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Boom! A new club for the young'uns

New group in Laguna Woods Village targets a younger demographic.

By **GREG HARDESTY**

The Orange County Register

LAGUNA WOODS – The girls were getting restless.

The TGIF dance party was winding down. The crowd was slowly thinning. An instrumental version of a sappy '70s standard sugar-coated the room.

A look of horror crossed Bonnie Diamond's face.

"This music," she cracked, "makes you want to blow your brains out!"

A friend, Catherine Paulson, was a little more generous.

"Holiday Inn music," she quipped.

Another friend, Rada Youngblood, finished her \$3 gin and tonic.

Dressed in 2½-inch black pumps, a leopard-print blouse, black miniskirt and ruffled black leather jacket, Youngblood was ready to party.

At 6 p.m., this shindig was over.

But the night was young.

"Care to join us?" Youngblood asked a new friend. "Heard of Brio? In Dana Point? Italian food. Great place. You'll love it."

YOUNGER GROUP

There's a new club in town at Laguna Woods Village, the retirement community formerly known as Leisure World.

And, by design, the club's a bit feisty.

Diamond, Paulson and Youngblood are members of the new Boomers Club. Organizers call it the first of its kind inside the gated community of more than 18,000 residents — where already about 250 clubs exist.

There's a Clown Club. A Pomegranate Guild. A Daughters of the British Empire Club.

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The advertisement features a scenic sunset over a beach with silhouettes of people walking. The text "only in crocs™ shoes." is overlaid in white. To the right, there is a QR code labeled "Neo", a pair of pink Crocs shoes, and the "cities by foot" logo with the Crocs brand name. The website "www.citiesbyfoot.com" is listed at the bottom.

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But there had never been a Boomers Club.

Founded in November by Leslee Davis, and already boasting nearly 70 members, the Boomers Club is aimed at younger residents of Laguna Woods Village — those from the minimum age of 55 to their mid-60s, although there is no formal age requirement.

Baby Boomers — technically, those born between 1946 and 1964 — are moving into the gated community in greater numbers.

Although Laguna Woods Village management doesn't break down growth in residents by age group, the average age of Laguna Woods Village residents is 67, down from 70 a decade ago.

"We expect the move-in age to continue to become lower as more and more 'boomers' discover the advantages of living in active adult communities like Laguna Woods Village," said Heather Rasmussen, a Laguna Woods Village spokeswoman.

Patty Gaede, 57, is a founding member of the Boomers Club and head of publicity. The former flight attendant moved into the community two years ago after a divorce.

"I was walking around here one day and an older gentleman asked me, 'Have you been carded yet?'" Gaede said with a laugh. "Maybe he felt like he was hitting on one of his

neighbor's kids."

The Boomers Club isn't just about partying the night away, although members love to dance and dine and have a good time. Although the club is aimed at baby boomers, it's not restricted to the 55-to-62 demographic.

Club president Leon St. Hilaire, for example, is a relatively elder statesman at 65. And he's married; roughly half the club's members are.

"We're very excited about the club," said St. Hilaire, who got defensive about one of his passions: lawn bowling. "It's growing fast."

It costs \$45 to join the Baby Boomers Club — steeper than most clubs, which typically charge less than half that for annual memberships. The higher fee is needed to get the club off to a solid start its first year, said St. Hilaire.

Members get together regularly and host one big club function a month.

"The idea is to bring all of us (younger residents) together," St. Hilaire said. "There aren't enough of us yet, but we're starting to approach a critical mass."

TRIPPING

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Baby Boomers Club members take trips to art galleries, cruise around Dana Point Harbor in flashy boats, and visit culinary schools.

They take day trips to Temecula and go on hikes.

"It's not really 'Leisure World,'" Gaede said. "It should be called 'Active World.'"

Members also go in groups to well-established clubs at Laguna Woods Village like TGIF, the Ocean Club and the Rock 'n' Rollers.

They are relative new kids on the block who welcome the company of their older neighbors, but feel a bit displaced when they go solo to certain events.

"A lot of us still are working," said Diamond, 55, the club's social director who is in real estate sales. "There are very little club activities geared toward people our age."

BUSY LIFE

The Baby Boomers Club got launched at a wine tasting. About 150 people packed into a room at a community clubhouse.

"Where did you all come from?" Gaede recalls thinking.

Paulson, a tall and willowy 59-year-old known for her fierce dancing skills, called the regular TGIF gatherings the "pulse of the community."

Although Paulson mingles with residents of all ages, the Michigan-born transplant says having a formal club for younger residents is helpful for those who feel a little isolated being surrounded mostly by folks their parents' age.

Paulson, a nurse, recalled her 34-year-old daughter's reaction when she moved into Laguna Woods Village three years ago.

"Mom, you can't move into a place like that!" Paulson's daughter said.

Oh, yes she can.

At Laguna Woods Village, Paulson has learned to ride a horse and golf. Her social calendar could rival that of any gregarious teenager.

"I get out and mingle with everybody," Paulson said. "You need to mingle. This is our community."

Older residents of Laguna Woods Village say they welcome the new club.

Jim Shaffer, 82, has lived in the private community for 11 years. He founded the

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TGIF Club 7½ years ago.

"I've had a feeling for a while that more younger people were moving in here because I see a lot more people driving to work," Shaffer said.

His TGIF parties attract about 150 people every week from 4 to 6 p.m. Attendees can buy cheap drinks, munch on snacks and dance to a live band.

"I'm seeing younger people show up," he said. "I think it's all right. Everybody's welcome here. We're an equal opportunity club."

NEVER TOO LATE

Youngblood, 65, gathered her belongings to head out to Brio for a bite of Italian.

Neil Diamond's "Song Sung Blue" was playing.

Time to split, Youngblood thought.

She scoffed at the idea of staying out late on a Friday night.


After all, Youngblood noted, she lives in Laguna Woods Village.

"And," she said, "no one thinks they're old enough to live here."

For more information about the Baby Boomers Club, call 714-866-7512 or visit www.LagunaWoodsVillage.com .

Contact the writer: 949-454-7356 or ghardesty@ocregister.com

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