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WHEATON CENTER

OF THE INFANT WELFARE SOCIETY OF CHICAGO:

a twenty-year history of
highlights and traditions
from 1957 to 1977

In 1957, a group of women from the Glen Ellyn-Wheaton area became aware of the good works being accomplished in other communities by local chapters of the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago. Believing that residents of the far-west suburbs could also make a contribution to the health and happiness of inner-city residents, Mrs. Robert John (Meg) sent a letter of inquiry to the downtown center, requesting permission to organize a chapter for that purpose. Shortly after the new year, on January 7, 1958, Springbrook Center of the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago was officially organized. According to a newspaper report of that day, the Springbrook name was chosen "from the brook that runs through the community". Members included women from Wheaton, Glen Ellyn, Winfield and West Chicago. The new center became the forty-seventh such center in the forty-seventh year of the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago.

The first meeting of Springbrook Center was held on January 20, 1958 at the home of Mrs. Warren Parent. Twenty-four members were present. Appropriately, Mrs. Robert John, founder of the center, became its first president. Among the more interesting rules of the new center was the 2¢ per minute fine levied against members arriving late for those initial meetings.

The fledgling Center had no time to waste! Almost at once, the new members began sewing garments for the several downtown stations serving the Chicago area. They also provided volunteers to staff one of the stations located on MacKedzie Street. In addition, two fundraising events were held--the sale of aconite bulbs and the sale of dolls, complete with exquisite, hand-made costumes. At one point in

this enthusiastic first year, Springbrook Center considered sponsoring the Ringling Brothers' Circus as a money-making event! The downtown parent organization gently discouraged what might have been "the greatest show on earth", cautioning the young center to move slowly in their first fund-raising endeavors. Undaunted, the new chapter, in July of 1958, began the long tradition of winning "firsts" with its floats entered in Wheaton's Fourth of July parades. This initial Springbrook entry was a twenty-foot-high stork made entirely of white paper. Understandably, the float won the award of "most unusual". More disappointing were the results of another fund-raiser, the sale of shirt-waist dresses co-sponsored by Charles A. Stevens. Although the store paid a commission to each center (based on \$14.98 per dress, plus 3% sales tax), the promotion was not a success.

By February 1959, twenty-eight members responded to roll call for Springbrook Center. According to minutes of a meeting that year, the neophyte chapter was still enthusiastic. Members considered giving a fashion show in conjunction with Marshall Field at the DuPage County Fair Building "which seats 3,000". Instead, the group settled for two dessert bridge benefits, a rummage sale, a hospital raffle and a baby contest judged by Forrest Tucker, star of the smash hit "Music Man". The \$480 in funds raised this second year was a 400% increase over the first year of the new center's operation.

On the Fourth of July, 1961, the "most beautiful civic float" was awarded to Springbrook Center for its carousel of wild animals. Then, as now, there were "mitten meetings", fashion shows, Easter brunches, dessert bridges, and always---sewing!

In the month of July 1963, Springbrook Center sponsored its first winner of the Miss Wheaton Belle Contest, Miss Lynne Ludy. Another first this year was the beginning of the fabled Bon Marche de Noel Bazaar, a grand marketplace of Christmas gifts. Held at the DuPage County Fairgrounds, the Bazaar was stocked by fourteen Chicago and west suburban stores, as well as by the members of Springbrook Center. Their numble fingers created a host of handmade items for an additional holiday booth of merchandise. In order to transform the large, barn-like room of the fairground building into an attractive bazaar, center members had to call forth much ingenuity and effort. The booths made ready for merchants to display their wares were really ten-foot-long tables completely draped in dark green burlap and covered on top with heavy white paper. Also, at the corner where some rudimentary kitchen facilities existed, a tearoom was built, literally from the ground up. Luncheons were served here for a nominal fee and homemade desserts were available during the afternoon and evening. Newspapers of the day acclaimed the Bazaar as "the most original Christmas show hereabouts". It was almost unbelievable that such a small organization could carry off such a grand endeavor as the Bon Marche de Noel Bazaar. And yet they did---for five consecutive years. The event was not without some pitfalls, of course.

In 1964, after three months of long preparation, Springbrook workers set out for their second Bon Marche Bazaar and found themselves quite literally snowbound in a gigantic winter storm. Only a few hardy souls arrived to man the booths and only a small number of customers showed up to buy the mountains of holiday merchandise. Nevertheless,

in 1964, the Springbrook Center was cited by the downtown parent organization as the center showing the highest percentage of profits in the history of the society. This was partly due to a most successful Golden Autumn Luncheon and Fashion Show held earlier in the year at the Drake Oakbrook Hotel.

In 1965, true to tradition, the Springbrook Center float won the "most original civic" award. The float was a huge bassinet of paper flowers. Also in 1965, much ado was made over a luncheon and fashion show held in conjunction with Charles A. Stevens. Planning for the show took place in the "most beautiful home in Chicagoland", according to local newspapers. The home and estate area later became known as the residential area of High Knob. On the other end of the scale and later in the year, Springbrook members hosted a Basin Street benefit dance.

In 1966, the by-now traditional Bon Marche Bazaar featured a huge Pooh Bear sent straight from Disneyworld. In addition to proceeds from the Bazaar, the center treasury was expanded by proceeds from a Fool's Gold Rummage Sale and a "Many Splendoured Things" Fashion Show. Springbrook Center was still sewing garments and still volunteering members' time to staff the downtown stations of the society.

1968 saw the inception of the traditional "Lollipops and Roses" Fashion Show. In this tenth year of its history, Springbrook Center numbered fifty-one active members. But troubled times lay ahead. The Bon Marche was re-located to the brand-new meeting hall at Pheasant Run. Though it was less work and probably more attractive, it drew far fewer customers and was not as financially successful.

Consequently, the Bon Marche was discontinued. At about the same time, Springbrook Center began losing members. Some moved away. Illness, personal problems, competition for members' time from other local charities---all these things combined to bring membership rolls to an all-time low.

By 1969, only twelve members of Springbrook Center remained. There was talk of disbanding the group, talk of turning the organization into a purely social club. But finally, those few members who were left decided to make a fresh beginning. First, they cast about for a new fund-raiser to replace the now-defunct Bon Marche. When the Clarendon Hills Center presented the Luminaria Project at a downtown board meeting, it was eagerly snatched up by the Springbrook group. Their local Luminaria Sale that year was a success and with regained confidence, Springbrook Center began once more to grow and prosper. The Luminaria Project gradually brought the Infant Welfare name to the attention of the local townspeople. Meanwhile, center members discovered that by serving the community in this new way, they served themselves as well.

By 1971, luminarias sold during the Christmas season reached 18,500. Other events such as "Lollipops", the Spring Tea and Fall Bridge Luncheon became local traditions. A new tradition was instituted with the inception of the first Tag Day. To solicit funds from local residents during this event, center members donned straw hats and carried slotted baby bottles. Afterward, members gathered for a Counting and Sipping Party, establishing still another tradition. Predictably, the center's float once again won "most original" in the

civic division of Wheaton's Fourth of July Parade. This time, a gigantic baby-bed populated with members and their husbands took the coveted award. About this time, the Springbrook Center changed its name to the Wheaton Springbrook Center in order to more accurately reflect its membership and community involvement.

In 1972, luminaria sales increased to 26,000, becoming the center's largest fund-raiser. The years of 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975 brought further refinements to those fund-raising events that had become annual traditions. In 1973, the Christmas Dance at the Baker Hotel had its beginning. In 1974 and in 1975, luminaria sales were centralized. Tag Day continued.

1976, America's Bicentennial year, found Wheaton Springbrook Center in its twentieth year of existence. A Bicentennial "Lollipops and Roses" Fashion Show featured both period gowns and contemporary fashions. Tag Day repeated its success as the center's second largest fund-raiser. Once again Wheaton Springbrook Center changed its name, this time shortening it to Wheaton Center. During the summer, Wheaton Center again won the "most original" float award in the Fourth of July Parade. This time, the "Birth of a Nation" theme featured a life-size bald eagle hatching from a huge paper mache egg. The eagle, played by a member's husband, nested among cut-out stars labeled with names of the original thirteen colonies. For the second time in its history, Wheaton Center Infant Welfare sponsored the winning Miss Wheaton Belle, Miss Amy Rogers. The daughter of a member, Miss Rogers had her own float in the Fourth of July Parade. Fall events followed

this successful summer with a mini-benefit of coffee and fashions at Lord and Taylor, Oak Brook. A new social event for members, a Progressive Dinner, joined the already traditional social events of the Summer Party, the Christmas Dance and the Counting and Sipping Party. General meetings took on a new look as programs were added to the monthly business agenda. At Christmas time, sales of luminaria rose to 30,000, setting a new record. Finally, to gain a better balance in work load for center members, the annual Bridge Brunch was moved from the Fall months to the Spring, while Tag Day was switched from Spring to Fall.

Now, as a new year begins, Wheaton Center looks back on twenty years of growing and maturing; twenty years of fun and camaraderie; twenty years of helping disadvantaged mothers, infants and children in the inner city. In 1977, Wheaton Center of the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago is proud of its past and confident of its future. The present members wish continued success to those members who will carry on this history into the years ahead.