



ROD VEAL/LAGUNA WOODS GLOBE

VILLAGER OF THE MONTH: Wilma Hart, shown above at the Equestrian Center, is an active volunteer with the Saddle Club. The horses in the foreground were commissioned by Hart and have been a staple at parties held at the stables.

Wilma Hart is Villager of the month

BY CHERYL WALKER
THE LAGUNA WOODS GLOBE

The Historical Society's pick for Villager of the Month of September, Wilma Hart, has made her mark in the community as an outstanding volunteer with the organizations she's associated with, namely the Sunday and Ballroom Dance and Saddle Clubs.

"Invaluable" is an adjective frequently associated with Wilma Hart's name recalling her service as officer or jack of all trades with the groups whether volunteering at the desk, answering telephones, assisting visitors, taking part in an equestrian drill team, performing in horse shows, putting on an apron to cook or serve refreshments at functions, coordinating events or designing and putting up decorations.

She is also an active member of Daughters of the Pioneers and of the Church of the Latter

Day Saints.

Laura Righter, president of the Ballroom Dance Club, says the former president of her group is "always ready to pitch in." "She does a fantastic job, particularly with decorating; in fact, she does our Tea Dance decorations."

Jan Nelson McLaughlin, former Laguna Woods's mayor and former secretary of the Saddle Club, recalls fondly Hart's willingness to serve and decorating flair. "She's a great gal."

El Toro Water Board President Ted Martin, former president of the Saddle Club, recalls Hart as being very active at the Equestrian Center. "She also spent a lot of time making silhouettes of a couple dancing for the wall which a lot of the dance clubs used for years."

BACKGROUND

Born in Utah, she was a premature baby that would have died, except that she received

a special blessing and was placed in a warming oven, which served as a crude incubator. "There weren't any incubators or hospitals where I lived in those days," she recalls. Indeed her mom had 11 pregnancies of which only five survived.

The family did not have many creature comforts, but there were other advantages. Her father, she recalls, put her on a horse when she was 3-years-old and, until ill health cut her riding short in the last few years, she used the skills she learned as a tot all her life. "I never did have a lesson."

She came to California during World War II where she worked in a Rosie the Riveter type of job as a journeyman sheet metal worker.

In spite of the utilitarian job, she always asserted her femininity with a variety of hats of all shapes, styles and colors.

Hart

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They became her trademark.

After the war, she was a hostess and waitress and then segued into the manicurist trade, which she enjoyed and which gained her entrée into the homes and studios of Hollywood's Golden Age elite.

The 28-year resident of the Village even counted as her clients members of crooner Frank Sinatra's famed Rat Pack. She says her favorite, however, was not old blue eyes but handsome and personable Peter Lawford.

She also gave manicures to the 35th president of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who she said was very nice and, like Lawford, treated her with easy good humor and respect.

She also had a marked rapport with 20th Century Fox studio executive Joe Shank who once paid for her tickets to travel without delay to take care of her only child, a son, who was injured.

Even while working she was very active in her church, a tradition she kept up when she moved into Laguna Woods Village.

The Villager also continues to pursue her love of collecting beautiful things, that, as a child, she could only dream of: beautiful tapestries, collectibles, china, figurines, furniture and much more.

Hart also kept up with her riding until health concerns forced her to hang up her saddle. She donated her horse to a facility that uses horseback riding as therapy for children with disabilities.

She does still have an animal though, a spunky pup named Pooh who she rescued from the pound.

Hart says she was thrilled and mystified when she received a call telling her she was the Society's September choice for Villager of the Month. It is, she says, such an honor.

To see Hart receive the Society's commendation, come to Clubhouse 6 at 10 a.m. next Wednesday, Sept. 6. All are welcome. Refreshments will be served.