

From the *Sag Harbor Express*

THE ROMEOS OF SAG HARBOR

“You’re looking good”

Maeve, the waitress at the Corner Bar, may well be in line for sainthood -- every couple of weeks she serves lunch to the Sag Harbor Romeos. No, no, not that kind. You were expecting maybe some juicy gossip about lotharios lurking in our quiet village? Sorry to disappoint you, these Romeos are Retired Old Men Eating Out, an informal group of geezers who meet for lunch every other Monday to exchange deep wisdom and decide the fate of the world. Maeve patiently keeps an eye on us while we squint at the specials board and hold a lengthy discussion of what that third one down says. We never order from the board anyway. We go back to studying the menu which we know by heart and order the same thing we’ve had for the last year. Our ages are in the seventies and eighties with Founder and Chairman Bill Wilson the senior at 87. We say, “That used to be old.”

The Corner Bar is the latest venue for the Romeos. We started at Dockside some ten or more years ago, migrated to Spinnakers when winter came, then moved on to the Corner Bar when Spinnakers changed hands. Switching to a new restaurant is a problem because some of us will not remember where we’re supposed to be and keep showing up at the old watering hole. We were worried that the Corner Bar might be too busy in summer to accommodate us, but since we’re old-fashioned sticklers for time and have nothing else to do we get there promptly at noon and beat the rush.

Our dozen or more members show the wonderful diversity of retirees in the Sag community. We have three doctors, one an orthopedic surgeon, another a neurologist, the third an orthodontist. We also count a former ad agency president, a human resources consultant, two IBM execs, a New York Telephone district manager, a corporate lawyer, two insurance execs, a pollster (our aforementioned chairman), a real estate agent, and a fine arts dealer, the latter two still working, but not very hard. We mourned the loss of two of our group in recent years -- Bob Reiser was president of Xerox International and Ron Lieber was an attorney in private practice.

Of course, given our ages, there are lots of discussions about ailments, what one of us calls “an organ recital,” and the former doctors get consulted regularly. “Hey, Doc, I’ve had this pain in my side for a couple of weeks. What do you think it is?” Otherwise we exchange aches and strains and gather an assortment of remedies from our table-mates. Much of the health talk involves dermatology and we’re all regularly getting carved up, freeze-dried and biopsied.

Since we probably haven’t seen our compatriots in two weeks, the chatter starts as soon as we sit down and continues until Maeve moves us along. “Well, are you guys ready to order?” In the early days there was a problem when a couple of the geezers ordered beer which costs more than soft drinks and since we split the bill evenly it led to some grumbling. Now we all drink iced tea. Also a couple of the more keen-eyed guys who can see the chalk board would occasionally order a special, something in “double figures” (over ten dollars), but now everyone is careful to avoid expensive dishes. Though there are a couple of hold-outs, most of us have given up bacon-cheeseburgers and there are lots of orders for flounder sandwiches and chicken wings. Some finicky

members ask for the flounder on a roll, not bread, Cajun style or not, with extra tartar sauce or no tartar sauce. But Maeve keeps it all straight. Several glasses of iced tea require several pit stops when we adjourn. Adjournment means a move from the table in the restaurant to a second session on the sidewalk outside that might go on for half an hour until someone says, "I better get going, I have important things to do."

The bill for eleven or twelve guys is always a source of banter since no one wants the responsibility of figuring out what we all must pay. It's especially challenging when there's an odd number of us and we make "funny" remarks about multiplication tables and long division and carrying to the next column. One of Maeve's qualifications for the halo is putting up with geezer humor. A couple of us play it safe and use a pen or pencil to calculate, but more of us do the math in our heads and usually come up with a figure that comes down to the same amount nearly every time. Maybe not so unexpected since we're all in the habit of choosing the same lunch we always order.

Of course like any large bunch of diners, we get noisy as we raise our voices to be heard over other gents who are hard of hearing and are also raising their voices. Sometimes customers crane their heads around disapprovingly but are usually tolerant when they see so much gray hair or no hair. Loud conversations range from medical pathology to the Yankees and the Mets (Mets fans don't talk very much), the Giants and Jets, travel (where you going next winter?), TV shows and old movies on TCM, and the computer feats of precocious grandchildren. We have a mix of conservatives and liberals and usually stay away from politics. One day when State Assemblyman Fred Thiele was eating nearby we offered to become his political "brain trust." He thanked us but so far we haven't heard from him. Surprisingly there are few jokes told. Does no one tell jokes

anymore? One wag recently stated there are now four stages of life, “Childhood, middle age, old age, and ‘You’re looking good.’”

Naturally our wives heard about our get-togethers and decided they too should meet for lunch. Of course they picked a pricier place to dine, and you can bet they don’t worry about ordering lunches that run into double figures.

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