

# 'Hat lady' will be honoree for October

**F**or most people, managing a sales force of 150 is task enough. For a woman in the 1930s and '40s to head an all-male staff was unheard of. For Ethel Mabie, these accomplishments are merely the beginning of the story.

Ethel Mabie, the "hat lady" of Leisure World, will be honored by Home Federal Savings and the Leisure World Historical Society as Leisure Worlder of the Month for October. The presentation will be on Monday, Oct. 3 at 10 a.m. in Clubhouse 6.

As a general agent and state manager for National Life Insurance of Chicago, Mrs. Mabie led her 150-man sales force for 17 years. Pointing to the mood and mores of the day, she said, "I never encouraged women to go into insurance. It seemed they only wanted to work during the hours their children were in school. I wanted all my agents to be successful, and the only way that can happen is to really work at it full time."

Mrs. Mabie's agents were placed throughout Ohio, but her professional affiliations carried her throughout the United States, some 30,000 miles each year. And that's where the hat collection began.

"In every town I visited," she said, "I would peruse the second-hand and book stores. I'd look for hats, books about hats - anything at all to do with hats. If I found one I liked or I thought would complement my collection, I'd buy it. Most often, though, I'd take a design to a local milliner and have the hat custom made."

As a Dale Carnegie instructor and a member of the National Platform Association, the natural thing to do with all these hats was to show them off. Mrs. Mabie hit the lecture circuit, speaking to women's clubs in 13 states.

Her talks, "Millinery on Parade" and "Headgear through the Ages," were always well received. The models she used came right from the audience.

"My oldest hat was from a design dating back to the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs," she said. "About 4,000 B.C."

She also had many hats from the famous designer Leslie James. One day recently she met a woman in the



**Ethel Mabie**

building where she lives who stopped her.

"Your're wearing my husband's hat," the woman said.

"I beg your pardon," replied Mrs. Mabie.

The woman paused. "I'm Mrs. Leslie James."

"That was a real thrill for me," Mrs. Mabie said. "I own many of Mr. James' hats; I've always thought of him as the premier milliner in America. In fact, I met him many years ago. But to find his wife living here, well that was quite a surprise."

Considering the size and extent of Mrs. Mabie's hat collection, comparison between her and Hedda Hopper was inevitable.

"I met Hedda Hopper once, as she was leaving after giving a talk," she said. "After getting a look at her collection, I decided mine was better, but she was more famous."

In addition to her extensive public speaking, Mrs. Mabie has written many articles for the insurance trade papers, as well as some romantic short stories. She recently completed her fifth book, as yet unpublished, titled "You Can Get Your Man, If . . ."

To further prove her status as a Renaissance Woman, Mrs. Mabie oil paints landscapes and plays the piano at least an hour every day. A former church organist, she says, "You have to keep practicing or you'll lose your ability."

Among her Leisure World credits, she is one of the founders of the Leisure World Art Association, which she served as president.