

# Children's Guild focuses on helping kids



KEN PERKINS/STAFF

**DANVILLE CHILDREN'S GUILD:** Left to right, front row: Currie Osborn, Vice President, Raymie Sladek, Publicity, Nisha Dada, Recording Secretary, Karin O'Connell, Current Member, and Christine Gnos, Current Member. Left to right, back row: Lisa Pellegrini, Founding Member Rep, Nikki Indart, Corresponding Secretary, and Michelle Duffield, President.

BY AMY MOELLERING  
CORRESPONDENT

The story of the Danville's Children's Guild spans two generations of women who share the belief that nurturing the larger community is as important as nurturing lifelong friendships. This hardworking group proves that it only takes a small number of dedicated members to make a huge difference in the lives of young children.

In the early 1970's, Danville resident Mary Church belonged to the East Bay Junior League but found it difficult to fulfill her volunteer duties in cities like Berkeley and Oakland while raising her young children. When she had the opportunity to volunteer at the Danville Child Resource Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to children with learning disabilities, she happily took it and discovered that there was a need at local charities. Church decided she wanted to focus on these charities with the autonomy and flexibility of a smaller group. In 1977, she formed the Danville Children's Guild with her friend Linda Schwaderer. By recruiting their friends, the group grew to about 30 members. Their first fundraiser, a tennis tournament at the Sycamore Clubhouse, benefited the Child Resource Center.

For years, the guild held auctions, luncheons, and other fundraisers to raise money for charities that might be overlooked by larger organizations. As their kids grew, other commitments took over and the organization fizzled in 1986.

Flash forward to 1999. Lisa Pellegrini and Heather Ninekirk were enjoying the time they spent playing bunko and getting their kids together for play dates, but decided they wanted to do something more. Ninekirk immediately thought of her mother, Marilyn Holeskin, and her work with the Danville Children's guild. The two approached Holeskin who was thrilled at the idea that the group might have a new beginning. "We had the group for years and established lifelong friendships, while providing so much for our community. I was excited for my daughters and their friends to experience what I had."

The first meeting consisted of five original members and approximately 30 interested women. "We gathered our friends and contacted the daughters and daughter-in-laws of the original group," said Pellegrini. "There was a lot of excitement at that meeting. We referred

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to ourselves as the New Danville Children's Guild." An old binder with the group's history and by-laws was handed over, along with a tax-id number and a bank account that had a balance of \$900.

The '90's women altered the mission statement to: "The Danville Children's Guild is an organization of women committed to improving the quality of life for children in Contra Costa County by raising funds for various children's charities and youth organizations. Our purpose is exclusively charitable."

And so the new group went to work. They had their first auction that spring. "We had no idea what we were doing," said Pellegrini. "The only auction I had been to before that was a policeman's crab feed."

Their challenge was finding a place that didn't have an exorbitant rental fee, and settled at Bridges which was just opening. After researching local charities they decided to help Comfort for Kids. "Because we are a small group of approximately 30-40 women we look for really needy charities, figuring that if we raise even a couple thousand, it will help." Their first auction defied all expectations: they raised \$24,000 for Comfort for Kids and an anonymous donor matched these funds, bringing the total to \$48,000. "To this day we still don't know who this angel was, but it was just what we needed to give an amazing donation," said Pellegrini. "After that first success we were very motivated; we realized that maybe we had something—we could actually make a difference for charities in our community."

The group took off after that, holding auctions, golf tournaments, walkathons, concession booths, and spring garage sales. The board selects four charities and the group votes on two to support each year. The winner gets the proceeds from their major fall fundraiser and the second winner receives the proceeds of their annual Spring Garage Sale. For the past few years, their major fundraiser has been a

seum, We Care Services, Children's Skin Disease Foundation, Community Against Substance Abuse, and Love-A-Child (a homeless recovery shelter in Bay Point).

Michelle Duffield, publicity chairperson, has been a member of the guild for three years. She committed to the group when a friend invited her to sell raffle tickets at the fall fashion show and she heard an inspirational presentation by the Children's Skin Disease Foundation. "The community spirit of this group is wonderful. It's a great way to share in that spirit and meet people." The group meets 10 times a year in members' homes and welcomes prospective members in January and May.

Pellegrini now has three children in local schools and divides her time volunteering in many capacities. "I know that I really don't have the time to commit like I once did, but I just can't seem to walk away from the Danville Children's Guild. I know how special this charity was to many of us when we established it in 1999. It is so nice to meet young women in our community who are motivated to make a difference in some children's lives. I am proud to still be a part of this wonderful charity and it is great to see our alumni come back to support us in our fundraisers."

For more information visit The Danville Children's Guild at [www.danvillechildrensguild.org](http://www.danvillechildrensguild.org)

## Fall Fashion Show.

Last October, the fashion show at Diablo Country Club drew 200 attendees and featured local boutiques, a silent auction, a vendor fair and a luncheon. For the first time, they featured men's fashions from the store Edge and received a great response. The show raised \$26,000 for the Bay Area Crisis Nursery, an organization that supports families in crisis.

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Some of the other charities that have benefited from the guild's efforts include: Foster a Dream, The Teddy Bear Foundation, the Down Syndrome Connection, Valley Children's Mu-



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