

Out to change the world

September's honoree committed to helping seniors



Sarah Reingewirtz/The News

Senior Sen. Helen Mills-Lindsay, is also president of the Laguna Hills Adult Day Health Care Center Auxiliary, to which she devotes much of her time on fundraising.

By Cheryl Walker
The News

What can one person do to change the world? Plenty, says the Historical Society's Leisure Worlder of the Month for September.

Helen Mills-Lindsay, who from 1986 to the present has climbed from assemblywoman to senior senator in the California Senior Legislature, says it's part of her nature to keep trying to do things to bring about positive changes in the lives of others.

"I'm committed to doing something, I can't stop," says Mills-Lindsay, a resident since 1979, who explains her career as a social worker, psychotherapist, and child and family counselor, followed naturally from her Unitarian upbringing.

"I was brought up studying women like Dorothea Dix, Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton and Julia Ward Howe;

these are the people I admired and, being familiar with their history, I began to believe I could do great things too."

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Mills-Lindsay, says at the age of 16 she knew that, unlike other girls her age, she wanted to pursue a career as a social worker rather than a marriage.

Mills-Lindsay waited until after she retired to wed Harry Lindsay and become the stepmother of three sons and grandmother of three grandchildren; but when she was a young woman, she says, "That wasn't for me - I just wanted to get an education and make the world better."

She earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree in social work and found fascinating and rewarding work on the East Coast, Texas and California, even in the darkest days of the Depression in the 1930s.

Among the clients she helped during a successful professional career that lasted more than a half century were distressed families and chil-

Ceremony facts

Who: Helen Mills-Lindsay
What: September Leisure Worlder of the Month
Where: Clubhouse 6
When: 10 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 4
Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

dren, seamen, schizophrenics, the criminally insane, sex offenders and a host of private patients (when she finally hung out her own shingle in Laguna Hills).

In spite of an ever-busy schedule, she always finds time to serve her community.

She was a member of the Golden Rain future health needs study committee, which she calls the best group ever brought together in the community to study the health and long-term care options for residents.

The group's chairman Bob Donaldson agrees with Mills-

Lindsay's assessment adding that the background and experience she brought to his team made her a "valued member."

She also has and continues to work for political change as an active member of Leisure World's Democratic Club, People for a National Health Program and Concerned Citizens for Peace.

"Since being part of the movement in making California the first state to pass a bill for confidentiality between therapists and patients, it made me know you can get things done with the Legislature."

After retiring, Mills-Lindsay decided she could even do more to make that happen and ran for and won a seat in the California Senior Legislature.

Created in 1980, the Senior Legislature formulates laws impacting older Americans, then seeks legislators to sponsor the bills in Sacramento. To date, CSL's priority recommendations have had a 70-percent success record.

As she progressed from assemblyperson to senior senator, Mills-Lindsay has gained notoriety for her outstanding insight into senior health and extended care issues.

Ellie Enriquez Peck, coordinator of the CSL in Sacramento, says "Helen is a strong vital element - her proposals always make the top 10 priorities."

Some of the issues she's fought for are support for senior centers, in-home health services (to keep seniors out of nursing facilities), affordable senior housing and health insurance.

She notes she's particularly proud of walking a bill through

the legislature which was passed, calling for seven day a week, 24 hour a day long-term in-home care for low or middle income seniors, the On-lock/PACE program.

Because only five demonstration programs have developed so far in the state, since they must be coordinated with an existing adult day health care facility, Mills-Lindsay was particularly anxious to make sure Leisure World would be the

next to enjoy the fruits of that legislation.

That's why she's worked tirelessly first to bring in and now to maintain the presence of the Laguna Hills Adult Day Health Care Center on El Toro Road, near Gate 14.

"That's my baby," says Mills-Lindsay pointing out that on July 1 LHADHC celebrated its third birthday with nearly double its original caseload, which includes clients with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, those recovering from strokes and more.

Mills-Lindsay says the center provides meals and snacks; recreational and educational programs; art and music workshops; physical, occupational

or rehabilitation therapy; games; transportation; even nursing services and personal care.

Center Director Peggy Weismair calls Mills-Lindsay "indispensable, a real morale booster, she really believes in what we're doing."

Marilyn Ditty, executive director of South County Senior Services, which operates the center, also has kudos for Mills-Lindsay's commitment to the center.

"I've known Helen for many years and I have found her to be a committed and caring activist on behalf of senior citizens and especially Leisure World residents."

Mills-Lindsay, the head of the center's auxiliary, says only money - about \$1 million - now prevents the center from offering the long-term care she hopes to make available to local seniors.

Although the center occupies a great deal of Mills-Lindsay's time, she says the effort is well worth it.

“We keep them (our patients) going and improve their quality of life, particularly those with Alzheimer's I feel very good about that.”