

LAGUNA WOODS

GLOBE



Clara Baker says moving to LWV is probably the best thing she has ever done. > CARINE NADEL/FOR THE LAGUNA WOODS GLOBE

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Clara Baker Honoree of Month for May

BY CARINE NADEL
FOR THE LAGUNA WOODS GLOBE

This month's Historical Society Honoree is Clara Baker.

I know I'm not supposed to editorialize, just tell you briefly about Baker's past and what she's done for the village since moving here in 1997, but I feel I must.

Just before I drove over to join Baker for our interview my mom fell. I was worried and got to our meeting place early. I apologized for doing so and was told not to think a bit about it "come right on in." I could feel the depth of concern for a woman she had never met.

Our interview began. Baker lived in New York for most of her life and was a decorated teacher. In fact, one group bestowed upon her an African statue that was meant to honor her for her talent in that arena. She loved it so much that it became a hobby to find other masks and statues in the same vein. They're lovingly displayed through her home.

Until recently, Baker was part of the Square Dancing Club.

"I really loved dancing, but my doctor gave me a choice - give up square dancing or I would have to get a knee replacement. So I gave it up. I also love being a part of the Theatre Guild and performing. I was juror No. 5 in the last show, the updated "12 Angry Jurors." I've also recently begun doing a two woman show about Maya Angelou for the San Clemente Cabrillo Playhouse. I fill so exhilarated when I hear the applause! It just gives me such joy each time."

Besides the theatre, Baker has been part of the Bridge Club. "I think though, of all the things I'm involved in, it's my work with the Foundation of Laguna Woods Village these last two years that mean the most to me. The Foundation provides temporary emergency help for people in need - paying medical bills, really any bills, giving funds to help keep the meals on wheels program up and running, keeping the Adult Day Care and meals at the Florence Sylvester Senior Center supplied with funds. We also help with fund-raising for various programs throughout the village.

"I've taken on the role of treasurer for the Foundation for the last year and a half. What a lot of residents don't realize is that many of our neighbors are finding that what they thought



Clara Baker is the Historical Society's Honoree of the Month for May.

would be enough to see them through their retirement isn't even beginning to cut it. They're finding themselves continually getting further and further behind. It's a very scary situation.

"The first step is that they find their way to Social Services and ask to get help. The department screens them and then sends the ones that need the most help to us. We never know the names, just the situation and that they need our help and we gladly give it."

One of the things that surprises Baker the most is that there was more free time during the years she was working full time and raising her kids. "I can't believe I'm so busy that I'm actually having a hard time fitting in all I want to do in a week. There's no way I can be in two places at once, but sometimes I feel like I need to! When I was teaching, I knew what my schedule would be and where I needed to put my time. Now, sometimes I'll want to take part

in different events or projects that are having meetings at the same time."

Baker doesn't know what she'd like to try next but states that whatever it is, she wants to be good at it.

"Moving here is probably the best thing I ever did. Don't get me wrong, I loved New York and never had a problem with living there, but as I got older I wasn't enjoying the cold weather. I had a friend who told me about Laguna Woods, so I came out here and never looked back. I'm having the time of my life with the wonderful people and my various groups and knowing that I'm also helping people."

I can't end this story without letting you know that later on that evening this very caring woman called me and asked how my mom was doing; she was concerned and just wanted an update.

Quite a testament in describing Clara Baker.