



Gretchen Olson, left, pours tea for fellow Soroptimist member Olivia Holderman at the group's tea and silent auction.

# Having Fun While Helping Out

*Goldendale Soroptimist members support local, international projects*

By Jeanie Senior

During the past four-plus decades, Soroptimist International of Goldendale has sponsored scholarships, fostered international relations and donated money to local causes. It helped pay for a digital mammogram machine for the Klickitat Valley Hospital, and it supports the food bank, Backpacks for Kids, Head Start and Programs for Peaceful Living.

"This is a really powerful little group that improves the lives of women and girls," says Sandra Choate, president of Soroptimists until July 1, when she was succeeded by Adar Israel.

The organization's membership includes business and professional women—some still working, others retired.

"I'm not sure people realize until they join that it's also a really fun group," Sandra says.

The last Saturday in June, Soroptimists held its second annual tea and silent auction, a social gathering and fundraiser that attracted more than 50 people and raised \$1,400. The money supports

scholarships for local women to help them complete their education and expand their employment opportunities. Two previous scholarship recipients are completing their degrees at Columbia Gorge Community College in The Dalles.

Tables for four, set up in the fellowship hall of Christ the King Lutheran Church, featured china tea services that ranged from Spode to art deco. Soroptimist members prepared the variety of sweet and savory foods arranged on a long table at one end of the room. Guests paid \$10 each for the tea. Those who didn't wear a hat from home could rent one for \$5.

"The community is very, very generous," says Barbara Robinson, who gathered items for the silent auction.

Among the items up for bid: paintings, jewelry, photographs and a mosaic; gift certificates to Goldendale restaurants; a car care package from Les Schwab and DT Fast Lube; a handmade quilt and a hand-crocheted afghan; a massage; a spa day; wine;

and a Goldendale shopping package.

Soroptimist members spent hours preparing for the tea and cleaning up afterward.

“The fact that we can get people together to have fun while we also are doing it for the purpose of helping women go on to school” is notable, says Adar.

The criteria for scholarship recipients specify they should go to a woman who is a head of household, is enrolled or already in school and is in financial need.

“Becoming educated is something we consider very important,” Adar says.

In addition to the scholarships, the group commits money to programs that help women and children. Soroptimists have paid for swimming lessons, and for fishing poles for kids on Family Fishing Day.

The group sponsored a Bedeck a Bra competition for a few years as a way to bring attention to the need for a digital mammogram machine at the local hospital. Sandra’s winning design the first year, Barbara explains with a chuckle, featured red lights and two rotating windmills.

The community involvement helped the hospital get the money for the machine. The bras designed for the competition are a changing display in the mammogram imaging room.

Dasia White isn’t a member, but she was a hard-working volunteer at the tea and silent auction. She says her work is a way for her to express her gratitude for all the group has done for the community, particularly for Programs for Peaceful Living, where she works as a programs coordinator and advocate.

The nonprofit helps victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and rape. Dasia says Soroptimist International of Goldendale provides clothing and other items for clients and offers ideas for ways to support victims.

Some of the money raised at other Soroptimist events—including plant sales and nut sales for the



**Sandra Choate, left, pins a corsage on Kay Kimmel, who was a charter member of the Soroptimist International of Goldendale 43 years ago.**

holidays—goes to international projects.

Every other year, the club hosts a visit from a Soroptimist member from around the world. In recent years, visitors have come from Sweden, England, Germany and India.

This year’s guest was Rufina Achieng, a young professional woman from Nairobi, Kenya, who visited in April. She spent four days in the Columbia Gorge, toured Goldendale and area attractions and met club members at a potluck. She also attended a powwow at Celilo Village.

Rufina told her hosts about her Soroptimist club’s long-term project: trying to rescue children who live in the garbage dumps in Nairobi.

“Early in the club’s history, they took girls in and sent them to the elementary school, and worked with them,” says Betty Long-Schlieff, one of the Soroptimists who hosted Rufina. “Now some girls have graduated and are going on to college. They’ve really focused on a few children to follow them all the way through.”

The international visitors pay their own airfare, but the clubs that host them provide the rest. Not all Soroptimist chapters participate in the program.

“It really breathes life into the club,” Betty says. “It makes you understand the greater purpose of what we’re supposed to be doing, and it gets the club interested in international projects.” ■