

Society lauds veterans rights advocate

By Cheryl Walker
The News

A lot happened to Al Holtz in 1996.

The 1995-96 Jewish War Veterans California State Commander was appointed director of the JWV Museum in Washington, D.C. and elected to JWV's National Executive Committee and chair of the Department of California Veterans legislation committee.

Governor Pete Wilson awarded him a Special Commendation for his devotion to veteran activities.

And now, the Leisure World Historical Society has selected him Leisure Worlder of the Month for August. The special ceremony is Wednesday, Aug. 7 at 10 a.m. in Clubhouse 6.

Although the 14-year resident has served in numerous club positions, his commitment to the community's JWV Gary Grant Post 680, where he served as commander from 1988-90, has been award-winning, to say the least.

Through the years he has received Man of the Year honors from JWV's Department of California; JWV's Orange County region; the National JWV; and from the Jewish Federation.

In 1991, the Orange County Board of Supervisors presented him with a special commendation for his efforts on behalf of veterans.

The post's current commander, Dr. Richard Davis, says Holtz not only participates in the club's regular activities but serves as a roving ambassador forwarding JWV's goals.

Davis said Holtz appears on Channel 6, distributes information, supports legislation and gives talks locally and nationwide on veterans affairs; promotes freedom, Americanism and patriotism; and has even worked with Gov. Wilson to ensure passage of a Wheelchair Lemon Law that safeguards buyers of defective equipment.



Al Holtz

One of his current projects involves trying to convince Congress to reverse legislation which denies home and farm loans to California veterans who served after Dec. 31, 1976.

Holtz, a native of Pittsburgh, PA., and Korean War veteran, says his mother encouraged him to join the JWV in 1954.

And he's never regretted following her advice as he moved up the ranks in the organization which celebrated its 100th birthday in March and has afforded him the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of fellow veterans.

Holtz says his most rewarding experience is working with hospitalized veterans: answering questions, relaying information and telling them about changes in the law that will impact their benefits.

Holtz routinely visits patients at the Long Beach Veterans Hospital with food, gifts, games and a listening ear.

The Chief of Volunteer Services at the hospital estimates that Holtz has logged more than 230 volunteer hours at the facility and has dubbed him the "spark plug" behind JWV's visitation program.

Holtz says, however, that the program is a win-win situation. "There's nothing more rewarding than to help a fellow veteran who is confined to a hospital bed. If it was not for the veteran who knows what flag we'd be saluting today."

Not surprisingly, Holtz was in the forefront of veterans groups who recently demonstrated at Saddleback College when the Associated Student Government refused to salute the flag at its meetings.

Holtz said the purpose of the protest wasn't to compel anyone to salute the flag but that those in attendance stand "with respect" as they would if the banner of another nation were being saluted.

Holtz says he's proud to be part of an organization which offers him so many opportunities to get veterans the help they deserve and need.

"The veterans are getting shortchanged and we want to make sure all vets get their proper rights and recognition."

To that end, Holtz is actively involved with the JWV's program to establish long-term care facilities for former service persons (the organization has three already in the works for California) and the Veteran's Administration's "Putting Veterans First" program.

The latter calls for veterans to be given priority health care, compensation/benefit and appeal processing, vocational assistance, cemetery services and more.

"We want to show vets we're grateful. Besides I've always heard the more charitable work you do you live longer."