

Getting to know....

Lorraine Ehlinger

Written by Vic Gideon

"I've always been a big believer in charity and this is easy for me," Lorraine Ehlinger says of the knitting ministry. "I always have something for charity on the needle."

That's how Lorraine describes No Hands But Yours, which meets twice a month in the Parish Meeting Room at St. Ann Church, or, during the nice weather, on lawn chairs in the parking lot. Last year, No Hands But Yours brought 200 items, many winter items, to the Ozanam Center to give away.

"It's always good to know it's to keep somebody warm," she says of her work.

While she didn't start No Hands, she's now the contact person for the group where she's knitted items for ten years, the ministry serving as an extension of a lifelong passion.

"I've been knitting forever and I'm a creative person," she says, describing the intersection of her skills and her mission. Her mother was always doing crafts, she remembers, but she was not a knitter so it was her grandmother who taught her to knit while Lorraine was in her teens. Aside from the work, it's an important social connection for her. "We just sit around and knit and talk and work on our projects," she confesses.

Lorraine, who sits in the front row for 10:00AM Mass at St. Philomena Church and is always ready to do a reading if needed, moved to Cleveland Heights from the west side after graduating from John Marshall in 1960, attending Flora Stone Mather College for Women on what's now Case Western Reserve University's campus in University Circle (a school absorbed by CWRU in 1972). She attended Mather College for a year but dropped out to get married and start a family, later returning to Ursuline College to earn a degree in fashion merchandising and business management.

A convert to Catholicism through marriage, the former Lorraine Arnold attends Mass every Sunday as she did when raising her children. She and her husband, John, raised their six children Catholic, a boy

and then five girls: John, Julie, Jackie, Janice, Jennifer, and Joyce. All six children went to grade school at St. Ann, John graduating from Benedictine, the girls from Cleveland Heights High School. While John passed away in 2011, her six kids (who range in age from 54 to 63) and ten grandchildren are scattered around the country, three nearby in South Euclid, Mayfield Heights, and Hiram and the other three in California, Indiana, and Florida with three PhDs and two master's degrees between them, she proudly volunteers.

A seamstress by trade, she used that skill to pay for her education at Ursuline College, then worked from home before opening a shop, Fig Leaves on Lee Road just north of Cedar, and moving upstairs from the storefront after 15 years before closing the business at the end of 2022. "I worked until I was eighty."

She's now putting her talents toward the knitting ministry which specializes in hats. "That's our biggest need so that's mainly what I knit."

The ministry stores the hats and other winter items during the warm months. Then, she turns her attention to her favorite item.

"The prayer shawls, you're wrapped up like a hug with the prayers of health and healing and strength and whatever else you might need," she explains. "When I'm working, especially the prayer shawls with my knitting machine, I'm thinking of who I'm making them for."

