

For the love of music

Popular teacher is February's honoree

By Cheryl Walker
The News

From her G-clef front door and living room decorations to her collection of miniature pianos on a shelf by her Steinway grand, Mildred Landecker makes no secret of the lively art that brought her to the attention of the Historical Society which named her Leisure Worlder of the Month for February.

The native of Rhode Island and award-winning Saddleback College Emeritus Institute music history teacher has shared her love of music with the community liberally since moving to Leisure World nearly two decades ago.

She's lectured on musical topics at the Sunday Discussion Club; organized Leisure World groups to attend musical performances at professional venues; performed, as featured artist or accompanist, at many community clubs and organizations; even arranged for professional artists to come to Leisure World and share their expertise.

She's also participated as a member in other Leisure World clubs like those for Ballroom, Square and Round Dancing; Table Tennis; and the Laguna Hills Academians.

Landecker thrives, however, on involvement, particularly initiating others to the joys of music which, she admits, has been a constant source of enjoyment in her life. "Music has made me happy."

"As soon as I could crawl I learned to play the piano by ear," she recalls and points out that she started taking formal

classes at age 11 and progressed so rapidly that she was herself giving lessons two years later.

With the prompting and support of her mother, she stayed on a fast track to further proficiency in music - not just living up to the tough professional standards of the Big Apple's Juilliard School of the Arts, but even completing the requirements to merit both her bachelor and master degrees at New York University before she was 20 years old.

"But I didn't get a job until I was 23 - because I couldn't meet the height requirement to teach in New York schools," she adds.

Landecker says her diminutive size also meant a less-than-ideal hand spread which held her back from pursuing the career of a concert pianist.

But, perseverance, and the approval of a special committee, finally resulted in her getting the job she wanted. "What I love is teaching - it's like a gardener planting a seed and seeing it take fruit," says Landecker, proudly noting that some of her pupils included Peter Nero, Hal Linden, Diahann Carroll, and Shari Lewis.

In addition to teaching music at the High School of Music and Art in New York City, she planted seeds in her off hours in a variety of ways: using music for therapeutic reasons in Bellevue Hospital's psychiatric wards, giving classes for adults and children to various social groups and camps, giving recitals, judging competitions, working one-on-one with students in lessons at her own studio in Carnegie Hall even penning three music texts on theory and harmony

Ceremony data

Who: Mildred Landecker
What: Leisure Worlder of the Month for February
Where: Clubhouse 6
When: 10 a.m., Wednesday, Feb. 1.
Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society.

"My goal is to transfer my love of music (the title of her Emeritus Course) to anyone who will listen," explains Landecker who illustrates the fact that she must be doing something right by displaying a stack of letters and testimonials from her former students thanking her for the knowledge and enthusiasm for music they reaped from her class.

"I try to open (my students) eyes and ears because music is what sustains me," she adds. "Of all the beautiful things, music carries me through some trying situations."

Landecker says she even picked her late husband, Louis, because of his performance on a musical aptitude test.

Although he wasn't a musician, he scored in the 99 percentile because of his love of the art.

She points out that they had radios in every room in their house to indulge their mutual interest.

Landecker likes opera, folk and national music, but classical is her favorite. "I'm a long hair from way back - though my hair is short!"

Though Landecker has taught to packed classes at Saddleback College since 1978 she says she has no plans to stop teaching groups or individuals. "As long as they'll let me, I'll be there . . . I enjoy being busy."



Jim Max/The News

Her love of music is reflected in the manor of Mildred Landecker, Leisure World of the Month for February.