

2009 Senior Style

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[← --back to story](#)

In a class by themselves: Retired Old Men Eating Out

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Everyone enjoys spending time with friends. From grade school through college, lives tend to revolve around finding a balance between school and friends. In adulthood, friends become even more important. With family not being as close as they used to be, friends step up to enter the role of support group.

One group is not necessarily so unique in the fact it's a group of friends that spend time together everyday. The group also isn't unique simply because of where they meet. What does make this group unique is the fact it exists despite changes in venue, members and a multitude of other factors. Every morning, a group of five to 10 men gather at the Elkins McDonald's. They call themselves the ROMEO Club - Retired Old Men Eating Out. While not an official club with recognition by any larger organization, the ROMEO Club is as unique as the individuals that comprise it.

The club, taken in the most loose definition of the word, has been meeting since the 1980s. The original location for gathering was the G.C. Murphy on the corner of Third Street and Davis Avenue in Downtown Elkins. After the store closed its doors, McDonald's became the place to find the ROMEOs. Members come and go beginning around 7:30 a.m. without any agenda or specific topic. Time spent at their table will be filled with more topics than an Elkins City Council meeting. One topic that the table will always come back to is golf. Many of the ROMEOs are golfers and, while not a requirement for membership, knowing the difference between the fairway and the rough as well as familiarity with the Mulligan will go a long way in contribution to the conversation.

Zan White, Gene Rosencrance, Tharon Jack, Max Armentrout and Dick White are only a few men that spend their mornings in the corner booth at McDonald's. Someone will always make sure all of the coffees are full and head out if they hear the signal of an empty cup clicking on the table. Jack, the news man of the group, always with a paper, shared the secret as to why this group gets together.

"You have to get up and get out," he said.

These men don't have any trouble doing that. Jack explained that spending time alone, not doing anything and not living is what causes people to die earlier. This idea and urge to meet goes beyond the corner booth. On any given day, other groups of men meet at the McDonald's. Men who like to talk about their experiences in the various wars, sit in a booth near the register, former members of the education field have a table near the window and the anglers are usually found in the center booths.

Both Jack and Rosencrance explained that this phenomenon not only occurs at places like Mama's Kitchen, Scottie's and The Allegheny Restaurant in Harman, but all across the country. On a trip to Myrtle Beach, Rosencrance told his wife he was going to go to the McDonald's one morning. His reason, he told her, was to "hang out with the good ol' boys." Jack's story is similar but taking place in Florida during a visit to relatives. Again at a McDonald's, Jack found a group similar to the ROMEOs even on a visit to the deep south.

Article Photos



(CU?and The Inter-Mountain/Alec Rader) MORNING JOE — Gene Rosencrance and Tharon Jack, two members of the ROMEO?Club — Retired Old Men Eating Out — talk shop with fellow retirees over bottomless cups of McDonald's coffee.

One of the best explanations of what this group is came from Rosencrance. He said that they were the group of guys that were usually seen hanging out in the bar at midnight, but now they meet at McDonald's early in the morning. Topics of conversation are similar and there's always a drink in someone's hand. Even though the venue and hours have changed, these are still just average guys hanging out with friends.

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