

The Good Life

Depression era youth makes impression on April honoree

By Cheryl Walker
The News

In spite of the hardships of growing up during the Depression, he's had a good life, says Carlos Vega. The Depression taught him the value of hard work, a value he used to make that "good life."

And now, the 77-year resident's willingness to give all-out attention to Leisure World activities is the reason the Historical Society selected him its Leisure Worlder of the month for April.

Vega has been an active participant in the New York Club, which his wife helped found, Concerned Citizens for Peace, the Community Association and the Theatre Guild.

He's advised various corporate maintenance and construction committees and worked on the Golden Rain and United nominating committees.

Although Vega says he was "stupified" when told of his selection by the society, his colleagues says there's no doubt the choice is right.

"If there was a perfect person created on the face of the earth, it's Carlos Vega," says former Golden Rain President Matt Magidson.

"He is truly a gentle man: thoughtful, soft-spoken, very warm, very accommodating, dedicated and responsible," says Margot Bouer, Golden Rain nominating committee chairwoman. "He did his job with enthusiasm and seriousness."

"He was a dream to work with, charming and intelligent," adds Cynthia Chyba, Golden Rain director and member of the Theatre Guild.

Background: The San Francisco native who grew up in Los Angeles was the oldest surviving boy in a family of 10.

So, when his father needed help to make ends meet in the darkest days of the Depression, Vega obliged, even though that meant having to leave high school before getting his diploma.

Yet, even though working full time in a furniture factory, he decided to go to school at night to complete his secondary education and college education.

When World War II broke out, he enlisted in the Navy and went to the University of Houston where he learned electronics.

After the war, he got his electrical engineering degree from West Coast University before putting his skills to work at Northrup.

He briefly tried a civil service job with water and power (because of its promises of lifetime security) but missed the challenges of working in the competitive defense marketplace.

Ceremony facts

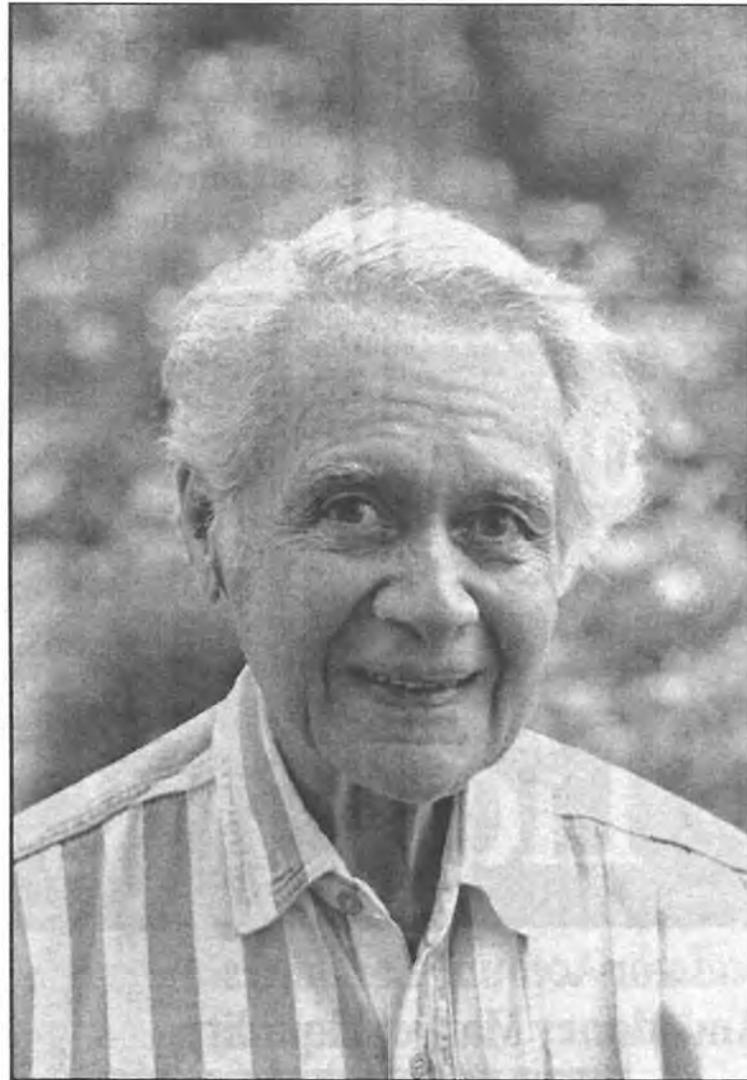
Who: Carlos Vegas

What: Leisure Worlder of the Month for April

Where: Clubhouse 6

When: 10 a.m., Wednesday, April 1

Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society.



Carlos Vega, Leisure Worlder of the Month for April

It wasn't long before he found all the challenges he craved: designing missiles for TRW in Redondo Beach and Washington, D.C.

He retired from the firm in 1976 and took care of his first wife until she died of cancer in 1978. Not one to remain idle, he volunteered as a peer counselor at the Santa Monica Health and

Peer Counseling Center where he worked for three years and met the woman who'd become his new wife. They've been married now for 16 years.

He credits Florence with getting him involved in Leisure World activities and soon found there was a lot of payback in doing so.

"When you're working with people who are considerate it's a pleasure - and doing something good is fun."

He says he particularly enjoys working on the nominating committees because of the "knowledgable, bright people" he is able to work with and having the opportunity to talk to candidates who are interested in donating their time and talents serving Leisure World.

But, he adds, that kind of commitment is essential for one considering a directorial seat - as it was for him making a success of his life against the odds.

Explains Vega, "Looking back, I'd say, in spite of the difficulties, the Depression was the best of times to have grown up in, people were kinder then and I was lucky to meet people who were good examples, like, when I worked in the factory. Two kids I worked with left to go to UC (University of California at) Berkeley which showed me you could work and go to school at the same time."

Even though times have changed, Vega says there are compensations - most notably, having a happy marriage, enjoying a comfortable retirement at Leisure World and relishing the companionship of his grandson, Danny.

"Yes, it's been a good life."