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photo: Nikki Forte

Who Ya Gonna Call?

MOMs OF OAKWOOD TAKE CHARGE

By Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin // PG. 20



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RAISING DAYTON

MOMs of Oakwood organize chaos

By Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin

With Mothers' Day just around the corner, we got to thinking about how much mothers do for us, how demanding a job motherhood can be and how they often make it seem so effortless. Really, their job description is much more like one of those guys who spins a bunch of plates on sticks all at the same time with a dog barking at his heels and a series of small – literal and metaphorical – fires that need to be put out. But once the smoke clears, there's the woman who loves you with everything she's worth and making you a better person for it, whether you want to be or not.

Dayton is full of mothers, and you get the sense that they all know each other, that they all somehow share this bond that unites them in a defensive front against the terrors of the world. It's a network of responsibility and support, not just to the children, but also to each other, lifting one another out of the occasionally mired routine of child-raising and providing an extra hand when two just aren't enough.

“You see each other at play group, and then you have a chance, through this group, to get to know each other even better.”

– Tracy Staley, MOMs co-president

In 1992, necessity, being the mother of invention, got Oakwood resident Karin Brown to form a group of moms in her neighborhood. The group came to be known as the Mothers of Oakwood Munchkins, or simply MOMs. For more than 20 years, the MOMs have raised well-rounded youngsters all the while giving one another that oh-so-important interaction with fellow grownups.

“I needed that adult time,” former president Maureen Wagner says. “Within that group, you find such a common bond of people going through the exact same thing right in your community.”

And those ties that bind haven't changed much over the years, according to Wagner, who recently visited the group for one of their MOMs' Nights.

“It was so neat because it was really the same, it just felt like the same feel, that support, the same conversations, the same concerns,” Wagner says.

That's not for lack of fresh faces! New co-presidents are chosen every year, many of whom have been new to the Dayton area. They serve to oversee various committees that act as arms of the group. Aside from Mom's Nights (which include book club, cooking club and sometimes a monthly meeting), the MOMs organize a weekly playgroup, field trips, a Spring Fling, an entry for the Oakwood Scarecrow Row and courtesy meals for families in need. The 200-member group also supports a service arm of their organization

known as Little Hands, Big Hearts, which does outreach such as a drive for Christmas presents, planting flowers at the school, donating classroom supplies, a book drive for Dayton Children's Hospital's resource room, and making Valentines for nursing home residents.

Yeah, and I thought I was busy.

Having coffee with MOMs

Current co-presidents Tracy Staley and Rose Lounsbury took the time out of their eventful schedules to sit down and discuss the history and benefits of MOMs. Both transplants from neighboring states and mothers of three, these women project insightfulness and calm. Have a cup of coffee with them, and you'll not only feel better about yourself, but everyone around you.

Who makes up MOMs?

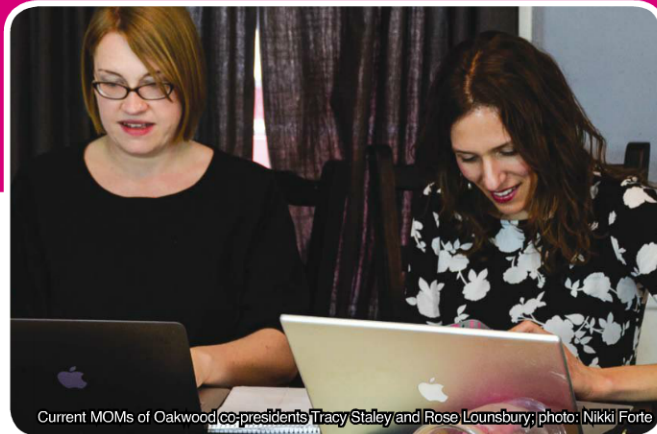
Tracy Staley: The group isn't monolithic in the sense that all the moms are not the same. There's a variety.

Rose Lounsbury: Single moms, traditional families, working moms, stay-at-home moms, part-time moms, entrepreneurs. We also have a new arm of the group, the MOMs of Teens and Tweens, which is new this year. Prior to that, the group was not exclusively for moms of younger kids, but it tended to attract more moms of younger kids, and so there was this need for support for moms of teenagers. I would say that's, if not equally difficult, more difficult than having little ones. So that reached out and met a need of other members in the community. I think that's been a really important part.

TS: They're doing monthly meetings on different topics of interest ... social media, drug and alcohol use, eating disorders, all the big scary things.

RL: Yeah, all the big scary things I'm really glad I don't have to worry about yet.

How has MOMs changed since its inception?



Current MOMs of Oakwood (co-presidents Tracy Staley and Rose Lounsbury); photo: Nikki Forte

TS: It has sustained and grown. One of the reasons, at least that I believe, this group has stayed viable over time is that Oakwood is geographic based. So you have a community like Oakwood, which is small, and you see each other. You see one another in person, and you can provide that true support parents need when they're raising young children or teenagers. You're going to see each other at the bus stop. You see each other at the pre-school. You see each other at play group, and then you have a chance, through this group, to get to know each other even better.

RL: I think Oakwood has a lot of people who moved into the community who are not from the community. I'm not sure, but I think most of the women in our group have moved in, in some way. And so you immediately, especially if you have young kids, you want to connect with people and find out, “OK, who's a good pediatrician? Who's a good electrician?” It's just very helpful for people who are moving in and they don't have any support.

TS: There are a lot of groups that form online, so that's the way that they operate. But I think the fact that this group started really before that was an option has helped it sustain. We have a Facebook page, and we have an email group and they're both very active, but the core of the group and what sustains the group from year to year is that true, in-person, getting to know each other. Working together, sharing support, sharing advice and resources in person. I think that's why you don't see a lot of crazy bickering or fighting online because you know the person as a person, as a parent.

RL: You're going to see them the next day at pre-school drop off, so you're not going to say something negative about them on Facebook.

TS: You can be very different from another parent, but that bond of knowing you're both in that same boat of what you're going through at the time with trying to raise your family is, I think, a bonding thing. And that's really what this group is. It's not solely social. It's not political. There aren't those things. It's truly based on that common goal of raising your family. Whatever that looks like for you.

RL: For me, when I joined it, I had babies [triplets]. I didn't do any of the playgroups and play dates because I could not do that. I could not get three babies out of the house and take them on a play date because it was just not worth it. But I did every single Thursday night everything. It was my time out of the house, away from the kids, whom I love very much, but I needed the social time. I needed to talk to other moms. Especially if you are a stay-at-home mom, which I was for two years when they were babies. It's very isolating. People tell you that, but you don't really realize how difficult that is – to be with babies all day and no adult interaction. So those Thursday nights were my saving grace, to know that I could get out and I could talk to people and I would get out of that environment where I was just changing diapers and being spit up on and feeding and changing more diapers and being spit up on ... When I was a very new mom, I needed that.

How do your children benefit from MOMs?

RL: My kids benefit because I benefit. I think if you take care of yourself and maintain a social life and you get support from other people, you are a better person. You are a better mom, and your kids benefit from that just because you are a more whole person and you are able to give to them.

TS: The ability to ask another parent who has maybe been in the community longer than you or has a different view into the community to ask for resources or help for your child. Where to find a specialist, that shared knowledge, can help your kids in big ways, like seeing the right doctor. For the moms who have been in the group for several years, they know one another and they know each other's children, and so they have that extra incentive to look out for those kids in the community. When they see them out in the park, riding their bikes, that's not a random child, that's Rose's son ... You can kind of keep that extra eye out for one another ... when you know other parents in the community and you're not anonymous to one another.



MOMs of Oakwood is a community of Oakwood area caregivers and plans a number of social and service-related projects throughout the year; photo: Nikki Forte

What do you see in the future of MOMs?

RL: The Teens and Tweens aspect I see that growing more, which is exciting because I think that is probably going to grow our membership more because typically moms sort of phase out of the group a little bit once their kids were in upper elementary generally, but I could see it growing and appealing to moms of older kids.

TS: We're looking to be a strong support system –

RL: – throughout the whole time of parenting.

TS: If you think about parenting in the age of social media, people share a lot about their young children. You hear about babies and pre-schoolers, they said this funny thing or they're having trouble with this thing. And most of the time those are universal issues –

RL: – potty-training, throwing tantrums –

TS: – and your child is not going to know that you're putting that out there, or they're not going to be embarrassed. They don't have the capacity for that yet, right? And so if you look at bloggers who share about parenting, the majority of that is about younger children. After that there comes a bit of a more silent period where people are not posting about their struggles or their children's individual struggles –

RL: – because all the children are on Facebook!

TS: You don't want to write about the awful stuff.

RL: They're embarrassed. Like, "My child told me they hate me."

TS: Your child now has privacy to respect, right? But these are HUGE things. But parents don't talk. I mean, they may talk among their small group of friends, but there's not that same sharing. I don't think. So if this group can extend itself –

RL: – to support parents –

TS: – during that time and address some of those BIG issues. When the kids are younger, there is that bigger possibility that one of the parents is home. A lot of parents are working by the time their kids are in elementary, middle and high school. So you don't even have that time waiting outside of

the school together. You don't have as much interaction.

I'm currently experiencing something between fear and awe.

RL: Don't be scared! Any parent will tell you, it's the hardest thing, but it's also the best thing at the same time. You can't have one without the other.

Is it just moms in MOMs?

RL: It's the MOMs group, but really it is open to any caregiver. When I was working, my au pair would take my kids to the playgroup ... I don't think dads necessarily need the support as much. I don't know why.

TS: Maybe they do, they just don't say.

RL: I feel like as women we need to talk more. So if we're having a problem with our kids, we need to talk it out and maybe repeat ourselves ten times until we've talked it out, and it's done. And a man, they might want to talk, but they're not going to want to talk that much.

Outside of paying dues, are there any requirements to join the group?

RL: There are no requirements. You don't even have to actually live in Oakwood. That's something people don't always understand. We have even had past presidents who live in Kettering or Centerville. It's really for any caregiver in the Dayton area, they can join. The majority of our membership lives in Oakwood, but we have quite a few members in the surrounding area.

TS: I think the group operates very well. People take ownership of what their role is and they run with it.

RL: It's a very welcoming group and a very supportive group.

For more about the MOMs of Oakwood, please visit momsofoakwood.org.



The MOMs gather at a cooking club meeting, one of many social events organized by the group

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