

Who knew murder could be so much fun?

By Lisa P. Stites
Staff Writer

Mystery, murder, mayhem, blackmail and bribery. No, it's not police reports. It's all part of the intrigue that swirls together to make for a real, live (almost) whodunit, when Where We Live hosts a murder mystery party. So far, the non-profit group based in Boiling Spring Lakes has hosted three such events as



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part of its efforts to raise \$30,000 to build a new playground. Thus far, they've raised about \$9,500. The latest party took everyone to Mar-

garitaland, an exclusive tropical resort, temporarily located in Boiling Spring Lakes Community Center. My husband Jeff and I played resort owners Joe and Jane Coconut. I'm happy to report that, though there was a murder at our resort, neither "Joe" nor I were the culprit or the victim.

But we haven't both been so innocent in the past.

For the very first party, Where We Live organizers Jen Iapalucci and Eleanor Erickson planned a 1980s high school reunion. We donned our finest 80s throw-back outfits, all the way to teased hair and Don Johnson-wannabe ensembles with sport coats and T-shirts. For this shindig, Jeff's character was the victim – a fast-talking movie producer who was instructed to give as many people as possible reasons to hate him. After met his faux demise, he spent the rest of the evening and mingling among the "living," trying, along with everyone else, to figure out who killed him.

My role that first party was a huge stretch. I was a reporter. Talk about typecasting!

Next it was a 1920s Chicago-style speakeasy. We played Italian mobsters – only partial typecasting on my part. Italian heritage? Yes. Family part of the "the family?" No. At least, I don't think so.

I'm not an actress and I can't imagine being part of a stage production. I really admire people who are courageous enough to show off their talents in front of a crowd.

So I was surprised by how much I enjoy these murder-mystery parties.

What I love most is the chance to step out of my normal character. It's a chance to be someone I'm not, to play a part and act differently than I normally would.

At the 1920s party, I took on one of the main female roles, which required me to loathe one of the other female leads because she only wanted my brother for his money. My party instructions told me to call her names, loudly, whenever I had the chance.

What's this, I wondered. I'm not only allowed, but I'm supposed to be rude to some of these people?

My first encounter with this woman, whom I had never ever met before that night, was when I walked up to her, put my hands on my hips and called her a name that insulted I knew all about the number of male friends she'd known over the years.

She laughed, quickly got into character and gave me the evil eye. As the night went on, we hurled insults and thinly veiled threats at each other and had a great time doing it.

When it was over, we finally learned each other's real names and had a good laugh over how mean we were.

That feeds into the other goal of Where We Live – providing entertainment and recreation for adults, not children and not seniors, in Brunswick County.

I can't wait to find out what we'll do next time, and whether I'll get to be the victim, or maybe even the murderer.

I wonder how I'll do it. With the candlestick in the library? Or maybe with the rope in the kitchen.



Photos courtesy of Widow's Mite Experience

Where water flows from faith

Woman's ministry dedicated to digging live-saving wells in African, Asian villages



Before their wells were installed by Operation Blessing Living Water (left), villagers walked miles to collect water from holes that were little more than mud puddles.

By Suzi Drake
Features Editor

Go to your faucet and pour yourself a glass of water. No big deal. If you're thirsty, you head to the water fountain and take a long drink or just buy a bottle of spring water. Ahhh, refreshing. But for villagers in many remote areas of Africa, India, China and other Asian countries, ample, clean drinking water is luxury they've never known.

In many cases, the closest water source is five miles away and teeming with disease-causing bacteria. And for some, namely women and children, the journey there is often a perilous one.

"We heard stories about the awful things happening to women and even little girls on these treks to get water for their family. Some of them are too gruesome to repeat," said Janet Baker. "We were looking for a way for women here to help other women and their children and, when we heard these stories, it just clicked. We knew our mission was to dig wells."

Baker is a founding member of Widow's Mite Experience, a Brunswick County-based women's ministry dedicated to making clean water accessible to impoverished villages across the globe by funding bore wells. Through a partnership with World Reach Project's Operation Blessing Living Water, in the four years since its inception the ministry has funded 174 wells, serving approximately 200,000 people in villages in India, China and Niger.

"It is amazing how many people's lives we are able to improve and even save through something as simple as water," Baker said. "When we started this, I had no idea we were going to be able to accomplish so much."

Four years ago eight women from across the county decided to find a way to make a difference. Once their mission to dig wells was realized, the question then became, "How?" – how to raise money and how to make it happen.

"To raise funds, we needed to find a way to empower a woman to give in a way that doesn't take money away from her family or tithes away from her church," Baker said.

In the Biblical story about a poor woman who gave all she had to the church, they found inspiration for a way to fund their wells, as well as a name for their ministry.

"The story of the Widow's Mite is one of sacrificial giving. When others were giving out of

their wealth, she gave out of her poverty," Baker explained. "So we asked women to think about what they could give to help others."

And the response they received was, as Baker recalled, "flabbergasting." The group made a few posters and put a few ads in the paper, asking for women to donate "personal treasures" to be sold at a charity auction. And seemingly from nowhere, donations started pouring in. The first year, the auction raised \$35,000.

Want to go?

What: Widow's Mite Experience auction & boutique
When: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Saturday, September 20
Where: Christian Ministry Center, 200 North Howe Street, Southport
Info: www.widowsmiteexperience.com

Widow's Mite has since made this auction its annual fundraiser and has continued to raise more and more money each year. Mind you, this is no dusty flea market or odds-and-ends yard sale. Widow's Mite is not offering women the opportunity to clean out their attic or closet; they are asking women to donate something they value. They are asking women to give their best.

"These are not things that people want to get rid of," Baker said. "It is the practice of sacrificial giving, the giving of something you love to help someone else."

The end result resembles a high-end auction house and boutique filled with antiques, jewelry, artwork, furniture and collectibles. Not as tangible, but just as valuable, are donations of golfing packages and weeks at beachfront vacation homes.

This year's auction is set for Saturday, September 20, at the Christian Ministry Center, located on the corner of North Howe and Nash streets in Southport, adjacent to Southport Baptist Church. The doors open at 10 a.m., when boutique items will be available to purchase outright, and bidding for silent auction items will begin. From noon to 1 p.m., Widow's Mite will serve a complementary lunch while the live auction is set up.

See "Widow's Mite" on back page of Portfolio