

Venerable Tuesday Club seeking members

114-year-old group wants to interest more women

By CRAIG CROSBY
Staff Writer

Pittsfield — Stand back for a moment, let your mind go, and the women of the Pittsfield Tuesday Club can carry you all the way back to 1893.

Then, as now, the women met on Tuesdays to share, to learn and to support their community. And then, as now, the women of the Tuesday club share more than a friendship: they are family.

"I like the people," said Carol Morse, of Clinton, a 20 year member of the club. "They're like sisters."

For 114 years, meeting at least one Tuesday every month, the Pittsfield Tuesday Club has given women in the Pittsfield area a place to come together to learn and share in each other's company.

But now, with most of the members well into their eighth decade, the club that just 20 years ago had a waiting list of women hoping to get in, is desperate to attract new members.

The Pittsfield Tuesday Club... was formed as a literary society when the 13 charter members met at the home of Leila Manson on Feb. 7, 1893.

"Our club is aging," said President RaeJean Hersey of Palmyra, as she looked around at the 15 members present at last week's annual meeting. "I'm trying to keep it going because it's been going for so long. I love these ladies. They all have so much to give, and have given, and still give."

The Pittsfield Tuesday Club, like hundreds of other clubs that cropped up during the women's suffrage movement of the late 1800s, was formed as a literary society when the 13 charter members met at the home

of Leila Manson on Feb. 7, 1893. The women studied the works of abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier.

Over the next five years the women would hold debates, study parliamentary law, hear lectures from Colby or Bowdoin College professors, and study the arts.

The women officially protested their relegation as second-class citizens without the right to vote and dared to dream that their club might one day change the world.

"Possibly some members of our little club may become President of the U.S. from this small beginning," the club's secretary wrote following a meeting in 1896.

The mission of learning and expanding horizons remains strong more than 100 years later.

"Its an organization where you can learn from the speakers," said Laura Maxwell of Pittsfield. "And it's the

sociability and meeting new people. In other words, it's educational."

The club was admitted to the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs on March 10, 1898. It is one of the oldest clubs in the Maine Federation — the Skowhegan Women's club is the oldest. The Maine federation is part of the international General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The 820 members of the 28 clubs in the Maine federation have an overriding purpose of making their communities better through volunteer service, said Gloria Leveillee, president of the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs. "It was



Staff photo by David Leaming

TUESDAY'S LADIES: RaeJean Hersey, president of the Pittsfield Tuesday Club, conducts the organization's annual meeting during a lunch at the John Martin's Manor in Waterville on Tuesday. From left are members Barbara Jones, Rosalie Williams, Sandra MacGowan, Marjorie Goodwin, Hersey, and Marietta Fletcher.

created to give women access to capital (to do social work)," Leveillee said.

The Pittsfield Tuesday Club helped raise money to found the Pittsfield Public Library and then raised funds again to support the ongoing capital campaign to expand the library. The club also supports a scholarship at Maine Central Institute and purchases newspapers for Vickery School in Pittsfield in addition to its other philanthropic ventures.

"The dedication and commitment of these women is amazing," said MaryEllen Frost of Clinton.

At 62 Frost is one of the youngest members of the

group. She joined two years ago in the hope of gaining influence and understanding of bills that come before the state Legislatures. While that has not worked as planned, Frost is thrilled to have made connections that she says have improved her life. "The wisdom these women bring to the group and share is inspirational," Frost said. "They feel emotionally connected to one another."

Those types of connections are key to attracting new members and the survival of all the women's clubs, Leveillee said.

"I think there's a need out there for

women to find ways to connect," Leveillee said. "Clubs are an opportunity to work with people that become friends." Marietta Fletcher of Pittsfield has been in the club for more than 30 years. Fletcher, who will be 89 next month, has no family remaining other than the members of the Tuesday Club and the four other clubs to which she belongs.

"I love the clubs," she said. "I like to make people feel free to come to my home to visit."

Persis Smith of Pittsfield belonged to the Pittsfield Arts Club, which was formed by the Tuesday Club, for about

20 years in the 1940s and 1950s. She had to drop out when she became a mother and there was too much to do at home. Today's women, she said, face the same time constraints, so clubs must pay attention and meet the modern woman where she is if the clubs are to survive.

"We must remember the past, but always keep in touch with the changing world," she said. "There are many huge changes taking place. We need to hear and be aware."

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