

## Loners on Wheels are high on life of travel



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Cathy Strawser and her 2 pups at a LoWs cozy campfire.

ROCKFORD — Hookin' up and gettin' hitched doesn't mean the same thing for everyone. For camping enthusiasts such as the group Loners on Wheels it is an opportunity to meet up with others and share traveling experiences.

LoW, a international organization with headquarters in Deming, New Mexico, began in 1969 (By Edith Lane) as a singles club for people who travel but don't want to do so alone.

Although members must be legally single to join, they must remain single to stay. It emphasizes camaraderie and a love of hitting the open road, not romance.

LoW has a chapter in most states; Illinois has three. Participants are welcome to tag along with others for special events or for the fun of it, said central Illinois member Cathy Strawser. The 69-year-old of Rockford joined four years ago after being introduced to the concept while camping by herself.

"The group happened to be there at the same time. They invited me to join their campfire, and I enjoyed them very much," Strawser recalls. "I came home, looked them up online and joined."

She received a telephone call from Pat Johnson, also of Rockford, inviting her to the LoW Christmas party to acquaint her with others, long before the camping season began.

Johnson, 90, has camped most of her life. "My mother ran a summer camp on the Des Plaines River in Chicago, and I have camped since I was a little kid."

With four children, she said she got back into it when her youngest was a year old.

"I think it is a great way to get kids acquainted with the outdoors. No matter where you go, you got the outdoors," she said. "Some places aren't as nice, but that's the way life is."

Admittedly, there has been a little role reversal since her husband passed away 21 years ago, Johnson said.

She drives her own Class B camper, and said her family sometimes worries how far she ventures out.

"When my kids get upset, I just don't listen," she said with a smile and shrug. "They have learned to be the same kind of people I am — we wanted to go and do something, we went and did it."

With LoW for 15 years, Johnson said her favorite part is, "The camaraderie, really. Friendship is a big part of it."

Strawser agrees, and said she also enjoys that LoW has no requirements to how often she participates.

"You can go to as few or as many of the campgrounds as you want," she said.

Strawser's favorite part, though, "is sitting around the campfire on nice nights. We sit around and talk and laugh, share stories and stuff like that. It is a group of people who are all so different that we never run out of things to talk about. I like doing that the most."

April through October, campouts are scheduled Tuesday through Friday, though many stay a day or two longer.

"We go to see the local sites and restaurants, walk a lot — since many of us have dogs," Strawser said.

"We get together for meals, we have a potluck once out of the week and happy hour is every day at 4 p.m."

During the off-season is the group's planning stage. Members look for areas, often times, state parks that are affordable, accommodating, clean, safe and in areas where there are fun things to do.