



# The Historian

Preserving Today for Tomorrow

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## The History of Leisure World - 1966

This article is the sixth in a series adapted from the transcripts of the Historical Society's first archivist, Marjorie F. Jones. Additional information was taken from five Historical Society Journals published between 1980 and 1982, *Fulfilling Retirement Dreams*, published by the Historical Society in 1989 and numerous issues of the 1966 *Leisure World News*.

Fifteen months after its opening day in 1964 1,469 individuals called Leisure World home. In a meeting at Clubhouse I, Orange County officials told residents the county's population "is now estimated at slightly more than 1 million and should be more than 2 million by 1970."

The growth of Leisure World was evidenced in more ways than memberships. Security became a separate department employing 65 officers who operated three patrol cars and two scooters with radios or walkie-talkies. Security officers continued to assist and supervise each move-in. As an added service, a hostess from Security called on new residents after a few days to offer further information and assistance. To accommodate the growing population, the minibuses fleet was increased to four.

Ross Cortese admitted his community plan failed to realize how many of the residents had green thumbs. He was deluged with requests for a garden area. A site off Moulton Parkway just past Clubhouse 2 was prepared to meet the need. Its 3.5 acres of garden plots were called Green Thumb and later renamed Garden Center 1. A site near the gardens was made available on a lease basis to residents who needed storage space for their recreational vehicles and boats. Both sites were purchased by GRF as community recreational facilities.

By 1966, more than 100 clubs had been organized. During the early months the only place for them to meet was Clubhouse I, which was booked from morning to night, so the Recreation Department had to limit room reservations to those clubs that had received approval for their bylaws and had submitted membership rosters.



Orange County Supervisor Hirstein and Heidi Cortese hug Siren and Belle that became the official mascots of Fire Station # 22 when it opened October 27, 1966.

Courtesy Leisure World News

### Governance

In November 1964, Robert L. Price, an employee of the Leisure World Foundation (LWF), was appointed Administrator for the community. One of his responsibilities was to form interim boards of directors for each Mutual and assist them after they were formed.

May 8, 1965 was set for the first annual meeting of Golden Rain, Laguna Hills (GRF). GRF had received signed affidavits from each mutual, 1 through 11, appointing Mr. Price as their representative to Golden Rain and to cast votes as directed by the mutuals' boards; or, if not directed his votes were to reflect the best interests of the mutuals. This meeting was adjourned to September 15, 1965 and again to January 18, 1966.

Regardless of postponements, GRF continued to make

## MUSINGS

### Honoree of Month

Congratulations to **Stan Lehrfeld**, our Laguna Woods honoree for August 2010 and **Dick Sharp**, our honoree for September. Stan, who recently moved to The Regency after 20 years in Laguna Woods is our first honoree who does not reside in the Village. **Las Palmas** and **The Regency**, both part of **Vintage Senior Living**, fund the Honoree of the Month program.



**Bob Ring**

Inga Futtrup is the photographer at **Images by Dwayne** who so expertly captures the images of our honorees. We are grateful to the **Laguna Woods Video Club**, whose members videotape the ceremony.

### Veterans History Project

*The Society is seeking a veteran who would like to serve as the Promotional Coordinator for our Veterans History Project.* We are looking for a personable, active resident, who participates in numerous community events, to encourage veterans to take part in this Library of Congress Program—a way to ensure that the achievements of our veterans are forever etched in our country's history.

The United States Congress created the Veterans History Project in 2000. The mission of the Project is to collect and archive the personal recollections of U.S. wartime veterans, to honor their service and share their stories with current and future generations. The project also collects stories from home front civilians who worked in support of our armed forces.

There are two levels of participation. Veterans can either choose to submit a form detailing important aspects of their service (including ranks, wartime activities, and locations of service) or submit a form and participate in an interview to bring tales of their service to life.

Forms and interviews are housed in the permanent collections of the Library of Congress and the Historical Society of Laguna Woods. They are available to veterans, scholars, students and anyone else visiting the Library or Society. Some content is available online.

**To volunteer, participate or for more information, please call the Historical Society at 206-0150.**

## Pino Conte's "The Veil"

Rising majestically out of a water fountain marking the entrance to Clubhouse I is a unique, bronze statue named "*The Veil*." The figure, with its expression of wonder and dream-like reality, has been called "a pure expression of spirituality." It was completed in 1961 and is approximately 6.5 feet high.

The sculptor was Pino Conte of Rome. He was born in 1915 in Bari and had his first one-man show in Rome in 1947. He had several exhibits of his work both in Italy and abroad and was awarded prizes, including the First Award of the Ministry of Public Education in 1956.

High on the slope of the Sidney, Australia Myer Music Bowl a young woman can be seen sitting quietly, perhaps listening to music from the concert stage below. *Mirragio*, a similar Conte creation, was donated to the city of Sidney by an anonymous Italian donor, with instructions that the figure be installed as if she were part of the audience.

Conte's early statues appear to have been inspired by a profound sense of religion.



**The Veil by Pino Conte taken in 1966.** Courtesy Leisure World News



**Mirragio by Pino Conte.**

the necessary decisions for the community. Medical insurance was available to residents on the first day of move-in. The building and lease contracts for the Clinic had been signed, and the financial arrangements for the mutuals had been arranged.

The TV cable system, Clubhouse II and the golf starter building had been authorized. Of special interest to golfers was the construction of a tunnel below El Toro Road near Gate 1 that allowed golf carts to cross the street safely.

### **January 1966**

GRF's first annual meeting was finally held on January 18<sup>th</sup> in Clubhouse II. The presidents of Mutual 1 through 4 exercised their right to vote for their respective mutual. Mutual 5 through 15 were represented by Administrator Price.

On January 27<sup>th</sup> the first GRF resident board of directors was elected by the housing mutuals. All subsequent board members of GRF would be elected by the members of the mutual boards.

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, Mannings restaurant broke ground for a 550-seat, 20,000 square foot restaurant located on the current site of Laguna Hills City Hall. The \$500,000 restaurant-cocktail facility was scheduled to be completed in 10 months. During the same week the shuffleboard courts located at Clubhouse II opened.

In June, 1965, the stable master of El Rancho Cortese, now known as the Equestrian Center, was hired. By the end of September, 1965 there were 15 horses stabled in new stalls and three months later the bridge trail from the stables to Aliso Creek, was opened.

From the day the stables opened in 1965, the "horsey set" started making plans for a saddle club. The first organizational meeting of the not-for-profit saddle club was held on January 16<sup>th</sup>, with more than 150 attending.



**The Lowell Hales use the riding ring at El Rancho Cortese Stable in December 1966.** Courtesy Leisure World News



**Eddie Nelson, Shuffleboard Club president, and Irene Sweet, Clubhouse II Hostess, try out the new courts in January 1966.** Courtesy Leisure World News

Annual dues were set at \$5. Twelve GRF horses were available for riding everyday but Mondays.

The Club's 237 charter members announced plans for picnics, moonlight rides, morning breakfasts and longer rides over the hills. During the first year of its existence, the club had installed a public address system, built a barbecue and purchased a hay wagon. These items were donated to the residents of Leisure World and accepted for them by GRF. The stable's hospitality room, planned by the charter members, was sponsored and has always been maintained by club members.

### **February 1966**

On February 6, 1966, GRF approved a contract for management services with LWF retroactive to August 1, 1964.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) required each new mutual to establish reserves. In February, GRF, trustee for these funds, established a fund to build a community hospital, a facility included in the agreements between the Mutuals and FHA. GRF established a \$300.00 fee to be collected from every residential sale, effective with Mutual No. 12, for this purpose.

The FHA, the Orange County Building Department and Leisure World's Architectural Committee approved atrium and patio cover alterations for eight of the 18 then existing models. Metal drop-down patio shades were permitted on some models.

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, with 400 in attendance, the Methodists broke ground for 13,500 square-foot building which would ultimately become their Fellowship Hall. The church was built on a 3.5-acre site donated



**Skeining on an oldtime spinning wheel at the February 1966 Hobby Show was resident Mrs. Len Dow, who demonstrated her talents for three years at Knott's Berry Farm.**

Courtesy Leisure World News

by Ross Cortese, located on Moulton Parkway, south of El Toro Road. A horse and plow from the old Moulton Ranch were used by Reverend Alec Nichols to turn the first shovelful of ground.

About 3,800 persons—including hundreds of visitors from San Diego, Los Angeles and Orange counties—viewed a two-day hobby show February 18-19 in the Main Lounge of Clubhouse I. The show included more than 100 widely varied displays. Exhibits ranged from hand weaving and hand script to jewelry and brasswear. Many of the items were antiques.

### **March 1966**

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> former Under Secretary of the Navy, Kenneth E. BeLieu, was elected president of LWF. BeLieu had served as executive vice president and succeeded William G. Simon, who continued as Chairman of the Board.

In late March the pedestrian gate, adjacent to what is now San Sebastian, was opened on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, so residents could park in the sales building parking lot in order to reduce parking problems in the Clubhouse I area.

### **April 1966**

Bus service between Leisure World and Laguna Beach started on April 18<sup>th</sup>. The service was operated by a private company approved by the Public Utilities Commission. Six daily trips were scheduled starting at 6:15 a.m. and ending at 9:00 p.m. The fare was \$1.00.

Nearly 4,000 persons visited the community's first outdoor art exhibit at Clubhouse I on April 22-23. The exhibit, sponsored by the Recreation Department and the Art Club, was open to the public. Nearly 400 paintings—mostly landscapes, seascapes and still life in oil. The greatest surprise was the quality of work by those with limited experience.

### **May 1966**

The Panhellenic Association opened a reading room in Clubhouse II on May 6<sup>th</sup> with a few chairs and small tables and about 1,400 books, some of which were surplus possessions of residents. The facility was open Monday through Friday. This volunteer program was the start of the Laguna Woods Village Library which continues to grow and is one of the community's most used facilities.

### **GRF's Second Annual Meetings**

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, the second annual membership meeting of GRF was held at Clubhouse II. LWF Vice President of Finance, Robert W. Carithers, outlined how the community's facilities were planned and funded. This subject will be addressed in a future issue of *The Historian*.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, Administrator Price was elected president of GRF at the organizational meeting of its new board of directors. To partially illustrate the growth and complexity of the community's operations and services, Price reported that in April medical services



**Ruth Dietrich, President of the Panhellenic Club, and an advisor prepare to open the reading room in Clubhouse II on May 5, 1966.**

Courtesy Leisure World News

were provided 18,352 times; education and recreation events were attended by 87,137; the bus system transported 15,607 passengers and almost 200,000 vehicles entered the gates.

### **Consolidation**

Tentative plans to consolidate mutuals to reduce costs, prevent duplication of effort in administration, accounting and other areas were discussed by directors of the eight then existing mutual boards and GRF at a May 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. Officials from the (FHA), LWF and the LWF legal staff attended the meeting.

When Leisure World was completed, the plan was to have 60 mutual boards with 180 directors to set policies for a projected 30,000 residents. Staff concluded that the administrative costs to hold 60 nearly identical board meetings each month would be prohibitive. The obvious solution was to consolidate the mutuals. It was also apparent that consolidation would spread the risk of such future adverse conditions as earthquakes, fires or floods over a larger number of manors, thus minimizing the financial impact on the owners in the affected areas.

Legal counsel advised that the procedures necessary for consolidation could be submitted to FHA for approval and returned to owners for consideration within 90 days. The mutual boards agreed to fund the approval process. FHA said they could complete their evaluation of such a proposal in approximately three weeks.

A presidents committee appointed by each board of Mutuals 1 through 8 was designated to further consider a proposed plan that would result in six mutuals, each of which would contain about 3,000 manors at the completion of the Leisure World's planned 18,000 manors.

In October, Laguna Hills Mutuals 1 through 8 and Mutual 10 were considering consolidation into First Laguna Hills Mutual and Mutuals 9 and 11 through 15 would consolidate into Second Laguna Hills Mutual. In spite of estimated annual cost savings of \$372,000, the question was not resolved during 1966.

### **June 1966**

By June, Mutuals 1 through 11 and their 3,685 manors were completed and Leisure World's population was approximately 6,400. Projections indicated that Leisure World's population would increase by more than 30% during the following six months.

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, GRF took over Rossmoor's contract with



**Channel 6's staff tests new technical systems which will allow them to present programs from outdoor locations. On July 19th programming originated live from poolside at Clubhouse I.**  
Courtesy Leisure World News

East Bay Antenna Systems for installation and maintenance of a master TV Antenna System.

The Leisure World STARS (Senior Talent Active Reserve Services), Inc. was granted nonprofit corporate status. Its purpose was to use the cross section of talents, interests, activities and capabilities of Leisure World residents to market Laguna Hills and Orange County to industrial, cultural and governmental organizations. The group published a book, *People In Action*, in March 1967.

### **Laguna Beach Expands**

On June 8<sup>th</sup> the Laguna Beach City Council submitted a proposal to the Local Agency Formation Commission to annex 1,885 acres of inhabited and uninhabited acres in Laguna Canyon.

One of the proposed annexations was a new development named Sycamore Hills. It included uninhabited land bordered by Laguna Lakes (Barbara's Lake), Laguna Canyon Road, El Toro Road and Leisure World and the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor toll road on the south. Under a pre-annexation agreement the Laguna Beach Planning Commission agreed to re-zone the area to permit 3,000 residential units on 520 acres of estate sized lots, including a nine-hole golf course and a small commercial area.

In spite of a lawsuit filed on December 28, 1976 in the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals by Rancho Palos Verdes Corporation, Laguna Beach adopted a general plan which provided that Sycamore Hills, now known as the James Dilly Preserve, should be preserved in its natural state and become part of the



Residents watched the aquatic ballerinas perform at a water carnival on May 13-14, 1966 at Clubhouse I. Courtesy Leisure World News

Laguna Coast Wilderness Park. Laguna Beach purchased this parcel in 1978.

### July 1966

At Clubhouse I a group of water enthusiasts presented the first Leisure World Water Ballet. It was so successful that it became an annual summer highlight.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, about 3,200 persons overwhelmed the bandstand area of Clubhouse I to view the Productions Guild's spectacular Independence Day evening program. More than 160 residents participated in the program. The guest speaker was Betty Roadman, noted lecturer and actress who discussed, "What's Right With America."

Another milestone was reached with the formation of the community's 100<sup>th</sup> club, the Telephone Club, which was open to all former employees of the Bell Telephone.

Channel 6 tested equipment that allowed them to present programs from outdoor locations.

In an article about Rossmoor Water Company published on July 14th the *Leisure World News* reported that during May 77 million gallons of water were used by 5,550 manors in Phase 1—the area inside Gates 1 through 4. This was enough water to fill the two reservoirs located near the intersection of Moulton Parkway and El Toro Road 15 times. More than nine reservoir sites with a capacity of 21 million gallons had been selected to meet the future needs. Phase 2, Gates 5 and 6, would add 2,760 manors.

Crews and equipment moved onto the 3.5-acre site, the current location of Laguna Hills City Hall on El Toro Road during the last week of July to begin construction of the 550-seat Manning's Restaurant and

cocktail lounge.

### Medicare

Payment for physician services under Medicare was signed into law on July 30, 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson as part of his "Great Society." Former President Harry Truman was the first to enroll in Medicare. The premium for Medicare Part B was set at \$3 per month. The program was launched on July 1, 1966.

For more than six months residents who would be 65 by July 1,

1966 were urged to enroll in Medicare's new voluntary supplementary medical plan, even if they were already enrolled in the Leisure World Medical Plan. In early June a new hospital-surgical medical benefits program underwritten by Blue Cross was offered to residents under age 65 who did not wish to continue in Leisure World's program at a cost of \$9.25 a month.

Medicare caused GRF to modify its medical service plan: (1) GRF would cover out-patient care to all Mutuals No. 1 through 11, except those residents who elected Medicare's Supplementary Medical Insurance. The plan would remain on an 80/20 basis at \$8.00 per person per month; (2) the original Leisure World medical plan would be continued for residents who wanted this coverage at a monthly cost of \$29.97; and (3) a \$4.00 charge for financing medical facilities would be added to the monthly carrying charge for all manors.

### August 1966

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, Robert W. Carithers, former national hospital consultant and economist, was named president of LWF. He replaced Kenneth E. BeLieu who resigned.

The groundbreaking ceremony for St. Nicholas Catholic Church was held on December 6, 1965 at the site on El Toro Road west of Leisure World Gate 1. Rev. Sporrer celebrated the first Mass in the 600-seat sanctuary on August 28<sup>th</sup>.

On August 31<sup>st</sup> the 7,000<sup>th</sup> and 7,001<sup>st</sup> residents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Turnbull of Pasadena, were welcomed to the community.

### September 1966

The lawn bowling greens, which were considered the finest in the nation, opened at Clubhouse II on September 1<sup>st</sup>. A crowd of 300 watched as members of the Lawn Bowling Club, dressed in white shirts and white slacks initiated the greens, following a dedication ceremony. The first week of play was limited to experienced bowlers.

During the month, a ground breaking ceremony was held on the Lutheran Church of the Cross's parcel on El Toro Road.

### **October 1966**

On October 12<sup>th</sup>, after just two days of rain, residents were murmuring, "Rain, rain, go away... " Overcast skies, an occasional clap of thunder, lightning and rain showers caused activity at most of the outdoor facilities to come to a standstill.

Leisure World resident "Mitch" Mitchell acquired the lease to operate the new Mobil Gas Service Station at El Toro Road and Moulton Parkway.

On October 27<sup>th</sup>, the Laguna Hills Fire Station facility on Paseo de Valencia was dedicated. The 10,522 square-foot fire station officially named Battalion District Headquarters housed one fire engine and a minimum of four men on round-the-clock duty.

The facility's service area was El Toro, Leisure World, Doheny Park, South Laguna, Capistrano Beach and Emerald Bay—all of which were unincorporated areas within Orange County. The highlights of the event included the presentation of two female Dalmatians, Siren and Belle, by Heidi Cortese, the 14-year-old daughter of Ross Cortese. A hose cutting ceremony replaced the traditional ribbon cutting.

### **November 1966**

The first service at the Methodist Church on Moulton Parkway was held on Sunday, November 6<sup>th</sup>. The 14,000 square foot structure is air-conditioned and seats 650 persons for worship and 400 for banquets.

On Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2.1 inches of rain drenched the community.

Two tennis courts were located adjacent to the south side of the entry to Clubhouse II. The community facilities agreement called for more tennis courts; however, they were not funded until 1980. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, an organizational meeting of the Tennis Club was held with 18 tennis players present.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, St. George's Episcopal Mission,



**The usually placid Aliso Creek was the scene of turbulent runoff as eight inches of rain fell over five days in early December 1966.** Courtesy Leisure World News

consecrated in 1891, celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a service of thanksgiving followed by a special dinner in Clubhouse I.

The groundbreaking ceremony for Temple Judea was held on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The addition of Mutual 10 and 11 increased the number of individuals serving as board members to 40.

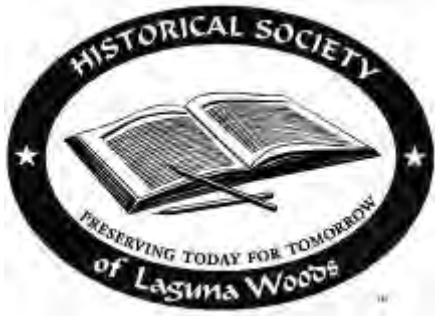
### **December 1966**

December 2<sup>nd</sup> was the beginning of five days of nearly continuous rain totaling 8.1 inches, the wettest December in the three-year history of the community. January would add another 4 inches.

During 1966 Leisure World's population increased from 5,145 to 8,159 residents living in 4,625 manors. Sales declined from about 2,000 to 1,600 manors, the start of a dramatic three-year decline. The composite budget for GRF and the mutuals was about \$5 million, 25% of which would be GRF funds generated by new sales.

Clubhouse I's facilities were used 420,000 times compared to 211,000 in 1965. Clubhouse II, which opened in September, 1965, was used more than 271,000 times. The golf course hosted more than 130,000 rounds and El Rancho Cortese Stables were used 11,000 times. The shuffleboard courts at Clubhouse I were used 29,000 times; the billiard room, 38,000. At Clubhouse II, the tennis courts were used 19,000 times and the billiard room 14,000 times.





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More than 3,200 packed the bandstand at Clubhouse I for the July 4, 1966 celebration. The Leisure World Orchestra, sitting in the gazebo, and a replica of the Old North Church in Boston provided a background for the program. Courtesy Leisure World News

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**Editor — Bob Ring**

Opinions expressed by authors in *The Historian* do not necessarily reflect those of the Historical Society of Laguna Woods.