

WILMETTE LIVING

A Creative Force
in Wilmette for Five Decades
Sally Schoch Celebrates
Her Latest Launch,
Sally's Nuts



Sally Schoch Infuses Creativity into Everything She Does

By Paul Clements

Photos by Mark Hersch, Mark Hersch Photography

With a growing family back in the early '60s, Sally Schoch and her husband Richard, residents of Evanston, knew it was time for a larger home and they soon found one to their liking on Gregory Avenue not far from where they were living. Richard had grown up in Evanston and his father owned a city mainstay, the Buddy & Johnny Ice Cream Parlor there, so they were entrenched and enjoyed living in Evanston. However, as they were getting ready to move in and were going through all the paperwork, it soon came to their attention that they had actually just bought a home in Wilmette.

Schoch tells this story with her self-deprecating sense of humor that brings a twinkle to her eye and a glimmer to her smile. The energetic octogenarian adds, "and I still live there today, three additions later."

For five decades, Schoch has not only lived in Wilmette, she has poured her heart and soul into the community, combining an adventurous think-big attitude, with the creativity she honed at the School of the Art Institute, where she got her undergraduate and graduate degrees. But don't underestimate her, she also is as good at organizing and getting things done as any drill sergeant, only without the drill sergeant's demeanor.



Her daughter, Kari Guhl, who is now a resident of Highland Park, and her partner in the new business they recently opened there, Sally's Nuts, recalls that everyday growing up in Wilmette "was an adventure. My mom organized the neighborhood. She would get us and the neighbor kids up at 5:00 AM to go on an adventure. We would walk to the beach to see the sunrise, or we would pile in our station wagon and head out to nature or down to the city."

Schoch says, "I would tell the kids, we're doing this today and we're doing that tomorrow. We were always in the car on weekends, going to the Dells or the U.P. My boys were in Boy Scouts, so we were always camping and I shot Super 8 movies of everything."

The only misadventure was "Tutmania," The Treasures of King Tutankhamun at the Field Museum in 1977 that broke all attendance records with 1.3 million visitors standing in long lines, sometimes overnight, to see the artifacts from the Ancient Egyptian's reign. Schoch looks at her daughter and says, "that damn Tut," and that's all she needs to say.

Schoch did so much more than entertain and educate the neighborhood kids, she lifted her neighborhood to another dimension and enhanced the culture of the community through her art, her cooking, her fashions and her events.

As she reminisces, the first things that come to mind are her childhood years and her art. She was born and raised in Joliet.



Her mother was a housewife, her father was an engineer and she was the youngest of five children. There are two things about her upbringing that fanned the flames of artistry, "crayons first, and then if you didn't have it, you had to make it," she says.

Her family lived on the outskirts of Joliet in a rural setting. While it's always fun to tell the next generation about all the modern conveniences you did without, she remembers the difficulty of growing up in the midst of World War II, but fondly remembers the Victory Garden they had.

Although she neither talks about it, or cultivates it as part of her persona, Schoch became part of the Beat Generation where the seeds of feminism were planted. So, while the trend then was for women to go to college to get an "M.R.S. Degree," Schoch took the train downtown by herself as a teenager pursuing her passion by going to The School of the Art Institute while she was still in high school.

"It was a happening place," she said, "and at that time, classes were actually in the Institute, so what could be better than that? It was the golden era of American art, so I was in classes with many artists whose works are now displayed in the Institute, like Claes Oldenburg, Richard Hunt, Robert Indiana, H. C. Westermann and LeRoy Nieman, who was one of the teachers. We all really looked up to him."

She went to Europe for a year, came back and "got serious," taking night school classes back at the Art Institute, where lo and behold, she "re-met" Richard Schoch and the two were married in 1962. They moved to Evanston and she worked downtown as an Ad Agency designer, while Dick worked for Cody Cosmetics and then Jack Daniels for 30 years..

"I was allowed a lot of freedom," Schoch said, "but I always wanted to be a mother."

So, she would move to Wilmette and have four children. Yet she continued to budget her time accordingly to have what we today call work/life balance.

In 1968, Carol Kleiman, the nationally syndicated business columnist for The Chicago Tribune, where she penned the pioneering and award-winning column Women at Work featured Schoch on December 17 under the headline "She's an Artist and Mother, Too." Kleiman featured Schoch, because at the time, she had pretty much moved on from oil painting and was primarily focused on collages and weaving, and it was noted in the article that her pieces were selling well at price points from \$20-\$50 at the Art Gallery at Marshall Field's State Street Store, The Pickwick Gallery in Winnetka and at Hobson House in Long Grove. Schoch was also involved in the elaborate merchandising displays of the Marshall Field's windows, which were always a must-walk around the block to see.

In response to the question "how does she do it," Schoch was quoted as saying, "I feel sorry for women with young children who go out to work. I just know they get up early, clean the house, get the kids off, go to work, work hard, come home, make dinner, and then iron all night. That's really hard." She then went on to say, "I love what I'm doing now and there seems to be a demand for it. I can work pretty much whenever I want."

Shortly after moving into Wilmette, in 1963, Schoch began the Gregory Ave. Art Fair, which she founded, organized, developed and expanded. It ran until 1975, one weekend every July, and it grew every year. It was not your traditional art fair. Of course, it featured local artists, but it also got every house on the block involved. Whether it was donating your boulevard to a local artist

to set up their booth, serving up hot dogs from your front porch, or offering up your backyard for a puppet show. If you were a neighbor, you were involved!

The July 24, 1969 edition of the Chicago Tribune shows a picture of two boys finger painting with the caption, "Two Wilmette youngsters, Breton Schoch and Bill Brumitt, prepare a finger painting for Saturday's fourth annual Gregory Ave. Art Fair in the north suburb. The day long fair, featuring a pet parade, puppet show, art exhibits and old-time comedy films starts at 9am on Gregory Ave. between 14th and 15th streets."

Guhl said, "Sally was selling her artwork and wanted to get her friends involved, so she was the organizer and she mapped everything out. My father was very involved, because he did all the signs, the lighting and the sound. All the kids were involved too. The big hit was always the Simon Splash dunking machine that was placed over the pool one of our neighbors had. There was a man who lived on the street named Mr. Klingler who owned a tuxedo. So, he would put that on and act like an aristocrat and everyone wanted to see him go down. We were even featured on WTTW Channel 11 one year when someone made a life-size, papier mache Big Bird.

When Sally wasn't leading adventures, making art, doing shows or raising a family, she was winning cook-offs.

"That's why we finally decided to open Sally's Nuts," Guhl said. "Sally had always wanted to do this and she has a treasure trove of great old recipes. There are certain foods you associate with the holidays that are unique to your family, and many times, they are just simple things you like to munch on. Those are the things we've brought to this shop. The nuts are pecans, almonds and cashews



made in Sally's sweet and salty way. We also have a snack shop serving the simple things we love like an Egg Salad or Bologna and Cheese Sandos with a Sack of Sally's Nuts and a Brownie, or a Cheese Board with a Spinach Salad. We can't wait for summer, when people can come in, grab some treats and head across the street to the park to enjoy."

Sally's brunches were so famous they were written up in the local newspapers. In a Cooking Corner column, author Barbera wrote, "Recently Sally served brunch to 30 more calmly than most of us set out lunch for the family. Smoked trout preceded crepes with two kinds of fillings and a cheese-topped strata. A fresh fruit bowl served as both salad and dessert. To round out her menu, there were three kinds of miniature muffins with homemade preserves."

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Among her many accomplishments, in 1981, Schoch won the salad category at the Pioneer Press-New Trier eXtension Cookoff with her Half Wild Rice Salad.

Sally's early recognition came for her fabric collage work, especially her pictures of children. These collages were, "prized possessions in many North Shore nurseries." She also did many commissioned works for "more formal parts of the home." Schoch credits her year spent in Europe for sparking her interest in this art form. She told the Chicago Tribune, "I saw fabric collages in the Scandinavian countries unlike anything I had ever seen before. They had combined handwoven fabrics with exquisite stitchery. I knew at once I had to learn the technique."

Yet, as she advanced into the decades of the '80s and '90s, she became more well-known for her large scale weavings and did many commissioned works of cityscapes for several municipalities, including her two home communities, Wilmette and Joliet. These works were large scale with intricate detailing and each would take her six months or more to complete.

Schoch's life has been prolific, seamlessly transitioning from decade to decade, even though she remains the same person she's always been. Most of us are part of a particular era and the rest of our lives are spent either winding down from that, or looking to recreate it in another time or place. Schoch defies all barriers in her life, even her age. She does what she wants the way she wants to, always with her family around her. She is equal parts ideal mother and housewife, artist and change agent. In summation, she is timeless. Her art has remained relevant over a 70-plus year career, never bending to the whims of fleeting fads. The wedding dresses she designed and made are passed down and worn from mother to daughter to granddaughter. The snacks she made for her children are now being sold in her new store to people of all ages, because they're considered healthy food options now.

Schoch is an inspiration and spending time with her is invigorating. May we all be so blessed and may we all live our lives to the fullest as she has always done.



Visit Sally's Nuts:

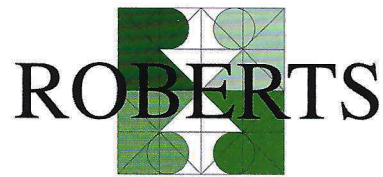
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