

A purr-fect choice



Andrew Scholer/The News

June honoree Barbara Helfrich at the Adult Day Health Care Center where she does volunteer work.

Society selects animal lover, volunteer for June honor

By Cheryl Walker
The News

For more than two decades in Leisure World, Dr. Barbara Helfrich has made house calls. In fact, her mobile practice included nearly 800 residents.

But these residents all had four legs, and generally barked or purred at her.

Although a back problem forced Helfrich's retirement five years ago, it did not dampen her determination to continue contributing to her community. That's one reason the Historical Society selected her as its June Leisure Worlorder of the Month.

Although Helfrich says she was surprised at the honor, those who've worked with her aren't.

Rebecca Wyman says of her successor as president of the Cat Club, that Helfrich has been a real asset to that organization. "There's no one I'd like to talk about so much as Barbara - she's an intelligent person and so pleasant.

"And she's done a perfectly grand job for the club and

contributed a great deal of her professional knowledge, helped with programming, served as president and helped coordinate our lost and found cats program (which is important since Laguna Hills doesn't have its own shelter like Mission Viejo or Laguna Beach)."

Manny Ackerman, president of the Leisure World's Audubon Society, says Helfrich is a "charming person, loyal and a hard worker" whose interests in animals and the environment have made her an invaluable asset to his group and even earned her the Society's 1996 Meritorious Service Award for dedication to Audubon ideals.

He points out Helfrich has been in charge of the Society's Education Committee, which brings the Audubon message to school children; several scholarship programs, which allow graduate students and professionals the opportunity to participate in ecology camps and workshops; and an essay contest for Laguna Hills High School students, to promote conservation awareness in young people.

Irma Franklin, past Audubon president, says Helfrich "lends a lot to our group in a general and a specific way."

In particular, she notes, Helfrich's interest in education and people skills have made her an ideal liaison with schools, whether she's dealing with teachers or students.

"And, she's a genuine lady," says Harmonaires president Bette Ring, adding that Helfrich is the kind of club member one dreams about.

"She's a personable contributor, shows up at rehearsals and performances . . . in fact, if she's not there, she's sick."

Helfrich also belongs to the Mac Users Group, League of Women Voters, Foreign Policy organization, Democratic Club,

Historical Society and does volunteer work each week at the Laguna Hills Adult Day Health Care Center.

Pet lovers inside and outside Leisure World can thank her for being one of the founding members of the Animal Urgent Care Clinic of South Orange County.

Located adjacent to the Mission Viejo Animal Shelter, it offers emergency care nights, weekends and holidays when the family vet is unavailable.

Helfrich traces a history of caring back to her childhood, when she tried to find out why a litter of kittens died.

In high school, says Helfrich, she "hung around" dog and cat hospitals trying to get a feel for what the doctors were doing.

By the time college called, Helfrich knew she wanted to dedicate her life to caring for animals. She became one of one two female students in the veterinary medicine program at Washington State University.

There, she met her husband to be, a veterinary surgeon, and after graduation, they opened the Canoga Park Dog and Cat hospital, which thrived for 20 years.

They moved to Leisure World after he retired, but when he died, she decided to go back to work, a decision which led to her mobile veterinary practice.

But although back problems forced her retirement, Helfrich keeps up with the latest trends in veterinary medicine via seminars and journals.

The calendar that used to be filled with appointments is now jammed with activities, but Helfrich says she enjoys what she's doing: keeping involved and making a contribution to the people and the community in which she lives.

"I think most people would like it (volunteer work) if they did it and gave it the time."

Ceremony facts

Who: Barbara Helfrich

What: Leisure Worlorder of the Month for June.

When: 10 a.m., Wednesday, June 4.

Where: Clubhouse 6

Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society