

Honoree is quiet force for good

By Cheryl Walker
The News

Being an idealist in an increasingly cynical world is not an easy task.

But for Leisure Worlder Dorothy Bernoff, an immigrant to the United States from a country that was a political pawn in two world wars, the alternative was unthinkable.

That's why throughout her life she has strived to make a difference through involvement in a variety of community activities - a practice she's continued in earnest since she and her husband and soulmate Lou moved to Leisure World seven years ago.

Bernoff has been an active participant in People for a National Health Plan (PNHP), Humanistic Judaism, Brandeis University Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Writer's Club, Concerned Citizens for Peace, the Community Association, the Historical Society, the Leisure World Library, Channel 6, the Theatre Guild, the Foreign Film Club and Elderhostel, Meals-on-Wheels and Friendship Force (foreign visitor exchange) programs.

Her superlative record is the reason why the Historical Society has decided to honor Bernoff this September as Leisure Worlder of the Month.

Bernoff, with characteristic modesty, says she was flabbergasted when the society announced its intentions.

The honoree explains that she loves what she's doing, "It keeps me alive - and I want to be alive as long as I live."

PNHP political action specialist Ted Rosenbaum says Bernoff has played a major role in his organization from virtually its inception. "A consistent, very efficient and self effacing performer, she's dedicated to the three main thrusts of our group: the



David E. Caballero/The News

Dorothy Bernoff has been named Leisure Worlder of the Month for September. The ceremony will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 2 in Clubhouse 6.

protection of Medicare, the best medical care for all Americans and state and national Patient Bills of Rights."

Thelma Greenbaum of the NCJW says Bernoff also was an asset to her organization working on publicity, photography, tutoring Russian emigrants English while always remaining "kind and very friendly."

Dean Davisson, chairman of the Writer's Club, says the member of his group's board of directors and, with her husband Lou, the person responsible for getting the group's newsletter mailed to members, is a very quiet persona "but she gets things done - she does the hands on things."

Sara Bruch, Concerned Citizens' chairperson, says Bernoff is one of those rare people you meet once in a while with a "sunny, wonderful disposition."

While Harry Manoff, chairman of Humanistic Judaism, says of the woman who puts out his group's monthly newsletter that she "really deserves" the society's accolades. "I can't say enough about her sweetness, her smile . . . she has endless strength and energy - she deserves not just woman of the month but woman of the year!"

Harriet Springer, another member of the organization, says Bernoff "can do more efficiently and quietly, but she stays out of the limelight . . . she's never lost touch with human beings."

Background Bernoff left her native Poland at age 8 settling with her family in Los Angeles. Within six months, she'd mastered English and fell in love with the world of books - and libraries.

In fact, in junior high school she won a gold medal in the local Daughters of the American Revolution's annual essay contest with a paper on the importance of her local branch for her education and hopes for the future.

She worked in libraries during high school and college but World War II and marriage changed those early plans.

When she finally decided to reenter the workforce part time after her children were in school she took a job as a floater in an electronic engineering company.

She did so well in that position, that soon she was juggling a variety of posts in the firm; among them, assistant to the plant manager, labor relations manager, designer of instruction manuals and more.

After 12 years, she segued into a state position working in the employment service where she did job counseling and placement under the Aid for Families with Dependant Children program.

After logging another dozen years there, she decided, after an exciting Elderhostel experience, to retire and enjoy life while she was still healthy and mobile. Lou followed her lead and retired six months later.

The couple came to Leisure World in 1991, which, both Bernoffs say, was the perfect choice for retired people who don't want to retire from life.

Explains Dorothy, "Leisure World is a marvelous place if you want to do things - and I love being involved and learning something new."