

# Sun City Center 'sweethearts' renew their vows on Valentine's Day



*Multiple couples gathered in Sun City Center on Feb. 14 to renew their wedding vows. From left to right - Genell and Larry Carter; Judy and Chet Budziak; Christina and*

*Edward Szymanski; Sharon and Tom Swinehart; Marilyn and Robert Enge; Deb and Ed Burgeson; Cindy and Fred Dezort; Shirley and Bob Kroeger; Cher'ley and Del Grogg; Norma and Neil Ebner. Back row center - Judge Stephen Cooper. KATHY STRAUB | Special to the Times*

## **By Kathy Straub, Times Correspondent**

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SUN CITY CENTER —Valentine's Day is a day to celebrate love; a day when loved ones share flowers, cards, chocolates, and romantic dinners.

But last Wednesday, 10 couples in Sun City Center took those expressions of love to a whole new level. In the glow of a beautiful sunset overlooking the lake behind the North Clubhouse in Kings Point, they renewed their wedding vows before retired judge Stephen Cooper.

Adorned with wedding veils and carrying bouquets of flowers, 10 brides faced their grooms of a decade to 50 years and pledged their continuing love and support of each other.

"Love does not consist of gazing into one another's eyes as we might do in the beginning of a marriage," said Cooper as he began the ceremony. "It's looking into the future and walking together into that future, making that love grow. Differences in a marriage are inevitable, but there is no hurt that cannot be cured by quiet talking and communication."

Communication seemed to be a common thread that explained the success of many of these marriages. Tom and Sharon Swinehart, who have been happily married for 49 years, agreed.

"It's important to listen to each other and cooperate," Sharon said.

After 49 years of marriage, Del and Cher'ley Grogg believe that "love, communication, having common goals and laughing a lot" are essential to a happy life together.

"Have patience with each other. Put your spouse before everyone and everything else," Cher'ley Grogg added

When asked what advice they would give to young couples getting married today, answers seemed to follow a distinct theme. Love, of course, maintaining a sense of humor, having patience with each other and again, communication were all high on the list of essentials. Larry and Genell Carter, the couple who have been married the longest at 50 years, gave this advice.

"You both need to work at it. It's a lot of give and take," Larry said

Then Genell added, "And Larry says, 'Yes, dear.'"

Chet and Judy Budziak, married for 45 years, said that for a successful marriage "you have to take it one day at a time and learn to respect each other more and more each day," while Edward and Christina Szymanski believe it's important to always say "I love you" at the end of every day.

Neil and Norma Ebner, together for 49 years advised, "Get to know each other and each other's families. Accept each other and be prepared to compromise."

This special event was sponsored by one of the newest clubs in Sun City Center: Healthy Lifestyles Meetup. This group was organized by Judge Stephen Cooper to help promote and encourage seniors to live longer by making certain lifestyle changes regarding healthy activities like dancing and fun exercise, making healthier food choices, maintaining positive attitudes and enriching relationships with friends and family.

Monthly meetings are held during which guest speakers that include doctors, nurses, and other knowledgeable sources give members professional advice on how to live longer and happier lives.

As a chief judge in Michigan, Cooper performed many marriage ceremonies as well as vow renewals, but he believed that the opportunity for vow renewals didn't exist in Sun City Center. So he advertised for this special Valentine's Day event and these 10 enthusiastic couples made the commitment to be a part of it.

During the ceremony, Cooper presented his own thoughts on love.

"Love is not just the big events," Cooper said. "It's the occasional greeting card, the unexpected flowers, a smiley face left behind, doing chores that the other would normally be doing, anticipating what your spouse might need or want and attempting to be there for them."

As the sun set and the ceremony came to an end, Cooper asked each couple the final and most important question.

"Do you take your spouse to be your favorite person, to laugh with them, to go on adventures with them, to support them through life's tough moments, be proud of them, grow old with them, and find new reasons to love them every day?"

The answer was a resounding, "I do."

For more information about Cooper's group Healthy Lifestyles Meetup, contact by email [HealthyMeetup@aol.com](mailto:HealthyMeetup@aol.com) or contact Judge Cooper at (248) 890-1890.

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