

SCENE

THE WEEK OF APRIL 24 - MAY 1, 2015

Claire Knopf

PRESERVING HISTORY AND VOLUNTEERING

IF YOU HAD to describe a modern day Wonder Woman in two words, they would be Claire Knopf.

This fast-paced dynamo with brilliant blue eyes and a ready smile sees a need, figures out a way she can help resolve an issue, and plunges in to get the job done. All of that while still concentrating on her family, and pursuing her other hobby – the one besides helping others – cooking.

New Jersey born and Rumson resident for nearly 22 years, Knopf and her husband Woody have both always been involved in helping others, and their own example has also been inherited by their three grown children Catherine, Elizabeth and James. Knopf herself traces her need to help others to the example she learned growing up when her mother was a nurse and nurtured others. She shrugs off the question of why she does so much for others with a simple, “I suppose I just think that’s the way it ought to be. I don’t know any other way.”

The list of Knopf’s volunteer service to organizations is almost endless: Monmouth County Historical Association, The Women’s Council for the Leon Hess Cancer Center at Monmouth Medical Center, Monmouth Conservation Foundation, Monmouth Museum, Visiting Nurse Association Health Group, Charley’s Fund, The Rumson Country Day School executive council, Monmouth Day Care Center, Spring House, Two River Film Festival – the list goes on. Knopf laughingly blames it on the Junior League.

Knopf joined the Junior League of Monmouth County – whose facility is located in Rumson – in 1988 and is now a sustainer of the organization. The chapter is part of one of the oldest, largest and most effective women’s volunteer organizations in the world whose aim is to instill knowledge, ideas, resources, and commitment among its members, teaching them the value of volunteering. Knopf found herself enjoying what she was learning as a league member and reveling in the volunteer work she was able to do. The league is dedicated towards identifying problems, whether in education, health, the environment, or family issues, and Knopf was delighted to be able to participate in solutions.

This year, the active community leader stepped down after five years as president of the Monmouth County Historical Association, although she continues to serve on its board of trustees as she has for the past 15 years, several years as first vice president. As president, Knopf’s focus was on meeting all the challenges a historic organization faces, from the need to raise funds to accomplish its mission to the more mundane issues of storing and caring for more than 30,000 artifacts. To accomplish this, she is promoting the new catchphrase for the association – “More than Revolutionary” – to make the public more aware that American pride and knowledge don’t stop with the early history of the country as a new nation, and that the association is a careful conservator of all periods of history in Monmouth County. She and Bob Sickles of Sickles Market co-chaired a fundraiser called As It Grows ... A Farm to Table Event to assist in the preservation and upkeep of The Parker Homestead – 1665, in Little Silver, and benefit both organizations.

Knopf is a strong believer in collaboration to accomplish goals, and also pointed out how the association collaborated with an historic exhibit at Morven Museum & Garden in Princeton. The association has long recognized Knopf’s unique flair for volunteering and is honoring her for her dedication to historic preservation at its 40th annual Garden Party slated for June 28.

The Women’s Council for the Leon Hess Cancer Center is another one of Knopf’s favorite organizations to help. “And it’s more than just raising funds,” she emphasizes, adding, “although we did raise \$3 million over the past 20 years. And we are celebrating our 20th anniversary this year.”

She smiles broadly as she launches into an

enthusiastic litany of the many ways The Women’s Council helps including assisting cancer patients at a very special Spa for Spirit Day offered twice a year for all current cancer patients undergoing radiation and/or chemotherapy at the Leon Hess Cancer Center. Knopf is currently president of The Women’s Council as well as chair of the annual Power of Pink Luncheon, a July event held on a private estate and the prime fundraising event for the council during the year.

In the Visiting Nurse Association, Knopf was on the committee that started the wildly successful Stately Homes-by-the-Sea Designer Show House event; she has served as chairman

of the gala, chairman of the design selection committee and chairman of the boutique over that time. This year she was one of the many who worked on one of the committees and was saddened by the fire that heavily damaged the house this week. “My heart goes out to all involved from the homeowners to every member of our community involved in this effort,” she said, “and to the history lost.”

Devoted to family, Knopf thrives on celebrating every holiday – actually, every occasion she can think of – with elaborate dinners she enjoys cooking. There’s no favorite recipe or style, she points out, she just enjoys cooking, grilling, having friends and family together

er for good times over good meals. And while Knopf and her husband have traveled extensively, she still has a few more sites on her list of places she wants to visit.

Energetic, enthusiastic, organized, and thorough, Claire Knopf is charming, generous and boundless in her desire and will to help others. She sets goals, then creates the means to achieve them. She envisions improvement, then goes about accomplishing it. She isn’t a woman who believes in giving orders, but rather one who believes in stepping in and working towards getting it all done.

BY MURIEL J. SMITH

