



LEISURE WORLD NEWS

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Society honors people advocate



Phyllis Fish stands behind her manor in a field of flowers.

News photo by Rod Veal

Phyllis Fish named Leisure Worlder for November

By Cheryl Walker
The News

For nearly nine years, Phyllis Fish has put the interests of residents first – as a director of the Third Mutual Board. Now her efforts are being rewarded by the Historical Society with its prestigious Leisure Worlder of the Month honor.

It was Fish who came up with the idea of having a Resident Relations committee where individual residents could meet one-on-one with a director of their board and a staff member to get a problem solved quickly, easily and without the intimidating experience of appearing before an entire board or committee.

She's always argued the resident's point of view in Third's

landscaping, architectural control, maintenance and a host of Golden Rain committees and subcommittees.

Whether its substituting vinyl-framed windows for aluminum, Solartubes for conventional skylights, allowing a small area of common ground encroachment to upgrade a manor or more latitude with private versus "mutual" plantings, Fish is ready to consider breaking new ground.

That's because she is a hands-on worker who does her homework, has never been a yes-woman or willing to settle for what's always been.

It isn't unusual to see her lone hand raised on a vote when a committee or board takes the opposite view.

But, even in defeat, Fish

never loses her sense of fair play, good humor – and sense of fun ... and that holds true even when she's listened to the thousandth boorish comment about her less-than-average height.

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Ceremony facts

Who: Phyllis Fish
What: Leisure Worlder of the Month for November
Where: Clubhouse 6
When: 10 a.m., Wednesday, Nov. 6
Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

ADVOCATE

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"I can always find the good in everything," she says.

Fish was also a tireless volunteer in the fight to stop the commercialization of the former U.S. Marine Base at El Toro; most notably, she helped found Leisure World's Seniors Against the El Toro Airport and put together and coordinated petition drives to get the various anti-airport initiatives on the ballot.

Former Third Mutual President Charles Hellmann calls her "one of the hardest working directors I've ever met - she is really deserving of this honor since she always has the best interests of the residents at heart."

Former SAETA colleague Virginia Kincaid recalls that Fish, like all the Leisure World team, worked overtime to gather petition signatures on anti-airport initiatives and, on the election days, get the vote out. And the result, says Kincaid speaks for the effort (since so many people said there was no chance to stop the airport, it was a done deal): "We won."

Background: A native of Michigan, Fish grew up in South Bend, Ind., where she first took up the game of golf (she still enjoys playing), studied to be a registered nurse (at Memorial Hospital School of Nursing) and, after graduation, went into the United States Army.

She served in the military for four years, achieving the rank of captain after work in the European Theatre of Operations and Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio, and, after the war, went to Indiana University where she earned both her bachelor and master's degrees in nursing education.

After graduation, she worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Dayton; became director of nursing at Knapp College of Nursing in Santa Barbara; became educational coordinator at University Hospital at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; and finally a nursing assistant and director and instructor of Salinas Valley's Adult education nursing program.

She also founded the Salinas Valley Hospice and, after moving to Leisure World with her spouse (of now 49 years) Jim, served on the Saddleback Memorial Hospital Foundation Board; worked as a volunteer in Saddleback's Oncology Unit; served on the Laguna Canyon Foundation board; and began her lengthy service on the Third Board and various Golden Rain committees as well as Project 21 (the first major community-wide planning effort).

Besides her board work, Fish is an active member of Leisure World's Womens golf and the bridge clubs.

Fish said when she came to Leisure World she thought, like many do, that she'd just want to play golf and relax. But, after two years, she found she

couldn't just stay home. So, following the advice of golf buddies like former Golden Rain Presidents Al Hanson and Leon Bosch, she got involved in governance.

Although Fish has many laurels on which to rest for her service, in particular helping to bring about the defeat of the El Toro airport, one of the most moving and soul-satisfying moments from her many-faceted career came in a chance encounter in Stater Brothers here in Laguna Woods.

A former patient remembered Fish as the nurse in charge when he was hospitalized in the midlands of England during World War II. He said he never forgot her kindness when she personally made the judgement call to send him home rather than back to the front and an uncertain (if any) future.

That encounter, says Fish, was once in a once-in-a-lifetime event and she says she still can't believe that the former patient remembered her more than half a century later and couldn't wait to shake her hand and say "Thanks."