
Leisure Worlder of the Month

Laura McKeever

LAGUNA HILLS—When asked why she allows herself to become so involved, she replies, “Because I intend to burn out, not rust out.”

To celebrate her commitment, Laura McKeever will be named “Leisure Worlder of the Month,” on Wednesday, Nov.4, at 10:00 a.m. in Clubhouse Six. The public is invited to attend the ceremony, which is sponsored by Home Federal and the Leisure World Historical Society.

Laura considers that she has been extremely lucky, for some near miracles have occurred in her life. Her mother, who was the youngest in a large family, died shortly after Laura’s birth. Her oldest sister, who had teenage children, took the baby to care for. When Laura was stricken with polio, the children devotedly massaged her, thus applying the “Sister Kenny” treatment which saved her from permanent paralysis.

By the time she was seven years old, it would have been hard to tell that anything had ever been wrong. By that time her father had remarried and she went to live with them and her brother who was two years older. Their childhood was not very happy, for neither her brother nor she enjoyed the stepmother.

A good education and much travel were the two ambitions of her father for his children; consequently, by the time she reached college age, Laura had journeyed throughout most of the eastern part of the United States.

Being a boy and older, her brother could go out on his own, but Laura had to start college at Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina where the family lived. About that time the urge to see the West caused her father to undertake what was then considered an adventurous trip to the West Coast by automobile. Of course Laura was needed to help with the driving.

That was her opportunity to get away from home. As they progressed up the coast, she visited each campus and found that the University of California at Berkeley was on the trimester schedule and would begin on August 15, a perfect time for her. On such a slender thread do the most important events of our lives sometimes hang.

With the self-confidence of youth, she left the parents at Salt Lake City on their return to Kansas, took the train back to Berkeley and went on campus not knowing a soul there. Thus began the adventure that became a long California career.

Her maternal grandfather was the beneficent type that wanted his grandchildren to share his fortune while he was still living, so with his help, Laura was able to complete the units needed for a teaching credential as well as the Master’s Degree in English. Again fortune favored her, for she was offered a position in Fallbrook because a campus friend knew of the vacancy and recommended her.

From 1928 to 1945, she taught in the Fallbrook Union High School. English, Drama, Latin, the usual extra activities, and finally the post of Vice Principal kept her very busy. Delta Kappa Gamma, the national honorary teachers’ society, was being organized in San Diego and Laura was chosen as a charter member from the northern part of the country.

She stayed in Fallbrook until the end of World War II because strong teachers were scarce with the young men away in the Service; then she decided it was time to move on.

The next twenty years she spent at Poly High School in Riverside as Senior Girls Counselor and Girls Service Club Advisor in addition to teaching classes in English, mainly college-preparatory seniors.

She remained active in Delta Kappa Gamma until retiring and also was CTA representative part of the time. When the rapid growth of Riverside required the building of two campuses to replace Poly High, she decided to retire rather than start a new career, partly because a close friend who was one of the first persons to move into Leisure World had been urging Laura to retire and move to “Paradise.”

In December, 1966, she began a glorious retirement. Before settling down to Leisure World activities, she devoted much of the first two or three years to overseas travel. Then volunteering in the Medical Center and being an officer in the Ebell Club consumed her time and energy.

During her term as President of Ebell from 1971 through 1973, she developed a special project in cooperation with the Leisure World nurse and a retired doctor in the community. To meet the need for an activity center for stroke victims and other handicapped persons, she organized “Resocialization Teams” of Ebell members who met weekly to provide games, refreshments, and companionship, and afford help to the families, who also appreciated the dinner parties on holidays. The enterprise lasted three years until Saddleback Hospital opened and the space in the Medical Center was no longer available.

From the day the hospital opened, Laura served as a volunteer at the reception desk, and as an officer, and for three and a half years as advisor to the junior volunteers. With about 4,000 hours credit, she resigned last spring when she had to have cataract surgery on each eye.

Residents belonging to the Orange County Philharmonic Society persuaded Laura to join them as soon as the time-consuming Ebell business was over.

The county-wide, extensive outreach programs of music enrichment in all the schools thrilled Laura, as a former teacher, who felt that the cut-back on most cultural programs caused by Prop 13 was tragic. She immediately became involved locally and from 1976 on she has served in various capacities on the County Women’s Committees Board also. Providing Philharmonic concerts, one of the important purposes of the Society, was hampered by the fact that Orange County had no adequate auditorium.

When the campaign to build the Orange County Performing Arts Center was begun, Laura became a charter member of Beethoven Chapter, the Leisure World segment of the supporting guilds, in which she has continuously served in various offices. Next, she became a Founder member of the Center and a donor. The combination of Philharmonic and Performing Arts activities is still keeping her busy.

Having agreed last year to help with the afternoon Forum in Clubhouse Three auditorium, she soon found herself on the board of that group. In gratitude for the wonderful attention and care she received from the staff of the Saddleback Valley Eye Center when she had the eye surgery, Laura has made one more commitment this summer—as a volunteer with their support group.