

AGENT/from page 1B

at the possibility of hosting

For more info, call 647-9285.

was changing and I really wanted to make a difference — for my country and for women.”

After a university official made a call to a congressman on her behalf, Childers found herself in Washington, D.C., working as a military caseworker.

And then a few months into the gig, destiny came knocking.

“A friend came up to me and said, ‘You won’t believe this, but they’re hiring female bodyguards for the Nixon girls.’”

Childers’ interest was immediately piqued.

“How do you get a job like that?”

“Well,” replied the friend, “you have to be able to shoot a gun and you have to be willing to die for \$7,500.”

“I can do that,” Childers

replied. “I can really shoot a gun. I’m a regular Annie Oakley.”

With a bit of pride, Childers said her Secret Service application was read by none other than Clint Hill, “the most famous of Secret Service agents” who history will remember for leaping onto the back of mortally wounded President John F. Kennedy’s limo during that infamous day in Dallas.

“I was just a 20-year-old kid from Pueblo who could shoot a gun,” Childers explained. “I really didn’t even know what the Secret Service did.”

“But I was selected along with the other four women, who were all police women.”

And so began an intensive training period in which Childers learned to

shoot submachine guns, engage in hand-to-hand combat, drive autos at high rates of speed as well as “how to deal with mass riots, how to deal with tear gas, how to protect the individuals.”

“But the thing that really hit me was when they said, ‘What you have to do is determine that if something isn’t right, then it’s probably not,’” Childers explained. “And you have to plan on the worst but pray for the best.”

Among the press, the fact that five women had joined the exclusive and century-year-old Secret Service was seen as a sort of novelty. With amusement, Childers read from a news article on the swearing-in ceremony that centered on the hair color, physical attractiveness and

“lithe, well-shaped figures” of the new agents.

As a member of the Secret Service, Childers was entrusted with the lives of such dignitaries as President Richard M. Nixon and his family, Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, the queen of Spain and numerous foreign heads of state.

It was, however, protecting Caroline and John — the children of the late President Kennedy — that occupies a special place in Childers’ memory.

“The Kennedys were my biggest and most interesting assignment,” Childers said. “Clint Hill called me and said, ‘Kathryn, since you can play tennis, you can ski, you can shoot and you’re cute and fun, we think you’d get along with the Kennedy kids.’”

It was a job that took

Childers from the Kennedy home in Hyannis Port, Mass., to the Greek island of Skorpios, where Jackie Onassis Kennedy was living a life of luxury aboard her husband’s lavish yacht.

“We won’t need you to come in here,” Onassis Kennedy told Childers after hosting a tour of the yacht. “We just need you on call for when Caroline wants to go for tennis and skiing.”

As the Secret Service is part of the U.S. Treasury Department, investigating and tracking down counterfeiters also played a sizeable role in Childers’ work as an agent.

Counterfeiting was big (illegal) business in the early ’70s, “and it was the Secret Service’s job to catch counterfeiters,” Childers said. She went on

to describe several undercover “buy” operations, firearm always nearby, to accomplish that very task.

“It’s where I really learned acting, I suppose,” Childers said of the undercover operations, one of which saw her disguised as a stewardess at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

As a perfect footnote to her storied tale, Childers shared a chance encounter she had with Kennedy Onassis in New York.

After the former first lady inquired about, and then heard, of Childers’ latest agent exploits, she simply replied, “You live such an interesting life.”

“Oh, Mrs. Onassis,” countered Childers. “It’s all relative.”

jpompia@chieftain.com