

Social networking where no technology is needed

By Ron Wilson

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Social networking. It's highly popular right now, through Facebook and Twitter. But before computers existed, and in fact from the beginning of history, there were social networks being created in a non-technological sense. Today, we'll learn about a traditional rural Kansas social network with a lot of staying power.

Melinda Sinn told me about the Silver Creek Beneficiary Club, a network of women in rural Riley County. Club members live near the small rural Kansas town of Keats, about 10 miles west of Manhattan.

Keats is a town of perhaps 300 residents. Now, that's rural.

The Silver Creek Beneficiary Club took its name from the creek that runs north out of the Wildcat Creek Valley. Silver Creek was also the name of a country school that once stood at a nearby crossroads.

Talk about staying power. On Thursday, July 14, the Silver Creek Beneficiary Club will be celebrating its 90th anniversary.

The club was formed in 1921 by a small group of neighborhood women who wanted to provide help to those in need in their community. The women started meeting in each other's homes and formed a club to share educational pursuits and help their community, family, friends and those in need.

"Ninety years ago this group of women formed a social network that has passed the test of time," Melinda said. "Still today, the club brings pleasure, enjoyment, and a helping hand when needed, to the families in this rural community."

The Silver Creek Beneficiary Club started out with 20 members and currently has 24 members. Many members today are third generation members of the club. Their grandmothers were founding members of the organization. While the club has never been large, it has been steady.

One tradition of the club is a summer family picnic. In the early days, the picnics were often held alongside the creeks that run through the valley. Now the picnics are held at

the Keats Park, which the club helps maintain by planting and caring for the flower garden during the long summer months.

Other traditions include meeting in member's homes, helping those in need and participating in educational programming.

The club also has a service mission, giving help to those in need and those who are sick. Club members raise funds for the Red Cross and Salvation Army, supply food for the Northern Riley County Food Pantry and collect Toys for Tots at Christmas time. The club continues to be a true social network.

"The Silver Creek Beneficiary Club has always been about the friendships that have been formed over the years and the social oppor-

tunities brought to a small Kansas community," Melinda said. The club motto is "Let's Go."

"The club is all about sharing stories, learning together, sharing laughter and sorrow, helping each other, neighbors, families and friends and even strangers," Melinda said. "They work hard to gather resources, whether it is raising money to help someone who is sick or who has had a fire or been hit by a tornado, or sewing pillows or walker bags for those in elder care facilities. They provide educational opportunities by sharing, reading books together, having guest speakers and in more modern times by going on excursions to learn more about homes, families, gardens, cooking and many other areas."

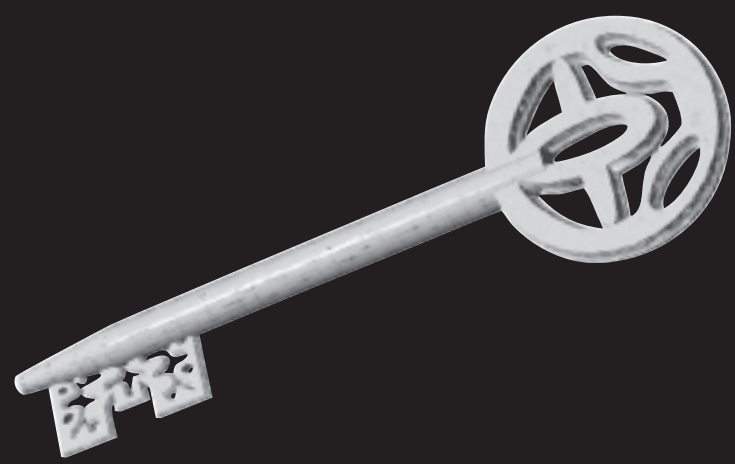
The Silver Creek Beneficiary Club will have an open house at the Keats United Methodist Church on Sunday, July 10, from 1 to 3 p.m. (Mountain Time).

Social networking. It is hugely popular today, in the form of Facebook, for example. But the Silver Creek Beneficiary Club reminds us that it is possible for people to make a difference with a local, face-to-face social network of their own. Through this club, social networking can be in the form of long-lasting relationships - not through technology, but through neighbors helping neighbors, friends helping friends, shared laughter and social gatherings, generation after generation. That's rural Kansas: a social network where no technology is needed.

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