

UP CLOSE: MARTIN WEITZ

An intimate look at one of south county's interesting personalities.

An airplane flying over an island jungle in the South Pacific might seem an unlikely place to hold an Easter service.

But as a "sky pilot" in World War II, Rabbi Martin Weitz was asked to conduct his first and only Easter service — in the skies over the Solomon Islands, to a crew representing eight different religious denominations.

It was 1944 and Weitz was charged with preaching to and instilling confidence in soldiers stationed on each of the six islands. "I thought I would get in trouble for conducting the service," Weitz said. But instead, he said his efforts earned him a citation.

Since then, Weitz has written eight books, more than 32 manuals on philosophy and other topics and more than 200 newspaper and magazine articles. He has conducted study tours worldwide, including tours in Russia and Japan. During a 1968 tour of Europe and Israel, he had private audiences with Pope Paul VI and then-Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir.

Throughout his career, Weitz said, he has been dedicated to increasing understanding between religious groups and is well-known for his pioneering efforts in education. He is mentioned in the Congressional Record of 1962 for his work in establishing a community-college system in New Jersey.

As a rabbi, Weitz has served congregations in six states. Last Friday, he served as master of ceremonies at Saddleback College's 12th annual Emeritus Day. He teaches liberal arts at Saddleback and at National University in San Diego.

At National University, he has introduced eight subjects into the curriculum during the 12 years he has been on the staff. Five years ago, Weitz was presented with National University's Outstanding Faculty Award. In the same year, he was honored as "Leisure Worldler of the Month" for January in a program sponsored by Home Federal Savings and the Leisure World Historical Society.



Ken Steinhardt/The Register

Rabbi Martin Weitz was master of ceremonies at Saddleback College's Emeritus Day.

■ **Time in Leisure World:** 11 years.

■ **Previous residence:** San Diego.

■ **Marital status:** Married to Margaret for 51 years.

■ **Children:** A daughter and a son. Mimi Levenson is an artist who lives in San Diego. She has two daughters. Jonathan is a dentist who lives in Denver.

■ **Religion:** Jewish.

■ **Political affiliation:** Independent.

■ **Work experience:** Weitz was as assistant rabbi in charge of education at Temple Shalom in Evanston, Ill., and taught at the College of Jewish studies in Chicago. He was a chaplain during World War II. In 1951, he said, he was instrumental in organizing the New Jersey community-college system.

Weitz served a congregation in Syosset, NY, and was a director of the Center for Interfaith Studies at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, from which he received one of his three honorary doctorates. Weitz moved in 1976 to San Diego, where he began his semi-retirement.

World Historical Society.

■ **Hero:** Albert Einstein. "He opened up the universe to us."

■ **Hobbies:** Trains. "I used to be frightened of them as a child, and now they fascinate me. I also enjoy walking, meeting people and love music and art."

■ **Favorite president:** Abraham Lincoln.

■ **In the morning:** "I take a walk and think about what I'm going to do during the day and then I write letters."

■ **Last book read:** "The Book of Abraham" by Marek Halter.

■ **Last movie:** "Betrayed."

■ **Favorite foods:** "Anything my wife makes."

■ **Favorite restaurant:** The Velvet Turtle.

■ **Magazine subscriptions:** Newsweek, Time, National Geographic and US News & World Report.

■ **Last vacation:** "My wife and I visited relatives and friends in Colorado and New Mexico last year, and we are planning another trip there before the end of this year."

■ **Most embarrassing moment:** "When a president of a congregation wanted details about one of our members so that he could solicit business from him. I wouldn't tell him anything because I felt he was wrong."

■ **Secret to happiness:** "Good friends, a sense of kinship and optimism."

■ **Secret to success:** "I don't have any secrets, but I think dedication and a sense of creativity are important."

— Compiled by Sarah Salkeld