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The Denver Post

On the Verge Park Hill woman's annual close circle of friends keep their sanity

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Caption: PHOTO: The Denver Post/Andy Cross Friends of Ann Petrila gather in her li the Verge party. The get-together began 10 years ago when the women gathered to a Nervous Breakdown.'

Ten years ago, Ann Petrila was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Well, OK, may

As a first-time mother juggling a social work career, marriage and the triple whamm that comes with a baby with serious health problems, Petrila says she was on the lec

Then she saw The Movie.

Pedro Almodovar's outrageous 1988 comedy, "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Bre speak to her; it all but shouted, "This one's for you, Ann."

Somehow, a good laugh made her feel better. So, she decided to show the movie at women she knew teetering on the brink.

These days, her annual Verge Party - as it has come to be known - is nothing short c shown ("After the first year, we didn't need it anymore," said one partygoer), but its in Petrila's Park Hill home.

Over the years the invitation list has grown to 75, and women now fly into Denver fr

"The doctor I work for said, "You're going to use up your vacation and your frequent Beverly Giordano of Lake City, Fla. "I told him, "You're not supposed to get it."

It's one of those woman things. Not to be sexist, but men are strictly forbidden amid and even the male family dog have been booted for the evening.

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"Women plan their summers around this party," adds Giordano, a nurse practitioner.

A big component to every successful party is, of course, the food table. But at this party, it's the party foods that Petrila says help you cope when you're on the verge.

Her dining room table on this recent July night was overflowing with "seriously regrettable" food: a plate of Twinkies, some sort of casserole dessert involving whipped cream and Oreos, cookies, popcorn (with jellybeans in the same bowl), pumpkin pie and a jumbo tub of butter. A makeshift bar

was set up in the kitchen.

"I see we have all food

groups represented here,"

declared Giordano. "Salt,

fat, sugar and alcohol."

A good number of the attendees at this year's party are in the health field, several in irony in that. In fact, being able to talk and laugh about being on the verge of a nervous breakdown are far from it.

"These are great, great women, and Ann is a hoot. She's also the sanest woman I know of a second-year diverger. "It's what women do. Men talk about, I don't know, military history, what they do. I suppose, from an evolutionary standpoint, it's good that we have both."

Decade-old tradition

The women, most now in their 40s and 50s, have been gathering for a decade. In their lives, marriages forged, babies born, divorces filed, affairs launched and parents buried. They have been dissected, bemoaned and celebrated with conversation, a fistful of M&M's, and margaritas.

Sometimes they only see each other once a year - at the party, of course - but when they meet, it's passed. And no subject, it seems, is off limits.

"We used to talk about day-care nightmares," says Giordano, "now it's like, so are you?"

The experts in human endeavor say what these women do is a social phenomenon. "It's good," says **Dianne Blomberg**, an associate professor of human communications at

She says it symbolizes the difference in the way most men and women communicate. "It's territory in our politically correct world, Blomberg said often the stereotypes hold true."

When women discuss their problems, she says, they aren't really looking for solutions, how it sounds in the open air. They want reassurance and agreement from the women, not solving and certainly not criticism. "It's like a loop."

Men, on the other hand, tend to work things out in their heads, Blomberg explained. "It's a mirror effect of conversation that goes on with women. She added that when men do it, it is usually during a shared activity.

Foreign idea to men

The idea of getting together at a party with no other agenda but to gab is foreign to

By coincidence, Blomberg said one of her all-time favorite movies is "Women on the Edge of Their Seats" and her husband saw it on their first date and now watch a video of it every anniversary.

She'd like to know how she can wrangle an invitation to next year's party.

Petrila said she was only going to have the party once, to help get her through that time she was diagnosed with diabetes insipidus, a rare kidney disorder.

"It was a dreadful time," she said. Her friends had been so helpful and supportive even when they were dealing with their own problems. "That is when I began to appreciate what women do for each other."

After the first party, it just became a given that there would be another one. And another one. The gathering didn't fold until well past 1 a.m.

"I think it's just something we all can relate to," Petrila says.

Her guests are of that certain age that once put them on the front lines of the fight for equality. They wanted it all, they demanded it. But, privately, they also realized that sometimes having it all isn't what you need.

Chris Chase certainly thinks so. She is the real estate agent who sold the Petrilas the house. "I think everyone here understands it," she said, looking around the room. "No mystery, really."

"For a set point of time, everyone of us has hit a period when we feel completely out of control. It's just have to say, dammit, I need some cookie dough."

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