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SOUTHERN DENTON COUNTY LIFE

Local club leaves politics at the door

By **Steve Gamel** June 19, 2021

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The Summit Club of Flower Mound hosts many events each year, such as last month's inaugural FM Smoke Fest, which support local charities and student scholarships. (Photo by Helen's Photography)

In a lot of ways, Claudio Forest is just like any other Flower Mound resident. He pays close attention to politics at every level; he's even a former town councilman and served on several boards and commissions for just more than a decade. He votes and certainly has his opinions on what he believes is right. And, occasionally, he'll tell you exactly how he feels about something.

He's a self-professed political junkie. But he also believes there is a time and place for everything in life.

"There always is," Forest said with a laugh. "There are definitely things that are more important – like family and community. I did my time serving the town I love, and I'd like to think I had a positive influence. Now it's time to move onto something else."

He added, "It's refreshing to sit with a great group of guys and not worry about anyone bringing up the latest political news."

But where in the world can you find such a group where politics doesn't exist – where only fellowship, fraternal service, jocularity, leadership, and all the things that make a community great remain? Where can you find a group of neighbors and friends who are more concerned with smoking just the right amount of meats or cooking hot dogs on the grill for a couple of hundred residents at a local event than talking about nonsense that's only going to divide people?

Well, for the past 45 years, the Summit Club of Flower Mound has prided itself on being that group.

Formed in 1974, the Summit Club is a non-political (it's literally spelled out in their Charter) service organization comprised of community leaders and hard-working men with a common goal of serving others, promoting good deeds, and having tons of fun in the process. The Summit Club strongly adheres to the founding principle of leaving politics at home. Today, its membership of 45-50 men includes local business leaders, civic leaders, retirees, and anyone who wants to serve.

Forest was excited to join in 2007, after first learning about the club and its community involvement. He's been the club's president since 2014.



Claudio Forest

"It has really become a passion of mine," Forest said of the group, which formed during the town's infancy as a way to break a vicious cycle of political bickering and get folks re-focused on their community. "I love doing what we do in town and being part of that fellowship with the other guys. It's always been a place to come and put away partisanship. Whether you are on the left, right, Democrat, Republican, Independent – as a club, we don't care. The important thing is that you're willing to serve the town and the public. We get people focused on the right stuff. We do a lot."

That last sentence is an understatement. As Flower Mound's oldest service organization for men, the Summit Club has gone out of its way to sponsor events such as the Easter Sunrise Service on the Mound, the Children's Independence Day Parade, Christmas parades, and Western Saloon and Casino Night. They've sponsored Boy Scout troops, Fire Prevention Week, cooked thousands upon thousands of hot dogs at town events and picnics and are responsible for giving out annual academic achievement awards to the top local students in elementary and middle schools in math, science, and English.

They've provided scholarships for students at NCTC and programs at Midwestern State and support to organizations such as Keep Flower Mound Beautiful, Communities in Schools of North Texas, Winning the Fight, and The Mound Foundation.

On its own, the Western Saloon and Casino Night raises roughly \$20,000 a year, which is then distributed to neighboring charities and scholarships. On May 15 and 16, they hosted their first FM Smoke Fest, a friendly competition among the town's best barbecue and smoking enthusiasts. It is one of 25 to 30 events on the Summit Club's schedule each year.

"Wherever the need is, we try hard to fill it," Forest said. "Over the years, we were known first as the hot dog boys. But we've really evolved from being more than just a social club to being philanthropic. We do have a great time doing it."

When he's not busy with the Summit Club, Claudio spends time with his wife, Carol. Together, they have two grown daughters, Cassandra and Courtney, and even they have taken after their dad to get involved in the town when they can.



It's all about serving the community and bringing people together for a common purpose.

"It's just a rewarding thing to do," Forest said.

If you'd like to learn more about the Summit Club of Flower Mound, visit summitclub.org. Annual dues are \$60. They host club meetings at Bari's Pizza on the first Thursday of every month, and all service-minded men are welcome. The first meal is free to prospective members.