regular opportunities for fellowship and recreation.

Programs were launched October 31, 1966, in the facilities at the Niles Leaning Tower YMCA. There were theme parties associated with holidays, members' birthdays or other special events. There were classes in art, fitness sessions, card games, and special Christmas programs. Members visited the Chicago Art Institute, attended the theater, and went on trips as far away as Canada.

Individual members often launched programs or activities. Within a year, "Rambling Thoughts," a newsletter sent to all members, was initiated and written by members. A group of members decided to participate in the Senior Olympics conducted by Northern Illinois University in 1982. A chorus was formed and sang for events at the YMCA. A few years later, members of the Senior Citizen's Club organized the "Tower-Tones" and began making formal appearances throughout the area singing before many other groups.

Shirley Spears became director of the Senior Adult Center in 1967. Membership quickly mushroomed from the original 18 members who organized the club in 1966. By 1970 there were 150 members, including 50 couples. The amount of men and women were equal which, according to Spears, "was unheard of at other senior centers." Membership increased to more than 500 members in 1974 with some 60 activities available. Members met four times a week at the YMCA. Usually there were six activities planned for each meeting day. In 1979, membership topped 1,000 with 200 married couples. Membership has remained constant for the past 20 years and in 1997 was approximately 1,100.

Soon after the group was established, members began several service projects. In 1969, 24 pairs of scuffies were made and sent to veterans at the Hines Hospital. Members wrote to U.S. Congressmen on various issues, took part in All-American Day events, participated in a hunger march, and prevailed on transit authorities to print and distribute bus schedules.

In 1974, the YMCA Senior Citizen Center received a \$5,000 grant for older American activities from the Suburban Cook County Area Agency. Members' annual dues and assessments for specified events generally paid for most activities. Additional funding came from the Niles Township Board, United Crusade, and Skokie Valley Kiwanees.

In 1978, the National Voluntary Organization for Independent Living for the Aging gave an award to the YMCA Senior Citizen Center for its information and referral services, health screening programs, and outreach and visiting programs.

Shirley Spears, director of the YMCA Senior Citizen Center, died in 1985. Recognized throughout the area and nation as a leading advocate for the aged, Spears helped organize the community forum for the White House Conference on Aging in 1980. The activity room at the YMCA is dedicated to the memory of Shirley Spears.

Lois Dickert served as director of the Senior Citizen Center from 1985 to 1993. Joan Hagensen became director in 1993, serving until 1996, when Evelyn Merkl, current director, was appointed.

Presidents of YMCA Senior Adult Center:

Otto Schaefer	1967-69	Florine Chambers	1980
Robert Link	1970, 1972	Harry Lastick	1981
Edward Martens	1971	Blanche Pollack	1982-84
Arthur Scharfenberg	1973-74	Joseph Bunzol	1985-87
Norman Loderhose	1975-76, 1978	Virginia Holm	1988-89
Joseph Chunowitz	1977	Betty Coken	1990-91
Herbert Gosstrom	1979	Merritt Cook, Sr.	1992-94, 1996-98
		Glen Dismang	1995