

TIES *and* TRADITIONS

BY MINDY RAYE HOLMES

What holds a ward together? These teens in Solvang, California, say it has to do with building a feeling of family.



Entering Solvang, California, is like traveling through time and space. One minute you are in California, and the next you are in an old Danish village. This unique town is maintained by tradition and by family ties. The Solvang Ward of the Santa Barbara California Stake also has many ties and traditions, and although most of the members aren't literally related, their ward feels like a family in many ways.

Feeling Comfortable

One thing that makes the Solvang Ward members feel like they are related is how the members feel around one another. "When I come to church I want to see people," says Sharilyn Millet, 15, who has been in the ward her whole life. "I feel comfortable talking

with people and sharing things with them."

That comfortable feeling is something visitors to the ward also experience. Because Solvang is a tourist destination, the ward often has visitors, who are welcomed with open arms. "When new people come to the ward they are surrounded by members who want to meet and get to know them," says Bishop Peter Haws. Everyone is welcome in this ward family.

Friends of All Ages

Like a real family, every member of the Solvang Ward is unique. Some are old, and some are young. Some have been in the ward their whole lives, and some have just moved in. But although they are different, they have still become close friends because





*To Katy Leonard,
Jordan McCleary,
and Lance Hansford
of the Solvang Ward,
Santa Barbara
California Stake,
ward members
almost feel like fam-
ily because of close
friendships they've
developed over the
years.*

Robert Park appreciates older ward members who have helped him grow in the gospel and who he now calls his friends.



the gospel ties them together.

And it doesn't matter how old or young another member is, the youth can make friends with people of all ages. It's something that Lance Hansford, 14, likes about the Church.

"It's kind of cool because you get to meet people that you normally wouldn't," Lance says. "You don't just walk up to an older person on the street and say, 'Hey, what's up?' They would have no clue who you are. But in the Church it's easier because they could have babysat you when you were little."

Several of the youth in the Solvang Ward talk fondly of older members who are their friends. Robert Park, 14, says that kind of friendship, despite the age differences, helps him to learn more about the gospel and unifies the ward.



Traditions

Katy Leonard, 14, says the best way to make your ward like a family is "just getting together a lot and having fun doing activities."

In the Solvang Ward, getting together has become a tradition as deeply rooted as the traditions in the Danish village. Every year there are traditional festivals, and there are members in the ward who always do certain things. One sister always makes pastries. One brother always plays in a band. Another member acts as the grandpa of the ward.

"Everyone has their little roles they play," Sharilyn says. "You know you can rely on people because it's just built that way."

Helping Each Other and Getting Along

Another thing the youth of the Solvang Ward say makes their bonds strong is how the members help and care for one another. They know that one role every member can play is helping others.

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT?

Katy Leonard says a good way to get closer to people in your ward is "by talking and socializing." This can be hard if you don't know the person or if they are a lot older than you. So what can you talk about?

"Well, you have the connection of the Church always," Katy says. "You can talk about the Church with other people." You can also just get to know them by asking about their family, interests, and hobbies. Who knows, you might find something you have in common!



“That seems to be going on in our ward,” Lance says. “It is like a family because we all help out each other, and we all get along.”

So what’s it like to live in the “Danish capital of America?” For youth in the Solvang Ward it means living in a ward family, enjoying the gospel bonds they have formed with other members. **NE**

JOIN THE FAMILY

“We hope each of you feels the need to join with the whole ward or branch family and use your unique gifts and talents to touch the lives of all of our brothers and sisters. The opportunities we all have for caring and fellowshiping in the ward or branch are boundless if we are willing to give of ourselves in love and service.”

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Belonging to a Ward Family,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1996, 15.



What helps your ward or branch family feel closer to each other? Let us know at newera@ldschurch.org.

Sharilyn Millet looks forward to seeing ward members every week and welcoming the many tourists who visit her ward while in Solvang.

