
Leisure Worlder of the Month

Wally Bjornson

Last month, ABC television aired the network premier of "The Right Stuff." It's a movie based on the lives of America's first seven astronauts, and the beginnings of our space program. A Leisure Worlder also played an integral role in those early days of the space program. As an engineer on the Mercury rocket project, Wally Bjornson met regularly with the seven astronauts, all of whom he called, "good and capable people . . . It was fascinating to be involved with the program."

For all the things Wally has been involved with, he has been chosen "Leisure Worlder of the Month," by the Leisure World Historical Society. Home Federal Savings sponsors the program. Wally's special ceremony will be held in Wednesday, July 2, at 10:00 a.m., in Clubhouse Six. The public is invited to attend.

The Wally Bjornson story begins 69 years ago in Devils' Lake, North Dakota. Wally is an electrical engineering graduate from North Dakota State University. Upon graduation, he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and joined the Crosley Radio Company as a radio engineer. Two years later, in 1941, Wally was called to active duty as a 2nd lieutenant in the Signal Corps. He ended his military career 20 years later, retiring as a Lt. Colonel in the Air Force. During this period he also received a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins University. On military duty, he served two and a half years in India-China and two years as a liaison to the Canadian Defense Research Board. His field of expertise was guided missile development. Other experience included four years as Chief Project Officer of the Falcon air-to-air missile family. Upon retirement, Wally joined Ford Aerospace and then moved on to Rockwell International. He served in several capacities, including project supervisor, manager and director on the Apollo and Space Shuttle programs.

Wally and his wife of 38 years, Betty, are relative newcomers to Leisure World. They moved here in 1981. But Wally has had no trouble keeping busy. Following his just-completed year as President of the Golden Rain Foundation, he will soon become president of such prestigious local groups as Saddleback Kiwanis and Leisure World Travel Club #1. Wally will travel to the Kiwanis International Convention in Houston this summer. But travel is natural for the Bjornsons. Throughout Wally's career, he has lived in 10 states and two foreign countries.

"But my roots are finally down," says Wally. "And I can't think of a better place to settle."