

IT STARTED AS A JOKE ...



BILL KALINA —*The York Dispatch*

Longtime friends have a laugh in a limousine that picked them up after they had colonoscopies Monday at Gastroenterology Associates of York. The group, from left, Linda Gordon of Lititz, Barb Trout of West Manchester Township, Mary Beth Steelman of Springettsbury Township, Peggy Taylor-Brown of Springettsbury Township and Sue Grove of West Manchester Township, scheduled colon check-ups on the same day and had the limo transport them to lunch and their homes afterward.

Girls' day out starts with colonoscopies

► **HEALTH:** The five friends made appointments together, then took a limo to lunch afterward.

By **KATHY STEVENS**
The York Dispatch

Ask most women how they'd spend a day with girlfriends and they'll likely list the favorites: Spa, movie, perhaps a mimosa brunch at a beachside restaurant.

But one group of longtime friends opted instead for a morning at the gastroenterologist's complemented with anesthesia and colonoscopies — lunch followed.

The women have redefined the traditional girls' day out to focus on health.

And as each celebrates her 50th birthday this year, they

► Learn more about colon cancer.

Page C3

say they'll schedule more check-ups to screen for diseases that can begin to crop up at this stage in their lives.

"It really started out to be a joke," said Mary Beth Steelman about a weekend at the beach last summer when one in their group suggested the group outing for colonoscopies. "When it was suggested, I just agreed, I said, 'Sure, I'll do it,' thinking that it would never happen."

It did happen Monday morning, the first day of National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

The timing enabled the group to bring attention to col-

onoscopies, which is the screening technique to detect precancerous or cancerous polyps.

Removal of the polyps in most cases prevents colorectal cancer, a disease that last year killed about 3,600 Pennsylvania residents, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Preparation: They'd planned their day appropriately. The women initially considered getting together the night before for a girls' night watching movies, chatting and running to the bathroom when required bowel cleaners did the job.

"No one had enough bathrooms," said Barb Trout, a nurse who works at Gastroenterology Associates of York in

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Continued from Page A1

York Township. "We decided just to stay in our own homes but call each other for support."

And so it went.

They followed instructions, consuming clear liquid diets of broth, water and ginger ale the day before, followed by prescribed laxatives that evening. Monday morning, they left their homes in York and Lancaster counties for their collective medical adventure at the endoscopy center where Trout works.

Each woman provided her health history, was briefed on the procedure and posed last-minute questions before being wheeled into a 10-by-7-foot room for the 20-minute procedure.

Health matters: That afternoon, the women, groggy from anesthesia, exited the center, climbed into a waiting limousine and headed to lunch — a meal punctuates most of

their get-togethers — where they could commiserate.

The women, Trout, Steelman, Sue Grove, Linda Gordon and Margaret Taylor-Brown, have been friends for decades. Grove and Trout met in first grade; they met the others during ninth grade while attending York Catholic High School.

They said they've shared numerous life transitions, from puberty to marriage and motherhood to empty nesters. They know which one has foot problems or thyroid issues or bouts of depression.

They've held each other's hands through

tough times, when parents died, when doctors delivered bad news. They've laughed, too, and retained friendship regardless of miles that separate.

And as they step into mid-life, they say they'll plan another odd day out for mammograms or bone density checks or hormone therapy consultation, counting on each other for support.

"It's all in the way we approach things," Trout says. "We have humor and we have each other. We want to make sure we also have our health."

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