



David Caballero / The News

Flashing his famous smile, Ben Siminow holds the almost 50-year-old hob nail boots he uses for hiking. The February honoree still keeps an ax in his car truck for clearing brush from trails.

Trailblazing for education

Community scout keeps groups on right paths

By Cheryl Walker
The News

The Leisure World Historical Society has selected a staunch supporter of the community's continuing education program as its February Leisure Worlder of the Month.

In fact, in 1987, Saddleback Community College honored Ben Siminow with a Trustees Award for a decade of outstanding service in helping to provide educational opportunities for older adults—a commitment he continues to this day.

But the 86-year-old "unofficial mayor of Pool 4" (so-called, says fellow Golden Rain swimmer and former Golden Rain President Peggy Kermer because "he makes every one feel like they

belong there") doesn't confine his dedication to one issue.

Since moving to Leisure World from his native New York with his wife and helpmate Irene in 1976, Siminow has given the same attention and care he used to succeed as a major retailer of camping equipment to help improve property values, control expenses, guarantee services and improve security for his fellow residents.

Besides regularly monitoring United and Golden Rain board meetings, he's headed fundraising efforts for the Clubhouse 1 carillon and bus shelters near Gate 3.

He's also contributed his time and savvy to a variety of committee and special groups such as the Health, Exercise and Play Club; the community activities, security, grounds and water and maintenance and construction committees; and the aquatics, physical activities, continuing education, and fitness

CEREMONY FACTS

Who: Ben Siminow
When: 10 a.m., Wednesday, Feb. 1
Where: Clubhouse 6
Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

center enlargement study groups.

Although his presence is ubiquitous, Siminow's style is not intrusive. Rather, typically dressed in sport shirt, shorts, sandals and a broad smile, he offers others his advice, assistance and open mind.

"He wants the best for the people here (in Leisure World) and he wants people to perform their best," explains Terry Robinson, Emeritus Institute exercise coordinator.

"He knows what's going on: the facts," adds Golden Rain Director Virginia Halley.

"Ben's a very down-to-earth person—he tells it like it is—because he has the

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welfare of every Leisure Worlder in his heart.

"He's working all the time to make things better for Leisure World."

Roots: Working to help people is nothing new to Siminow who started collecting pay at age 12 delivering newspapers, weighing potatoes and shipping department store merchandise, to help support his family.

He attended high school at night with dreams of attending college until the Depression ended that fantasy.

Instead, he was happy to get a job assembling aluminum hair curlers at 7 cents a gross.

Siminow's pivotal career break occurred when he got a job as an assistant bookkeeper in a company where the head bookkeeper liked hiking on weekends and encouraged him to give it a try.

The city boy did-and found the fresh air, quiet, beautiful scenery and delicious relaxation of the open country, particularly Bear Mountain, about 50 miles north of New York City, irresistible.

So much so, that he became hooked on hiking. He joined the Hiking Club of New York City, became a trail scout at Bear Mountain State Park (he still carts a chain saw and ax to clear trails in the trunk of his car) and started a small mail order business selling moccasins.

As his circle of outdoor enthusiast friends (and knowledge of the great outdoors) increased on his camping trips, he began to first import and then manufacture camping equipment to fit customers' needs.

Siminow frequently worked at the sewing machine or workbench when he couldn't find the right supplier of finished items or parts and is especially proud of having invented an insulated fabric without stitching (to keep frigid air from leaking through the stitch holes).

His talent, says Siminow, came naturally. "I just have the ability

to see something and know how it is done."

In 1938, he opened Camp & Trail Outfitters which, by the time he sold it 32 years later, boasted a catalogue filled with hundreds of items made in the US and imported from Switzerland, Austria, Germany, France, Scotland and Italy for the serious outdoorsperson-from dehydrated food, cooking utensils and parkas to gear for wilderness trekking, pole or jungle crossing, mountain climbing and cave exploring.

Siminow even assembled signal lights for the Navy, made sleeping bags able to withstand sub-zero cold for the Army and helped outfit expeditions for exploration teams that challenged Mt. Everest and Antarctica, among others.

When 1970 flipped on the calendar, however, Siminow decided more than 30 years of seven-day work weeks was enough: "I wanted out."

The big move: The Siminows opted for California to be near their only child.

Interestingly, Marlene carries on the family tradition for hard work as the executive director of Israel Bonds for the Pacific Northwest region and has raised more than \$100 million through bond sales for the State of Israel.

The big move turned out to be the right one, says Siminow who enjoys the climate and casual ambiance of Southern California and the many amenities of Leisure World.

He notes too that although health problems in recent years have kept him from attending many meetings, he plans to continue keeping a watchful eye on what's going on and not turn away until wrongs are set right.

Siminow says he's always had the knack of knowing how to fix things. "It's just a logical understanding of what should be: I just see problems and say let's see what can be done."