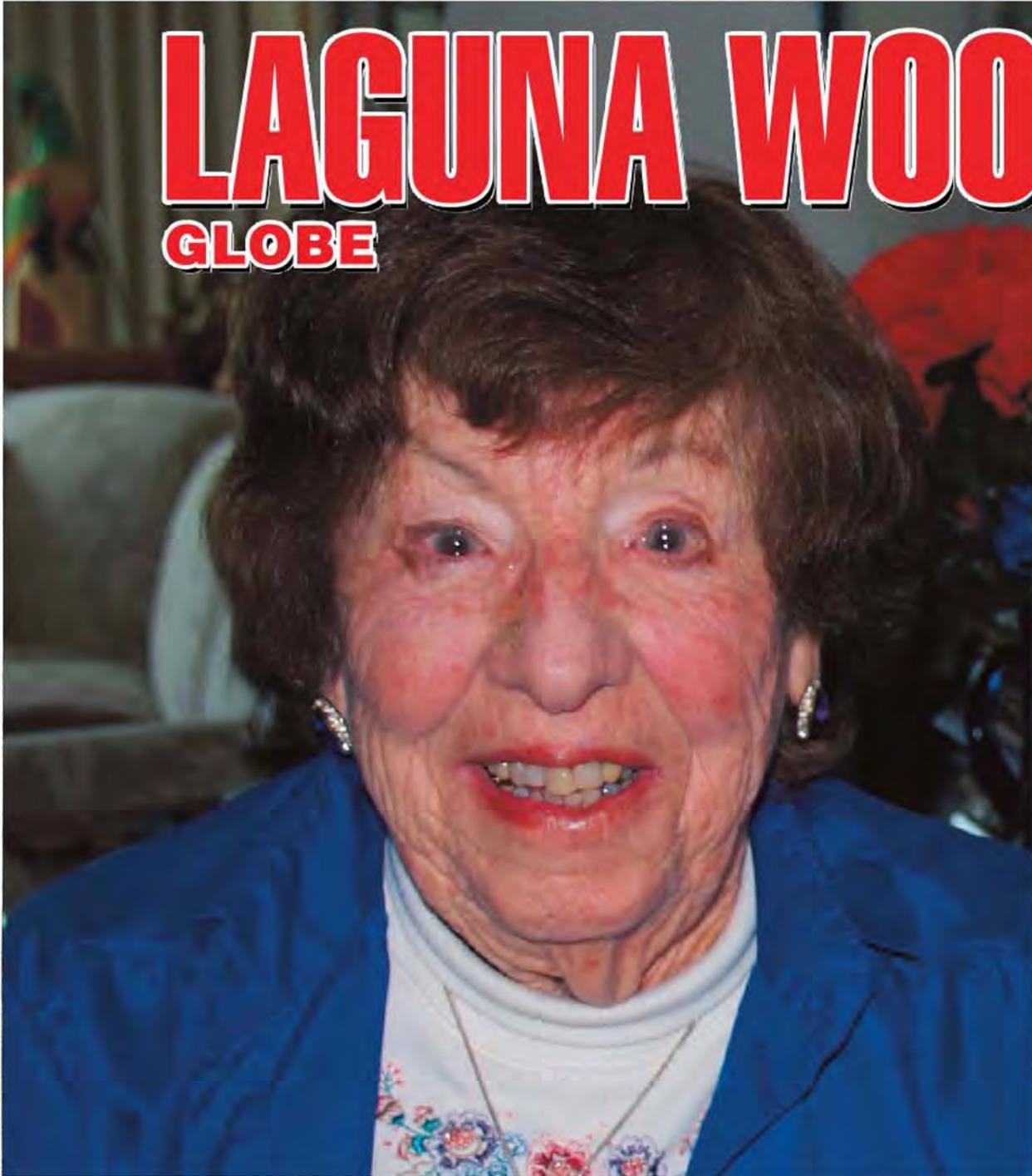


LAGUNA WOODS

GLOBE



Laguna Woods Village resident Helene Iberall, 97, has been named Honoree of the Month by the Historical Society of Laguna Woods for her contributions to the community. > CLAIRE WEBB, STAFF

AN AMAZING WOMAN

HISTORICAL SOCIETY HONORS 97-YEAR-OLD.

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Keeping Yiddish words alive, a passion for honoree

BY CLAIRE WEBB
LAGUNA WOODS GLOBE

At 97, Helene Iberall has trekked across Europe, broken a world record and done her part to keep the Hebrew language of Yiddish alive in Laguna Woods Village.

Iberall, who said she still worries she hasn't followed her own motto, "Do something important with yourself," will be honored in January by the Historical Society of Laguna Woods for her contributions and achievements in the community.

Iberall, originally from New York City after her parents emigrated from Eastern Europe, said one of her passions as an adult was to keep the spoken Yiddish words alive in the Jewish community.

Iberall took a trip to Russia in 1974 to visit Refuseniks, a group of Soviet Jews who were refused visas by the government to leave the country. When Iberall visited Moscow to bring some of the family's money, books and gifts, she was asked to speak Yiddish to an elderly Russian woman who had not heard the language in years.

Tears form in Iberall's eyes at her home in Laguna Woods as she remembers how thrilled the woman was to hear the few phrases – such as where she was from and why she came to Russia – she could remember.

"Prejudice is the worst thing in this world," Iberall said. "Dwell on human kindness."

Several years later, Iberall heard a group of Jewish women speaking Yiddish on a bus from Sherman Oaks, where she lived at the time, to the Fairfax district of Los Angeles. She knew she wanted to start an organization that would perpetuate the language among Jewish people.

After arriving in Laguna Woods Village in 1991, Iberall, as a member of the



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Brandeis University National Women's Committee, started a monthly group where women could come and practice speaking Yiddish to one another. The groups met in residents' homes, and later at Clubhouse 5, and members chose everyday topics of conversation and would often change the lyrics of English songs to Yiddish to practice.

Iberall still attends the monthly sessions.

Iberall broke a senior swimming world record in 2003 as a part of the Coast Master's Swim team in the Southwest Masters regional competition in Mission Viejo. It was Iberall's first swimming competition at the age of 90, although she had been a regular swimmer at the Clubhouse 5 pool since she moved to the retirement community with her husband, Arthur Iberall.

Iberall looked to the end of the Olympic-size pool before the race, "Oh my

god, I'm not going to slow down," she said.

She swam in the mixed 200 meter freestyle relay with her three other teammates to take home the gold that year with a time of 5:26.80.

Iberall said although she no longer swims, the secret to keeping healthy at her age is staying active. She regularly plays virtual Wii bowling on the television with her live-in daughter Thea. Iberall has a high score of 225.

Iberall said in light of all her life experiences, the best one has been the opportunity to raise her four daughters. Two have become scientists and the other two have followed their passions to creating art and painting.

"They're just amazing women," Iberall said.

Iberall will be honored at a ceremony on Jan. 5 at Clubhouse 6 at 9:30 a.m.