

AN UNBREAKABLE BOND

“Desperate Housewives” Have Nothing Over Ashland’s “Perfect 10”

Suitemates and sorority sisters during their years at Ashland College, a group of 10 alumnae have made a commitment to stay connected.

Today they live in different states, have very different careers and lifestyles, yet the allegiance to each other is just as strong as ever.

For 30 years they have been gathering for their own group reunion. Dubbing themselves humorously, “The Perfect Ten,” after the hit 1979 Bo Derek movie, they find laughter and friendship go hand in hand claiming all the years melt away within the first hours together.

“We cry, laugh, scream and carry on like we are 19 again,” admits Claudia Rom Johnson ’75, a guidance counselor in Medina, Ohio.

“Which is why we don’t include husbands or kids,” says Charlotte Colwell Rodenfels ’74, now a travel agent in Upper Arlington, Ohio.

Usually meeting every other year, they’ve been to inns and resorts all over Ohio and Pennsylvania, the beach, New York City, to a rodeo in Texas, even back to Ashland’s campus. The year they all turned 50, they treated themselves to a Caribbean Island vacation.





The majority studied education while at Ashland and four are still teaching, having collectively racked up nearly 100 years in the public schools. The others have ventured into a variety of fields. They say their commonality of similar values and their wonderfully memorable years together at Ashland forged this bond.

“Right after graduation and throughout the ’70s we saw each other pretty regularly,” explains Karen Terhune Duncan ’76, who owns an advertising agency in New Jersey. “But after all our weddings, we’d run out of excuses to meet.”

So, they gathered for a girl’s weekend in a small inn near Erie, Pa. That was in 1984. Sixteen marriages, more than 50 moves and 15 kids later, these 10 say they have the most important thing in common.

Friendship.

“Back in the ’80s we grouped ourselves into teams to plan these reunions. Whichever group’s turn it is to plan – they choose the location,” Mary Elges McMillen ’75, director of consumer affairs for Buehler’s Food Markets in Wooster, Ohio, describes.

So while the location changes, some things never do.

“We’re big on tradition,” laughs Peggi Martinelli Holtshouser, regional vice-president for The Gap stores and host of the most recent reunion at her home near Ft. Worth, Texas. All these traditions stem from their years at Ashland. “We always have M&M’s and Jones potato chips,” she describes. “We’d have TAB (Coca-Cola soft drink product of the ’70s) but that’s pretty much impossible to find now.”

“We listen to the same music which usually includes Barry White,” says Chris Reynolds ’75, a paralegal from Philadelphia.

“And we love to play games,” describes Barb Ewing Cockroft ’75, a seventh grade English teacher in Hartville, Ohio. “Euchre or some word game. One year we played Pictionary in the lobby of the Seven Springs Resort in Pennsylvania and had a huge audience watching and cheering us on, including Pittsburgh Steeler coach Bill Cowher.”

The photo on page 7 shows members of Ashland’s “Perfect 10” preparing for the trip to Punta Cana in 2003 (l-r): Renie DeGiralomo Emery ’75, Claudia Rom Johnson ’75, guest Lisa DeGiralomo Shoeman ’73, Barb Ewing Cockroft ’74, ’03, Peggi Martinelli Holtshouser ’76, Mary Elges McMillen ’75, Jane Tschantz Walker ’74, Karen Terhune Duncan ’76, Char Colwell Rodenfells ’74 and Cristy Deer Cash ’76. (Not pictured is Chris Reynolds ’75.)





“Oh, we usually draw a crowd wherever we go. Ten women in matching pink cowboy hats will do that,” McMillen laughs.

This group loves their pink and green – the colors of their beloved Delta Zeta sorority.

“We wear a lot of pink and green at the reunions,” comments Renie DeGiralomo Emery '75, a bridal consultant from Upper Arlington, Ohio.

“We always buy something collectively, so we’ve got quite an assortment of ‘Perfect 10’ paraphernalia,” adds Jane Tschantz Walker '75, a third grade teacher in the Akron Public Schools.

Thirty years of memorabilia include matching t-shirts, visors, Statue of Liberty hair bands, tote bags, beach towels, nightshirts, silver bracelets (which have a dangling “10”) and their favorite; “toe rings” from the Jersey shore.

“We had our Perfect 10 close call,” jokes Cristy Deer Cash, '76, a physical education teacher in Upper Arlington, Ohio. “We considered getting tattoos.”

So why do these busy women drop everything and meet?

“Commitment,” says Johnson. “And a desire to stay connected.”

They maintain that they’ve supported each other during rough patches, and celebrated with each other when things are good. They agree that laughter is a major component to their long term friendship.

“When we get together we reconnect to our roots, and reenergize for the future,” says Walker. “The older we get, the more we appreciate this friendship,” says Rodenfels.

At the recent dedication of the Dwight Schar College of Education, a plaque was unveiled at the door of the Early Childhood Lounge emblazoned with “Perfect Ten” and each of their names.

Cockcroft, who is AU’s chairperson of the Stark County educational steering committee, enlisted the support of the others and a campaign began. “Every one of us made generous donations and we made a dream come true.” This dedicated group of alumnae donated \$25,000 collectively for the naming rights. “Immortality reigns for the Perfect 10,” she says, with a satisfied smile.

What’s next?

“We’re saving for our 60th birthday reunion,” they all roar with laughter. “We’re hoping some place will give us a volume discount on cosmetic surgery.”

But what they really hope for is that their children find the same such lifelong friends in college that they did.

Accent Magazine would like to feature other groups of AU alumni who meet on a regular basis. Members of these groups are asked to contact the Public Relations Office at 419-289-5007.

