



RECONNECT *ing*

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

SUE BENAGE

By: Laura L. Valenti

At first glance, it does not seem like the demure woman seated on the beige sofa in a newer Springfield apartment complex would have once been a city planner and development professional for the city of Lebanon but without a doubt, that is exactly the position Sue Benage once held.

Born in Crane, Mo., her grandfather was a doctor and her father worked as a pharmacist as her family struggled like so many others to survive the Depression years and later, those of World War II. They moved often as they went from Crane to Eldon and finally to Lebanon, where she said she was able to complete her last four years of school. A few years later with her husband, J.C. Benage in the Navy, she found herself traveling again.

"I was happy to come back to Lebanon and begin raising a family," she shared with a smile and a humble shrug. "I can't imagine how you are going to make much of a story out of this. I was at home with kids, always working with kids, through Girl Scouts and then teaching Sunday School at First United Methodist Church." And before long, Sue Benage was also working with other people's kids, providing short term foster care for those in need.

"We would get calls from the police department and the sheriff," she continued. She also worked as a volunteer at the Wallace, and then Breech Hospital in Lebanon, forerunners of the current Mercy Hospital. She also served as a volunteer with Project Misdemeanor, one of Lebanon's first programs to provide mentors for at risk children and teens, as designated by the local courts.

Kids grow up and soon, Sue Benage's interest in her community expanded beyond the children she had once served as she worked in economic development for the city of Lebanon. Her work included a five year stint on the Community Planning and Zoning Board as well as on the project that came to make Lebanon a certified city with the state of Missouri.

Most people give little thought to the planning and development that go into this sort of certification which involves a wide range of community services from the size and scope of the local library to the school board to the sizing of the local water pipes and the state standards set for the area's sewage system.

"There were so many that worked with me, to make this certification happen. Nobody does something like this by themselves. I worked with people like Mayor Kenneth Cowan, Martin Dryden, and school superintendent Vic Slaughter and so many others," she stated with a strong sense of fond remembrance in her voice.

Meanwhile, Sue Benage was also named

as an Ambassador for the Chamber of Commerce's Board of Ambassadors. "There were 20 men ambassadors," she added in a soft voice, "and me. I was the first woman named as a Lebanon Ambassador."

While planning and zoning undergirds the continued growth of a small city like Lebanon, she also found herself caught up, as was so much of Lebanon in the late 1980s with baseball fever as the Babe Ruth World Series came to town for the first time in 1986.

"There was so much planning to be done to make that happen, with teams coming from all over the United States. We put together bags for the players which had information from many Lebanon companies and industries, from boats to blue jeans, and various small items representing our town, letting their families know what there was to do here," she remembered. "And then we did it all again, just a couple of years later, when Babe Ruth officials contacted us unexpectedly to say the community that had planned to host them, had not been able to keep that commitment. They had been so impressed with the way Lebanon had provided for the Babe Ruth World Series just a couple of years before and they wanted to know if we would be willing to do it again. And we did."

Once again, back to promoting Lebanon at various locations through the Missouri Commercial Development program, Sue Benage involved Lebanon students from Alva Hazell's art classes to help run booths to promote Lebanon.

"One year, our theme for the Lebanon booth was Used Cars because at one time, we had been dubbed the Used Car Capital of the World," she laughed. "And then we had other themes after that. I was so proud of those kids as they learned about their own community and helped to promote it."

Sue Benage moved to Springfield in the year 2000 after a health emergency and has remained there, now residing quietly and comfortably in a senior citizens development.

With all of her work for the city of Lebanon, often with little fanfare or public notice, no doubt one of Sue Benage's finest contributions to her community, both in Lebanon and in the state at large, is her own family and the other children she once cared for. A friend recently commented when her name was mentioned. "She sure raised some great kids."

Sue Benage's children include her son, Joe who lives in the Kansas City community of Prairie Village, and daughters, Donna Caffey of Lebanon, Julia Pederson of Springfield and Amy Cook of Marshfield. She has nine grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren.



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Left, a photo that ran in the Lebanon Daily Record on August 23, 1987 of Sue Benage when she served her second year as coordinator of the Babe Ruth World Series headquarters.



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