

A merry band of Y's men



By Michael S. Rohde

On Tuesday mornings in Meriden — about 9:45 am — elderly men trek into the YMCA on West Main. Most walk slowly (some are using canes or walkers). They are on their way to the weekly Y's Men of Meriden meeting.

I'm a member of this club for retired and semi-retired "like me" men from Meriden and surrounding areas. The purpose of the club is to provide the opportunity for fellowship, entertainment, and the exchange of ideas. We are a fun and active group. Nobody takes himself too seriously — and if someone tries, he is quickly responded to with good natured heckling and put-downs.

The group has been meeting for 26 years and currently has 119 members. They range in age from the 70s to mid-90s and come from many walks of life and careers as business owners, engineers, lawyers, doctors, educators, human service professionals, and community leaders. All in all, quite a diverse group. About 80 members attend the weekly meetings.

Every meeting includes a program featuring club announcements (hiking club, cyber seniors, results of weekly bridge and cribbage tournaments, new members, plus upcoming presentations) and a weekly storyteller. Also, the main speakers offer presentations on a wide range of interesting topics (Connecticut history, travel pre-

sentations, science topics, etc.) After the main speaker, there is a weekly bridge and cribbage tournament for those interested.

The club's hospitality chairman, Joe Giannetti, keeps track of members who have been sidelined by medical issues and also members who have died. He dutifully sends around, for all to sign, get-well cards and memorial cards for deceased members' families.

Well, one day there was a mix-up as the memorial card was circulating and all of a sudden we heard a shout: "Hey, this is for me!" (This brought howls of laughter from everyone.)

In addition to the weekly meetings that take place from September through June, the club also has a weekly hiking club that schedules local walks. Another activity is the cyber seniors where technology expert Dennis Kababik offers expert advice. This group meets twice a month to discuss and receive guidance about the internet, computers, cell phones and the latest technological advances. Jack Brooks is a member and noted: "It keeps me sharp about some of the latest hardware and gadgets and up to date about the computer world."

The club also offers an annual holiday party and summer picnic for members and guests, along with an annual golf outing.

Dr. Peter Burch, a retired ophthalmologist, is a longtime member who has taken on the responsibility of managing the Y's Men web-

site, handling media outreach, and writing the monthly newsletter. I asked Peter how he got involved. "In 2000, my friend and club member Marvin Beloff asked me to join. I said I would go to only one meeting (frankly, this was the last thing I felt like doing) but I did go, and I have been to just about every meeting since. And now I really look forward to it every week."

Another Y's Man is Bruce Burchsted, the owner of Prentis Printing, and a more recent member who joined five years ago. Bruce said, "I am in the category of being semi-retired. I may not make every meeting, but I try to make most of them, and thoroughly enjoy the weekly talks, jokes, and social interaction. Someday, when I'm fully retired, I'll be able to hang out after the meetings to play bridge and/or cribbage with those that do, and that will be even more enjoyable".

The Y's Men is a terrific club. We laugh a lot at the meetings and have great camaraderie and fun. We also learn a lot from our speakers and storytellers.

The club is always seeking new members. I encourage anyone who might be interested to check out our website: www.ysmenofmeriden.com or call 203-235-6386. I guarantee it will be worth the effort!

Michael S. Rohde is a former mayor and city councilor of Meriden.