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FEATURED

Group brings local retirees, professionals together

By Jordan Gass-Poore' New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung
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Jo Anne Hale smiles while seated with fellow members of Single Professionals Network on July 25 at Oma Gruene's Secret Garten.

Photos by LAURA MCKENZIE | Herald-Zeitung

Off and on for about a decade, New Braunfels resident Carl Nentwich has planned and participated in Single Professionals Network (SPN) events. July 25 was no different, when the 72-year-old and his girlfriend Helen Nolen co-sponsored a mixer at Oma's Secret Garten in Gruene.

Nentwich said the couple chose the location because it is one of their favorite area spots.

"If there's not a crowd, it's not worth going to," he said, adding SPN members are the reason why he joined the San Antonio-based organization, which is aimed at professionals and retirees 45 years and older.

Clad in a University of Texas shirt, ring and a straw hat, Nentwich, a UT alumnus, remembered how organizations similar to SPN helped him connect with Nolen, a former owner of an automobile dealer franchise.

An online dating website had declared them a match. Nentwich said he soon sent Nolen a photo of himself with former UT football coach Darrell Royal, to which she questioned him about his identity.

"I should have hung up the phone then," Nentwich said jokingly.

The couple have been by each other's side for years, even though Nolen is not a college football fan, and has aided each other through Nentwich's Parkinson's disease.

Despite riding solo at the Gruene SPN event because of Nolan's prior engagement in San Antonio, Nentwich was kept in good company by the organization's public relations director Dolly Isakson.

Isakson said she began attending SPN events with a friend, where they felt "so welcomed," about five years ago after the deaths of their husbands that occurred only a day apart.

This coincidence of timing allowed the two women to meet and discover they lived in the same gated community in San Antonio.

"I called her three months later and we've become each other's crutch," said Isakson, adding that it took about a year after her husband's death for her to begin to build a new lifestyle. "That's gotten us through it."

The retired travel agent said she has met many other friends through SPN, which celebrated 25 years of having fun and making lasting relationships earlier this year.

More than 200 unmarried members from across the San Antonio area organize, plan, and attend events and trips.

“It’s a place you can go where everybody knows your name,” Isakson said.

Even one of the organizations original founders, John Behrens, remains an active member, occasionally DJing at mixers.

Elizabeth Schultz, SPN co-activities director, said the organization’s events — such as its annual Labor Day party in San Antonio — are opportunities for people to make friends, not romantic matches.

“It’s become a friendship base,” said Schultz, who joined the organization in 2003 after the death of her husband. “We support each other. There’s many members you can count on.”

Members even recently volunteered to help transport the organization’s vice president, Larry Malone, to and from the location where he was having cataracts surgery.