



## Coffee Club Gift Supports New Healing Garden

If you were to walk into the hospital cafeteria on any given weekday morning between the hours of 10-11 a.m., you would likely be drawn to the chatter and laughter from a little group that likes to refer to themselves as The Coffee Club.

The group began meeting over 20 years ago in the home of Barbara (O'Riley) and Buhler Sears. Barbara was the matriarch of the family, being the oldest of 11 O'Riley siblings. She loved to entertain, so when Dave Sears and Charlie O'Riley were in the construction business together and would pause mid-morning for a coffee break, it was only natural that they would meet at Barbara's home.

As most good things do, the small group that met for a coffee group grew. Other family members began taking their morning coffee break at that time, and sometimes people would just see cars and stop by.

"The group really snowballed," says W.R. O'Riley. "We would often get phone calls from neighbors or friends driving by wondering if someone passed away."

What started out as a simple coffee break, grew into a celebration of anything and began to include more friends, family and neighbors. Several of the wives that had retired from their teaching careers were able to join the group as well.

Donna Holt was one of the first adoptees added to the group who didn't carry the O'Riley name. Donna and Barbara were high school classmates and best friends, and Barb voted her in as an O'Riley. Donna has been a member of the coffee club ever since.

The Coffee Club says they spend a lot of time "fact checking" the local news when they meet. Conversations often go from community happenings, to health, family and grandkids. Barb's number one rule remains, no politics or religion will be discussed.

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The group checks on each other. They tend to their flock and many other flocks in the community. When tough times come, the coffee club is there for each other.

It was through those "check-in's" that Loretta Kissinger became part of the club. When Loretta's husband, Harley became ill, Barb and Buhler would check on him at the hospital and nursing home. When Harley passed in 2005,

Barb came to Loretta and invited her to join their coffee group. “We meet five days a week and that’s how many days you should come,” Barb told Loretta.

In 2004, Barbara was diagnosed with cancer. The group still met in her home for Buhler, even if Barb was sick in bed and not able to join them. Buhler carried on the entertaining after Barb passed, wanting to be a good host like her, it gave the coffee club an opportunity to check in on him. While he had a knack for picking out a good honeydew, he may not have served up the same delicacies that Barb once did. The group fondly recalls the time he served them undercooked brats at 10a.m.

After Buhler passed in 2014, the coffee club was in search of a new location to meet. They didn’t really like anything until they decided on at the hospital cafeteria. They knew it was their place, and they have been coming five days a week for five years now.

The group feels a strong connection to the hospital starting when O’Riley Brothers Construction built the north wing of the hospital, and later when several patient rooms became sponsored by those in the group. Along with this, most everyone in the group has done volunteer work at the hospital. Many are still serving today.

“The hospital has been very welcoming to us,” says Kathy Sue O’Riley. “When the new president, Nate Blackford, arrived for his first week on the job, he even stopped by to say hello.”

The core of the group comes from large Catholic families where you had to shout to get a lot of attention.

“We can get loud, but we haven’t been kicked out yet,” laughs W.R. O’Riley.

Stories are often told time and again, but laughter ensues like it was their first time the story was told.

When the group heard about the addition of the Healing Garden for local cancer care patients and their families, they knew they wanted to be a part of it in some way. They landed on the purchase of one of the bistro tables. The gift is the perfect tribute to the garden from the club, offering their group, and many others a great outdoor space to gather.

“The emphasis of helping local cancer patients in the healing garden goes right back to our roots with Barb,” says W.R. O’Riley. “Since Barb, we’ve had many friends and family that have passed or are currently battling cancer. Everyone has been touched by it.”

At the core of it all, this group is all about good friends that are there for each other. Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville and the St. Francis Hospital Foundation is blessed to have their support.

“We have a very good hospital here, and we want to do everything we can to make sure that continues,” says Loretta Kissinger.

If you’re interested in learning more about how you can support local cancer care patients in the healing garden, please reach out to Megan Jennings at 660-562-7933 or visit our website at [www.stfranchishospitalfoundation.com](http://www.stfranchishospitalfoundation.com) to learn more.

