



LEISURE WORLD NEWS

Thursday
Jan. 1, 2004

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An Orange County Register publication

PNHP founder first 2004 honoree

Historical Society recognizes Bill Schwied, doctor, musician, humanitarian

By Cheryl Walker
The News

From the workplace to retirement, Leisure World resident, William Schwied, M.D., has dedicated his life to maintaining the health and welfare of his fellow man.

And, more than a decade ago, Schwied was the man responsible for the creation of People for a National Health Program, dubbed by Consumer Advocate Ralph Nader's Public Citizen as the "best grassroots organization" in America.

It's little wonder the Leisure World Historical Society decided to pick him to open up the new year as 2004's January Leisure Worlder of the Month.

Dave Blodgett, a former officer of the Community Civic Organization and community activist calls Schwied "the most loving, caring and committed leader in the field of public health care I have ever met -- he brings great honor to the Leisure World community for his lifetime of activism in promoting universal health care."

Ted Rosenbaum, PNHP charter member, calls Schwied an inspiration to all, not just for creating the largest activist group pushing for a national health program in the state "but for being a dedicated soul who has given his whole life to help people he's a wonderful guy."

Background: The Chicago native, received his medical degree from the University of Illinois' College of Medicine. He interned at Wayne County



Dr. Bill Schwied gets as much enjoyment from his music as he does from medicine.

News photo by Rod Veal

Hospital in Michigan and served his residency in internal medicine at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Illinois.

He specialized in internal medicine and allergies in both private practice and hospital work and also became a clinical instructor in his field at the University of Illinois and, after moving to California 20 years ago, at the UCLA's School of

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Ceremony facts

Who: Dr. Bill Schwied

What: Leisure Worlder of the Month for January

Where: Clubhouse 6

When: 10 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 7

Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

Funded by: Renaissance at the Regency and Wellington

HONOREE

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Medicine.

He also went back to school in the Golden State and earned his master's degree in public health.

Two years later he moved to Leisure World and began working as a contract physician for the Orange County Health Care Agency treating mainly drug users and AIDS patients.

In 1991, Schwied decided to start a chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program in Leisure World, advocating a public insurance plan similar to the National Health Program in Canada.

The plan would cover prescription drugs, long-term care, mental health treatments, office visits, diagnostic tests, surgery, hospital and nursing home stays, dentistry, medical equipment and other health services.

The plan would work by eliminating the middle administration costs and having a single payer reimburse health care providers. Funding for programs would come from a combination of corporate, personal income and specialty item (alcohol, tobacco, gasoline, etc.) taxes and profits from other programs like the lottery.

The interest of Leisure Worlders who were not doctors convinced Schwied that the community needed a new organization with the same goals as the national Physicians group. The result was People for a National Health Program.

Schwied says he's always been interested in effective communication between patient and doctor, improved health education and humanized one-on-one health care -- all of which, he contends, are severely compromised in the present for profit system where the physician is so concerned about the bottom line he hasn't the time to see his patient as a person.

It's a system Schwied calls "sick, immoral, cruel and inequitable."

PNHP has, through the years, mobilized in defense of national and state legislation promoting its agenda and keeps its memberships up to date with information about

health care programs through top experts in many fields of study.

Schwied also helped found a support organization for persons suffering the latent after effects of early bouts with polio called "Polio Survivors Plus," which meets monthly in Leisure World to give hope, help and advice.

In 1947, when Schwied took care of troops in Okinawa he contracted acute poliomyelitis. Although his condition improved he retained some residual paralysis in his leg. In later life, however, some of the symptoms from the earlier bout began reappearing and he discovered he was suffering from a condition called post polio syndrome.

He soon discovered he was not alone and that others were experiencing the same frustration he was in finding doctors to treat or even believe such a syndrome existed.

So, in typical Schwied style, he did something about it. He formed Polio Survivors Plus for not just residents of Leisure World but anyone in the immediate area who needed help dealing with the chronic condition.

In a recent interview, Schwied explained that PSP members support each other and try to educate doctors to take care of the kinds of disabilities associated with PPS.

Schwied is happy to report that that goal is achieving its ends and now there are books, websites and clinics dedicated to helping those dealing with the after effects of polio.

But lest Schwied give the impression that he is all work and no play, note that he has had another lifelong talent, music, and has played the piano and viola since his youth.

He continues to heal hearts, minds and spirits through music by playing with the Leisure World Symphony.

Schwied says he has no intention of taking it easy and forgetting the many causes and enterprises that he's involved with.

"I believe in following your passion," explains Schwied and admits he has many that he will not ignore. "I don't try to convert people, I don't try to change people, I try to change myself.

"My motto is whatever turns you on you should go for."