

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

LEIGH LUKAWIECKI

What's good about the world? Nothing much you might say. Well, you're wrong! There's a lot that's good and Leigh Lukawiecki tells all about it twice a week on Channel 6.

A delightful, eager, happy Leisure World resident, Leigh believes in accentuating the positive in everything she does, and she does it with a gusto that belies her 72 years.

How does she know so much about what's going on and what might be of interest to residents of Leisure World? By being present at meetings, study classes and other activities, by attending luncheons and participating in numerous goings-on in Leisure World or in Laguna Beach and other parts of the Southland.

A native of Virginia, Leigh attended schools in Coronado, California and then moved to San Francisco. She married Captain Edward Dewey Walbridge, U.S.N., a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy who, she proudly recalls, had 13 ancestors who fought in the American Revolution.

Widowed following World War II, she spent an Easter holiday in Rome, fell in love with the city and decided to make it her home. Because the summers were very hot, some friends invited her to the Adriatic coast where she met a family who was going to Vienna and asked her to join them. She went for what she thought would be a week and stayed four years.

It was there she was introduced to Count Eugene A. Lukawiecki of Poland, who proposed marriage the evening of their first meeting. "There was no question in my mind or in his from the time we met," she says, "but it took us four years to get everything squared away."

Because Poland was under Communist control, the Russians wanted the Count to return to his native land where, as nobility, he would have been imprisoned.

Leigh stayed in Vienna, working first for the United States Embassy and later in a covert operation for the U.S. Army. The times that followed were often happy and frivolous with balls, marble palaces and walks in the Vienna Woods, and more often very tense, ending in a dramatic escape for the Count, who was eventually rescued by an Army plane which landed on the streets of Vienna and flew him to safety.

Leigh was taken from Vienna under military guard and the couple was reunited in Salzburg where they were married in the Mirabell Palace. Then they took a ship to America and settled in Long Beach, California to live a more peaceful life, but the fairytale romance of Countess Leigh Lukawiecki did not have a story-book ending, and the Count died of a heart attack in 1958.

The next month, Leigh moved to Palm Springs. Having studied the Unity religion for many years, she became minister of her own church, Unity-in-the-Desert, where she served for 10 years until the pressures became too great and she moved to Leisure World in 1972.

From a Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy in World War II, where she served 3½ years as a communications officer at the 8th Naval District Headquarters in New Orleans, to the role she now plays as the very first volunteer roving reporter at Channel 6, Leigh has traveled a fascinating and often rugged road contributing much along the way to her country and to Leisure World.

Entitled to various forms of address such as, Reverend, Lieutenant, Mrs., Countess, Lady . . . she says, "Just call me Lee, please. My Polish name doesn't sound like it looks, so just forget it. Simple first names are so friendly."

She serves on the Boards of Directors of the Unity Church of Leisure World, the Community Concert Association and Opera-100, where she has been nominated for President this Fall.

Leigh is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, Laguna Beach Branch; American Legion Post #257, Laguna Hills; Clan MacLeod Association of USA, Inc.; The Retired Officers Association; National Association of Unity Churches, associate member; Friends of Met (the Metropolitan Opera of New York City).

In Leisure World she is a member of the Amigos Nuevos; Missouri Club; Latin American Club; and serves as a Unity minister emeritus, substituting for two ministers at Leisure World church services and classes; a member of the prayer panel of Leisure World Unity church praying daily for all who request it.

She has volunteered many hours attending meetings, events, viewing performances, interviewing prominent people which total the good things about which she reports on television. "After all," she laughs, "that is my religion . . . accentuating the positive."