



LEISURE WORLD NEWS

LEISURE WORLD
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Irish eyes are smiling 'Mr. Ireland' aids clubs, collects old spectacles, donates to Canyon

By Cheryl Walker
The News

When 11 year Leisure World resident Joe Higgins learned the community's Historical Society had selected him as Leisure Worlder of Month for June, he recalls saying "I don't deserve it . . . but I'll take it."

Higgins good-humored modesty about his own accomplishments is in sharp contrast to his many friends who heartily support the society's judgment.

His credits include being an active member of the Foreign Policy Association, the 110 Club, the American Irish Society, the Historical Society, the Saddleback Kiwanis, the Laguna Canyon Foundation and the

Saddleback Memorial Medical Center Associates.

FPA President Peter Plessner noted that Higgins' contributions to his organization have been particularly exemplary and include serving as president, member of the organization's nominating committee and, for more than nine years, group discussion leader.

"He's very active, very enthusiastic and one of the backbones of the organization and, as a leader/moderator, he shows himself well informed and prepared."

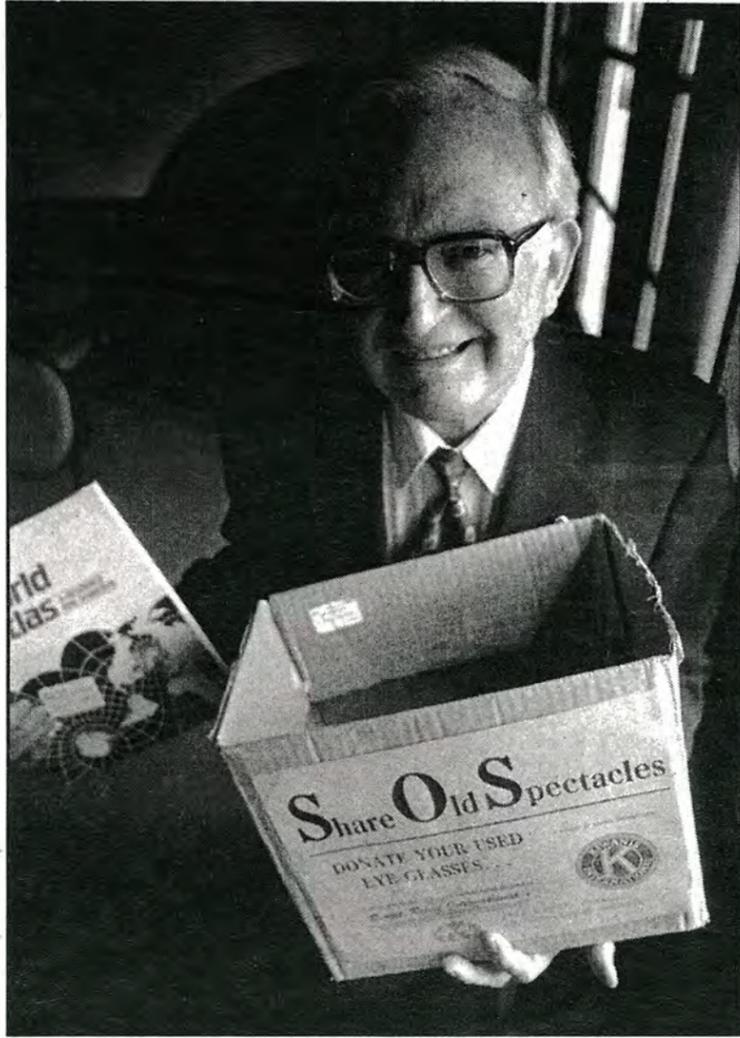
American Irish Society President Wes Westre showered similar kudos on Higgins, whose love of his Irish heritage has earned him the affectionate nickname "Mr. Ireland."

Westre notes that his predecessor (1992-94) was a dynamic leader, always striving to make meetings interesting and fun.

As, for example, when the world soccer finals were being played on the West Coast and Higgins convinced a member of the Irish team to pay a special visit to the club.

Westre says he also makes available for club use his extensive video library collection on the land of his forefather's birth.

See IRISH, page 7



David E. Caballero/The News

Joe Higgins, Leisure Worlder of the Month for June, is chairman of the Kiwanis Club's "Share Old Spectacles" drive.

Ceremony facts

Who: Joe Higgins

What: Leisure World of the Month for June

Where: Clubhouse 6

When: 10 a.m. Wednesday, June 7

Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

IRISH

From page 1

Former 110 Club President Tom Beckwith calls him simply "an outstanding man who takes his responsibilities very seriously and does an outstanding job."

"He is concerned with everyone and dedicated to doing the very best he can."

Laguna Canyon Foundation Executive Director Mary Feagraus agrees and says she found Higgins a kind, warm and considerate individual."

She notes the generous contributor was one of the first to see the importance of the Laguna Canyon purchase, to maintain the wilderness park for all Orange County residents and open space near Leisure World's walls.

At the "Keep It Wild" party in Clubhouse 5 on May 24, Higgins and his wife donated another \$1,000 to the cause, as did other residents.

Saddleback Kiwanis President Ward Payne notes that Higgins is responsible for two exciting philanthropies of his service organization: Save Old Spectacles, a program which matches old prescription glasses with poor people in foreign countries, and the Geography Awareness Project, which provides educational materials for local youngsters to help them keep abreast of the latest developments in world politics.

Another project he's just started, is collecting old hearing aids and batteries to recycle for those who cannot afford them.

Higgins won election as a Foundation Golden Patron for his support of the club's scholarship fund for needy Chapman University students.

Payne says he also chairs the club's International Affair Committee and characterizes the leadership he gives to that project as being "thorough, thoughtful and cerebral."

Background: New York born, Higgins says the early death of his father made him understand the importance of living responsibly and the value of a good education.

He worked his way through college until World War II called him to the European Theatre where he rose in rank from a private to first lieutenant.

When the war ended he returned to the states, completed his education (earning a bachelor of business administration degree from the College of the City of New York).

He went to work the prestigious firm of Dun & Bradstreet, which became his

employer for the next 30 years.

There, he was able to indulge a love of teaching, serving as a personnel and training manager and director of education.

While working, he also served as president of the New Hyde Park Lakeville Estates Civic Association, vice president of the New Hyde Park Library Board and vice president of the Rye Wood Civic Association.

After relocating to California,

he was president of the Golden Colonial Condominium Association in Sherman Oaks and became a member of the Santa Ana Elks Lodge and Retired Officers Association.

Motivating forces: When faced with his service record, Higgins shrugs off accolades. "I feel if you live in a community you like, you want to do something for it."

The world traveller explains, for example, that foreign policy issues are close to his heart and he enjoys talking about what role the United States should play in relation to world issues.

He says joining the American-Irish Society was a natural, considering his and his wife's backgrounds ("we're Irish on both sides") and, as for the Kiwanis, "there are more

talented people in it!"

His geography educational materials project is his favorite because of his desire to help young people develop the tools to compete in the modern world.

"I believe in the value of lifelong education and for getting young people to know they can grow out of the slums with education and can achieve anything they want."