

For sight-limited players

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Alm opens door to shuffleboard

By Mary Roda
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The red disc skated across the waxed surface of the shuffleboard court, and the players waited expectantly for the call. "Oops, Red is in the kitchen!"

The next player took her post before a row of black disks, and Vern Alm advised her, "There's one down there on the right. Here we go."

The player shoved the cue forward expertly. Alm shaded his eyes as he peered down court, and remarked, "Look at that gal! Just look at her shoot!"

Alm is an expert shuffleboard player himself, but on Thursday mornings he sets aside his own cue to assist players with sight limitations, including several who are totally blind.

All of the players, he noted, are entitled to carry white canes.

Alm, who lives at 791-B Via Los Altos, was recently cited by the Saddleback Kiwanis Club for his shuffleboard program, which he launched five years ago in the outdoor "A" court behind Clubhouse 1.

A crew of Kiwanis Club volunteers join Alm Thursday mornings at 9 a.m. to assist the players, who don't have to do anything special to play — just show up.

Alm is usually there well before the play begins, waxing the lanes, cleaning the scoreboards and setting out cues for players.

He is a gentle coach, and his enthusiasm for the sport is infectious. "When you tell them they made a good shot," Alm observed, "you'd be sur-

prised at the expression on their faces. And it gets them out in the open."

The Leisure World resident is the first to admit surprise at the continued success of the program. "Frankly, I thought some players would get discouraged," said Alm, who ranks as top shuffleboarder on the "Jet Traveling Team," which tours throughout Orange County for competition with outside clubs.

Two or three players did give up the game, "but most of them have been really faithful about coming," Alm noted.

"I love every one of these people," he said, waving an arm at the players in the patio-like court area. "They so enjoy playing and I enjoy coaching."

The feeling goes both ways.

"He's marvelous," said player Janet Baggot. "He's just the greatest."

Dick Taylor has nothing but praise for his coach. "He's excellent. You couldn't get them any better."

Taylor, who is completely blind, said shuffleboard is "a real challenge." He has a reputation as a crack shot on the court. "When you happen to make a good shot," he added, "it makes you feel good."

He recommends the sport to persons with sight limitations. "With a minimum of help," he explained, "you can learn to play quite well, especially with people who know what help you need, and give you just that much."

Violette Williams is 94, and has been playing



TAKING POINTERS — Vern Alm coaches Violette Williams, 94, on shuffleboard technique.

—NEWS Photo

shuffleboard under Alm's watchful eye for two years.

"I think the first problem when we're blind is to keep on our feet," she advises. "It's one way of getting exercise besides walking," she added.

Garry Hollaar, a Kiwanian who has been a regular assistant on the courts for three years, said the club members sometimes join the players for a game. "They have a lot of fun," he said. "They get to associate with other people."

Hollaar became involved in the project when he first moved to

Leisure World. "Four of these people are my neighbors," he added, "and I pick them up every week."

Any sight impaired resident is invited to join the weekly play. Some players attend every week, others only occasionally.

The hour-long play is scheduled immediately before Vista Nueva, an organization designed to assist Leisure World residents with sight limitations deal with everyday problems. Vista Nueva meets in the nearby Clubhouse 1 art gallery at 10 a.m. Thursdays.