

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

GEORGE A. ROWLEY

By the time he was 9 years old, George A. Rowley's future seemed ordained. "I used to run around at school from classroom to classroom, drawing display pictures of Santa Claus and turkeys and you-name-it," he recalls.

The schoolboy artist grew up to become a cartoon animator at the Disney Studio during the golden age of "Snow White," "Pinocchio," "Fantasia," "Bambi" and "Song of the South."

After 36 years of achievement with the Hollywood cartoon industry, he packed up his pens and paints for a move to Leisure World where his talents were promptly utilized for countless community activities. Perhaps best known for long-term stints as cartoonist for the *Leisure World News* and moderator of the "What Was My Line" television game show on the community's closed-circuit Channel 6, Rowley also has freely donated his time and skills to groups throughout the area.

Rowley was born in Sioux City, Iowa, and spent his boyhood there and in Omaha. His early penchant for art drew him like a magnet for further studies at the Omaha Art Academy and Chicago Art Institute.

After moving west in the early 1930s, he continued his art studies at Chouinard and also encountered a young public school teacher named Mina Throne, who later became his wife. Their first meeting was a blind date jointly arranged by his brother and her roommate. The latter couple also subsequently married and she is the widowed Mabel (Mrs. Ernest) Rowley of Leisure World.

In 1934 George Rowley joined the Disney Studio's Effects Animation Department, where he remained for 21 years as animator and department head. In addition to the beloved features previously mentioned, he has animation credits for 11 other full-length Disney films including "The Three Caballeros," "Make Mine Music," "Fun and Fancy Free," "The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad," "Cinderella," "Alice in Wonderland," "Peter Pan" and "Lady and the Tramp."

One of his special projects on "Three Caballeros" was an intricate ending in which a bull pranced onto the scene and burst into a mind-boggling fireworks display spelling out "The End" in various languages, concluding with a lively burst of red-white-and-blue for the English translation.

"I spent literally months working on the scene," laughs Rowley. "And each time I saw it in a theater, they pulled the curtains right over that ending."

Rowley comments on his years with Walt Disney: "It was a priceless experience. He was a task-master and a genius, with the amazing faculty of knowing what the public wanted and how to give it to them."

In 1955 he was hired by Paramount Studios to serve as animation supervisor for "The Ten Commandments." On this project he devised a new method of filming sequences combining animation with live action to produce life-like effects for the movie, which went on to win a Special Effects Oscar. Film buffs may recall one of Rowley's contributions—a pillar of fire with writhing fingers which majestically wrote out the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. Another was the famous parting of the Red Sea scene.

The animated titles for the Doris Day film, "Teacher's Pet," and special animated effects in Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo" were also part of his work at Paramount.

Rowley later worked under contract at Sketch Book Films, Larry Harmon Productions and Filmation Studios. He concluded with five years as Hanna Barbera Productions' supervising animator before retiring in 1970.

For the next ten years Rowley's cartoons enlivened the pages of the *Leisure World News*, drawing such comments as, "he has brought much laughter to us by letting us see the humorous side of our foibles" . . . "his humorous caricatures hold the mirror up to ourselves."

Rowley has been a guest teacher at art schools and frequently appears before local clubs and other groups in the surrounding community, illustrating his talks with cartoons which he donates for use as door prizes and charity raffles.

His favorite appearances are at public schools and youth group meetings, where he delights his young audiences by inviting the children to take his sketch pad and draw a line which he then transforms into the character of their choice.

Rowley's volunteer artwork also embellishes the massive fireplace at Clubhouse One during various holidays and appears on the letterheads and directories of countless groups in the community. "I'm always doing something for someone, and that's good for us all," he comments.

Rowley is an ordained elder of Geneva Presbyterian Church and a vice president of the Laguna Hills Kiwanis. He and his wife, a retired college professor, have three married daughters and eight grandchildren.