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Justine Ratner, 13-year Leisure World resident, renown for contributions to community.

SHOWING THE WAY

COMMUNITY: Historical Society's head docent gets October nod

By Cheryl Walker
The News

Irving Goldberg said he launched the Historical Society docent program in frustration because some members of the real estate community took prospective buyers around (Leisure World) but "that brought certain pressures to bear that were limiting."

He knew the Society could do better with its own trained volunteers.

He first enlisted the aid of community activist Isabel Tashman but her death caused

him to seek a new leader cut from the same cloth - and he found it in October's Leisure Worlder of the month and Society board director Justine Ratner.

Explains Goldberg, "She understands the needs of the community, has the ability to pick up and train volunteers and hold them together and she keeps the tours current with the changes in the community."

Goldberg says the tours, which were originally 60 minutes but now are 90-120 minutes twice a month plus a floating extra tour every two months, are open to prospective and new residents. About 20 pack a Leisure World bus per outing.

The tours (which change periodically to include other locations) currently start at the Historical Society building adjacent to the Leisure World Library and include an introductory video on the community; distribution of literature; walking tours of the library, Clubhouses 1 and 5 and Clubhouse 4's arts and crafts workshops; and bus tours spotlighting points of interest both inside the gates and outside along the thoroughfares of greater Laguna Woods.

"The big push is to give people a real sense of the community and answer their questions accurately on a wide range of topics," says Goldberg, point-

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ing out the latter include queries on the facilities, history, carrying charges, services, residential opportunities and benefits, cooperative versus condominium considerations and more, "depending on the interests of the people."

To do that well, says Goldberg, "You need an in-depth understanding of the community." And, he adds, it helps when the tour guides are personable, intelligent people, like the docents (there are a dozen docents in all) that accompany each group.

"Justine has been a vital element in the success of the program and in getting people to understand what this community is all about," he says.

Ratner's contributions to the community, however, do not stop at being, what Historical Society President Evelyn Shopp "docent par excellence - who will do what ever you want and do it beautifully."

The 13-year resident also trained as a Law Enforcement Assistance Program volunteer and served in the Victim Witness Assistance Program at South County Courthouse; worked at the Community Service Program Youth Shelter in Laguna Beach; served as an Elderhostel hostess at the University of Judaism; and is a member of the City of Laguna Woods general plan coordinating committee, League of Women Voters, the National Organization of Women, Potters and Sculptors Club, Tennis Club, ORT, Common Cause, the PC Users Group, the National Council of Jewish Women, Reform Temple of Leisure World and People for a National Health Program.

In spite of the long list, Ratner says she was "floored" when she learned the Society had pegged her for its special honor.

The Somerville, N.J. native and wife of 54 years to Community Association President George Ratner, says she enjoys being active, but doesn't like being in the spotlight.

In her pre-retirement years, Ratner explains, she worked as secretary, treasurer and manager of finance, administration and sales service in family businesses which manufactured and sold building products and electronic and security products designed by her spouse. "He's really the creative one in the family."

Ratner, however, while working, still managed to raise two children who went on to careers in law and engineering; volunteered as a Brownie and Girl Scout leader; and served as Parent/Teacher Association president and board member at her temple.

After retiring, Ratner says she and her husband found Leisure World the perfect spot not just because of climate and amenities but especially the people.

"We looked at other places, like Florida, but that was very 'country club'," she explains. "I was enthused here because of the variety of the residents."

"We're from all economic levels, not all alike or cookie-cutter, and I like that: this community is very unique."

To arrange to take a tour, call community relations, 597-4360.

The celebration of Ratner's Leisure World of the Month honor will be Wednesday, Oct. 4 at 10 a.m. in Clubhouse 6. All are invited to attend.