

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

MARY CORNELIUS

It's important to try new things, even if you blunder. This is the philosophy of Mary Reese Cornelius who has been chosen Leisure Worlder of the Month for February, 1978. "We all need to find something that is demanding to make life interesting and meaningful," she says.

From a little farm girl in a Welsh town in Central Ohio, where she was involved in farm-home activities from canning and bread-making to milking and hay-baling, Mary Cornelius has emerged as an important figure in club work and as a public speaker, legislative leader, political advocate and a staunch supporter of the educational process.

A delightful lady with an articulate grasp on the English language, Mary's sense of humor and her love of people have enabled her to achieve a well-tuned sense of balance as a participant in, rather than an observer of, the world around her.

She majored in English, Drama and Speech with a B.S. in Education from Ohio State and spent seven years teaching high school in Utica, Ohio. She had one semester at U.C. Berkeley and a graduate year at USC. Following this she and George Washington Cornelius were married in Ohio on June 30, 1933.

After moving to California, Mary became involved in San Gabriel little theatre and community work. She was president of the San Gabriel Women's Club, a charter member and president of the Alhambra-San Gabriel Branch of AAUW, on the Mission Play Revival Committee, war work committees and a Girl Scout leader. She served on the Alhambra Board of Education 12 years, part of that time as its president.

She served the Los Angeles District Federation of Women's Clubs, which has 25,000 members in five counties, as secretary, vice president and then president. She then served the California State Federation as Education Chairman, Public Speaking Chairman, Auditor and Vice-President at Large. She was Public Speaking Consultant to the International Federation of Women's Clubs in 1953-55 conducting workshops in Washington, D.C. and Denver. She retired from the "upward climb" in the Federation one year after her husband retired in 1957 in order to spend more time with him. She had also served the State Division of AAUW as Parliamentarian, Fellowship Chairman and Nominating Committee Chairman.

George and Mary then built three desert cabins on 5-acre homesteads in Lucerne Valley, San Bernardino Co., and for the next five years they bought, remodeled and sold several houses as a retirement hobby for George. Mary did the plans and the paper and tax work leaving him free to do the "sawing".

While remodeling two houses in South Laguna in 1963, they learned of Rossmoor Leisure World. They loved it and from their "move-in" day, Thanksgiving 1964, they still love it and boast about it wherever they go.

Since coming here, Mary has been president of the Woman's Club, the Democratic Club, United Methodist Women and the Foreign Policy Association. She served as Chairman of Leadership Development, Status of Women and Legislation of the Orange County Federation of Women's Clubs and was named its "Woman of the Year" in 1973. She was named Laywoman of the Year at the United Methodist Church in 1974.

She is a charter member and currently active in the Laguna Beach Branch of University Women, is an honorary member of Delta Kappa Gamma, a member of the Indiana-Ohio Club, United Methodist Church, Church Women United, World War I and American Legion Auxiliaries, Foreign Policy Association, Woman's Club of Laguna Hills and of Mission Viejo, Saddleback College Citizens' Liaison Committee and takes part in the Pennsylvania Club, Retired Teachers and Hikers Clubs.

Mrs. Cornelius served on the Saddleback Area Coordinating Council Board for two years and on its Review Board for four years and is currently elected from Leisure World to again serve on the Council Board. She is an elected director of United Mutual (currently the only woman with ten men) and represents that body as Publicity Chairman, SACC liaison and on the Governance and Community Relations Committees.

She occasionally has time to do story-telling and book reviews and does frequent folk song-and-story programs with original verses while George plays the melodica and some of his 25 harmonicas.

He plays the piano at home and Mary says her favorite piece is "Meditation" because she can at least hear what meditation is like even though she doesn't have much time for it.