



David Carlson/The News

Ciwa Griffiths, a past president of the Leisure World Writer's Club, first made a name for herself with her research into helping deaf children learn to both hear and speak. She is the founder of the HEAR Center in Pasadena.

# Honoree has many talents

## Ciwa Griffiths worked her magic to help deaf children

By Cheryl Walker  
The News

**W**hen her friend and former Community Association board member Dave Blodgett heard that Ciwa Griffiths had been named as Leisure World of the month for July, the first word he uttered was "magic."

"There are no words that can describe the magic of this woman . . . she's wonderful," says Blodgett, who shares with Griffith a love of writing and membership in Leisure World's Writer's Club where her poetry and stories have won prizes.

But it is not just for the written word that Griffiths is special — even though she's published several volumes of poetry, non-fiction texts and recently concluded a family history called "One Out of 10."

Nor is it just for the 12-year Leisure World resident's service to other community organizations such as the Orange

### CEREMONY FACTS

**Honoree:** Ciwa Griffiths  
**What:** Leisure Worlder for July  
**Where:** Clubhouse 6  
**When:** 10 a.m. Wednesday, July 7  
**Sponsor:** Leisure World Historical Society

County Philharmonic Committee, College Club and the American Association of University Women.

Rather, it is also for Griffiths' outstanding contributions to society. She is the founder of the Hearing, Education, Auditory Research or HEAR Center of Pasadena in 1954 and her near single-handed altering of the way hearing impaired children are educated.

Thanks to her pioneering research, willingness to experiment and tenacity of spirit, a child with impaired hearing can now enjoy a normal life completely integrated in society.

Before Griffiths' research, many hearing impaired children were warehoused in segregated schools for the deaf, denied hearing aids at early ages and

instructed to depend on lip reading and sign language to communicate.

Griffiths early hunch, which later was established by hard evidence, was that even the most profoundly deaf retained some level of residual hearing.

In the forward to her book — "HEAR: a Four-Letter Word" — on how she developed her views and started her center, Joseph Stewart, director of the Department of Health and Human Services sensory disabilities program, notes that "improved auditory testing in recent years has proven her intuition correct: over 97 percent of those in schools for the deaf have been found to have enough residual hearing to benefit from amplification and speech instruction."

He goes on to say that "the host of speaking deaf persons throughout the world today are the living testimony to Griffiths' courage and determination.

"The greatest tribute to her is that these people, these one time 'deaf' babies, are so well

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integrated into society that they do not consider themselves 'deaf'."

Griffiths championed an auditory or sound-based teaching method for the hearing impaired which required early use of amplification. She fitted infants as young as 21-days-old with hearing aids in both ears to ensure the development of relatively normal speech patterns.

She says that in human development people best learn language in the first eight months of life.

Griffiths notes that if hearing problems are discovered and amplification provided during this crucial period, 64-percent of infants born deaf experience a reversal of hearing loss.

"Some children are born with immature hearing neural mechanisms which just need to be stimulated so they will hear—provided the child isn't born with complete nerve loss," says Griffiths,

For this reason, one of her causes is the fight to get

legislators to make hearing tests a routine part of post natal examinations.

Although she has lived to see those who scoffed at her early in her career change their minds, she says she's incapable of resting on her laurels while there's still work to be done.

Nominally retired, Griffiths is still the president of the HEAR Center's guild, a consultant and a tireless agitator for better education, research and equipment for the hearing impaired.

Born in the Fiji Islands and named Ciwa, Fijian for nine because she was the ninth of 10 children, she credits the energy and drive which allowed her to take on the medical and educational establishment of her day to her mother, a diminutive can-do dynamo from Texas who overcame the injustice of being denied entry to law school solely because of her sex to excel in not one but four careers: writer, editor, legal secretary and poet.

"My mother was a suffragette and she taught us you can do whatever you want if you have the courage to do what you

believe in — and not be afraid to be different," recalls Griffiths.

"I said I never wanted to stand on a soap box like her — when I was young I was so shy — but when you believe in what you're talking about you're not nervous."

Asked if she thought her mother would be impressed at what she'd done with her life, Griffiths says the lady wouldn't have bat an eyelash.

"She would have taken my accomplishments for granted. She always said if you undertake to do something you should stay with it until you finish it."

Griffiths agrees too, for even though she's won kudos, such as the Alexander Graham Bell Award for Outstanding Teacher of 1991, the bottom line in her work has been its own reward.

"I think I have been so fortunate in my life to have established the HEAR center and to know that, thanks to me, children will get hearing aids without question . . . that's something more than rewarding: it's knowing that what you taught and what you put into practice really works."