

## More than Fair-weather friends

Group of LHS grads gathers every decade to celebrate special bond

BY MICHELLE GEORGE • The Eagle-Gazette Staff • October 17, 2009

LANCASTER -- They share matching heart-and-key charm bracelets and memories of high school trips to the fair, double dates at Jimmy Jawbreakers and weekend excursions to Buckeye Lake.

But, most importantly, the 70-year-old women and Lancaster natives who fondly refer to themselves as the "Dorkeys" share a rare and special friendship that has spanned more than 50 years.

On Friday evening, 11 of the 18 women who bonded at Lancaster High School in the 1950s and vowed to remain close for the rest of their lives, joined together at the Fairfield County Fair to celebrate their 70th birthdays -- and their lengthy friendship.

The Dorkeys get together every 10 years to ring in their milestone birthdays and reminisce about their high school years. In 1999, they celebrated turning 60 by renting a limo and hosting a slumber party at Shaw's Restaurant in Lancaster. This year, they celebrated turning 70 with burgers from Jimmy Jawbreakers and rides on the Ferris Wheel and Merry-Go-Round.

"We chose this because there is nothing bigger than the fair," Dorkey member Pat Lahmer Ross said. "We have a lot of wonderful memories of coming here when we were in high school. I remember the sun was always shining -- we always had great weather for the fair."

The group first started calling themselves the Dorkeys while they were attending Lancaster High School. All 18 members graduated in 1957.

Their unusual name has generated quite a few laughs from their children and grandchildren during the years -- but it does stand for something in particular, Elizabeth "Ibby" Henderson Green said.

"We were all naive and arrogant enough to think we had the keys to life, so that's where we got the name from," Green said. "We ended up getting little charm bracelets in high school that had a heart and a key."

The group have their share of favorite memories from their high school years, such as renting a cottage at Buckeye Lake but still having to be chaperoned all night by several of their mothers.



Members of the "Dorkeys," a group of women who graduated together from Lancaster High School in 1957, celebrate a mini-class reunion at the Fairfield County Fair on Friday evening. The women gathered to celebrate their 70th birthdays and lifelong friendship. (Abigail S. Fisher, Eagle-Gazette)



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But it's the times they spent at the fair that top some of their favorite memories. The women all recall eating burgers from Jimmy Jawbreakers, giggling together on various fair rides and playfully shrieking at fellow Dorkey Ann Courtright Swearingen every time she would daringly tilt the Ferris Wheel car.

"We were all just Midwest, small-town girls who grew up in the '50s and the most important thing to us then were family and friends," said Dorkey member Barbara Fogel Klayman. "Our relationships with other friends are different than the ones we have with each other because we all know each other so well; we knew each other's siblings and homes.

"We all came from different financial backgrounds and had different religions, but those things never mattered."

Today, the women are scattered throughout United States but have kept in contact through letters, phone calls and e-mail. In between their 10-year visits, the Dorkeys coordinate smaller get-togethers and visit each other in their current hometowns in Florida, California and New York.

But they always look forward to meeting up every year in the town where they first met many years ago. In addition to attending the fair on Friday, they also plan to stay at Buckeye Lake and visit with an old high school teacher and a fellow Dorkey's mother before heading back to their homes and families on Sunday.

"We all love Lancaster," said Ross, who now lives in New York.

"I still feel like I'm coming home every time I come back here."

Klayman said she always feels like she's stepping back into the good old days when she reunites with her old high school buddies every 10 years.

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To quote (the novel), 'The Girls from Ames,' when we're together 'we're every age we ever were,'" Klayman said.

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