

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

VIOLET ROYER

Vi Royer was a childhood tomboy who loved to climb trees and swim in the ocean. As a teenager, she became one of the West Coast's first marathon dancers and performed acrobatic feats at Muscle Beach.

Now silver-haired and in her so-called "sunset years," she continues to swim a quarter mile each day and play championship golf three times a week. And for those idle moments, there is an exercise bicycle tucked away in her home.

Mrs. Royer is perhaps best known in Leisure World as a performer in the Aquadettes annual water ballet and as a twelve-time women's golf champion. But to hundreds of former non-swimmers in the community, she is the dedicated instructor who enabled them to overcome their life-long fear of water and to enjoy the healthful aspects of swimming.

A native of Los Angeles, the former Violet Pompey grew up near the Santa Monica beaches as the youngest of five children. Her tomboy tendencies were encouraged by her brothers and condoned by her parents, "who just threw up their hands and let me go," she recalls.

At age 16 she participated in one of California's early marathon dances in which she and her partner were proclaimed co-winners with one other remaining couple when the contest was halted six days and six nights later.

As the recipient of numerous terpsichorean trophies, she also was invited to demonstrate the varsity drag and similar dance steps of that era on the stage of the Pantages and other local theaters.

At 18 she married Edmund Royer, later to become a successful tile contractor. During the austere post-Depression years, Vi worked in a restaurant where her efficiency and warm personality earned generous tips. This augmented the family coffers and led her husband in later years to refer to his company as "the business that tips built."

Their children are Ronald, now a priest in Lakewood; Sister Judith, a teacher-nun at Loyola Marymount University, and Carole, an expert skier who lives with her husband at Mammoth Lakes. The Royer youngsters shared their mother's love of the ocean and sometimes joined her in performing acrobatic stunts at Santa Monica's Muscle Beach during the early innocent days of that mecca for athletes.

Mrs. Royer was 49 when she took up golf at her husband's urging. Then an employee of Bullocks Westwood, she was the only woman to win that chain's President's Cup Tournament. She is also a three-time winner of the Western American Golf Association women's championship trophy and was women's champion at Hesperia Country Club for five years.

Since moving to Leisure World in 1967, she has been women's golf champion 12 years out of 15. Her records include six holes-in-one, one double eagle and four eagles.

She is a former president of the Leisure World Women's Golf Club as well as the Aquadettes, which she joined in 1971. Each year she performs a solo and arranges choreography for the large production number in the synchronized swimming group's August water show.

The women practice all year and coordinate music, costumes, props, scenery and lighting to produce an aqua extravaganza that has attracted national publicity and capacity audiences.

Nostalgic images of Esther Williams were invoked when Mrs. Royer made her solo entrance on a trapeze in the 1973 show. Last year she choreographed and participated in a dramatic Hawaiian number. "I always try for the spectacular," she notes.

She has served as a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the Leisure World pools for many years, often working a 35-hour week during the summer season. To qualify for the job, she enrolled in a Red Cross water safety instructor class at the age of 65. Eyeing the three-meter diving board she and her much younger classmates were required to master, she made a characteristic decision. "I figured if the rest could do it, so could I," she recalls.

Now widowed, she gains her greatest satisfaction from the swimming classes where her personal warmth and perseverance are cited by others as highly successful teaching tools. Six of her former students were selected for the Aquadettes team, which has a membership age average of 72.

Although she stresses enjoyment rather than perfection as the primary goal for her swim students, Mrs. Royer maintains tougher standards in her own life. "I've always been determined to do my best in everything I try. I tell myself if I am going to do it, let's do it well."