

# The P-pack

by Fran Mascia-Lees (PSRC Participant)



*“Fran, why not just get up after class and walk down Nassau Street.”*

This was John George’s response to my not-first-time complaint that I felt bored in retirement. I was taking his “Transition to Retirement” class taught at PSRC, a popular course that helps people about to retire, recent retirees, and, even, long-standing retired seniors deal with the challenges of this stage of their lives.

Immediately after his suggestion, a lovely, perky woman sitting next to me proposed, “Fran, I’ll walk with you.” The outspoken gentleman next to her offered to accompany us and, before we knew it, three others joined in. Not long after, some of our spouses became part of the group, until we numbered nine in all. What started casually has turned into a walk and lunch get-together every Monday at Winberries in downtown Princeton, now into its third year. One of our members had mentioned early in the course that she felt lonely in retirement, quipping that there are two types of people in the world: those like cats who are loners and those like dogs who travel in packs. She was a dog, she said, living in a cat world. Not any more. The group now had its name, “The Princeton Pack,” or “P-pack,” the short version under which our standing reservation at the restaurant is listed.

By now, we know the Winberries staff by name and those not serving us on a particular day might casually drop by our private room (where we insist that the music be turned off) to say “hi,” have one of the “goodies” one of our members likes to bring, or sing “Happy Birthday” along with the rest of us. Our activities have by now moved beyond Nassau Street and the walls of the restaurant: we go to the theater together, lunch at each other’s houses, and have visited one another in the hospital. One couple watches a TV series at the home of another member who gets a cable channel they don’t. One graciously “pet-sat” my parrots when my husband was hospitalized for a week.

Above all, the members of the P-pack value the deep friendships that have developed over time. It is that, the support, companionship, and laughter—sometimes bordering on raucousness (and even a bawdy joke or two)—that keep us coming together week after week. We have now shared a number of important life events that have brought us ever closer and made us a tight-knit group: the marriage of children, the birth of grandchildren, the death of a loved one, and grave illnesses. For many of us, the P-pack has helped to define our retirement as social, rather than lonely. Perhaps, most importantly, it has given us friends we know we can count on.



Thanks, John.

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