

July 28, 2005



Grete Rothschild has not owned a car since her move to Leisure and finds riding the buses gets her where she needs to go.

News photo by Rod Veal

Bus advocate is August honoree

Being car-less does not mean being helpless

Good transportation is one of the hardest to find and most sought after needs for seniors, especially those who no longer have wheels of their own.

That's one of the reasons Leisure World is unique among retirement communities since it meets a full range of transport needs with its fixed route, on-demand, lift and evening and weekend bus service for residents.

Residents like Historical Society August honoree Grete Rothschild help make the system work by making her voice heard on Golden Rain Foundation committees and special groups. It's her goal to bring up resident needs and suggest ways they can be met.

The native of Nuremberg, Germany and resident since 1982, helps to ensure customer satisfaction by participating in

the GRF bus system meetings, coordinating volunteers who can answer questions about routes and schedules and working with both Leisure World and Laguna Woods city staff to provide materials to make traveling the system easier.

"She's very meticulous, extremely detail oriented so much so that it can drive you nuts ... but when the work is done you thank her for holding your feet to the fire; nobody does it better," says Denise Welch, bus committee member, Third Mutual director and co-chairperson of the Transportation Awareness Day.

"I'm lucky enough to have known her for about 20 years," says Dorothy Bilecki, another bus and community volunteer. "When she has to take on a project she goes all out to finish it with great attention to accuracy."

Background: Rothschild originally intended to pursue a career as a grain chemist, but World War II intervened and

immigrants like herself to the United States found the job market brighter in the secretarial pool.

She specialized in legal secretarial work; then, after the war, married and helped her husband with his dental supply business.

Their one child Monica

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Ceremony facts

Who: Grete Rothschild

What: Leisure Worlder of the Month for August

Where: Clubhouse 6

When: 10 a.m., Wednesday, Aug. 3

Sponsors: Leisure World Historical Society with funding from Renaissance at the Regency.

urged them to retire to Leisure World but it wasn't until his 75th birthday, that they got him to come.

Rothschild says they arrived "carless" and started using the buses, "each and every line" to get to know the community.

"I was very happy because I never enjoyed driving."

That first year also was the start of friendships that have stood the test of time with Bilecki, late United Director Burton Taubman, late Third and GRF Director Bert Black, former United Treasurer Bert Posthill and Third Director Phyllis Fish.

Over the years that core group has expanded, most notably with current City Councilman and former GRF Director Milton Robbins; and GRF Treasurer Maury Kravitz who was the first to establish the policy that the buses were not just a nice-to-have amenity but a necessity for those who can't or don't want to drive, providing a lifeline to food, doctors and more.

Rothschild was also active in Leisure World's battle to stop the commercialization of Marine Corps Air Station El Toro (whose runways can be seen from her living room windows) and to become a city.

After Laguna Woods incorporated, she served on the city transportation subgroup and similar groups in Leisure World.

She also heads a group of volunteers called the Bus Transportation Specialists (to help residents take maximum benefit from the bus system), worked on Third's nominating committee and attends numerous meetings.

When not attending meetings, she enjoys opera, classical music, baking, Scrabble and cleaning (which she does to perfection, even dusting the leaves on her luxurious plants). She says she's not a big joiner or club person.

Nor does she like to talk about her life before coming to America. "When I saw the Statue of Liberty, that's when life began for me."