



Don Leach/*The News*

Ivan Wolfson, Leisure Worlder of the Month for October, can be found most days at the Garden Center where he gives advice and counsel to those with plant problems.

## How does your garden grow?

October's honoree sports a green thumb

By Tina Nguyen  
The News

Ivan Wolfson, standing amidst a vast garden of tall flowers and a thick bed of vegetables, considers how they can be made taller and thicker. This "plant psychiatrist" however, does not counsel plants, but looks for remedies for gardening ailments.

Wolfson, the Historical Society's choice for October Leisure Worlder of the Month, is a horticulture specialist who spends his time maintaining the Leisure World Garden Centers and sharing with others his tips on the science and

### Ceremony information

**Who:** Ivan Wolfson  
**What:** Leisure World for October  
**Where:** Clubhouse 6  
**When:** Wednesday, Oct. 6, refreshments, 9:30 a.m., ceremony 10 a.m.  
**Sponsor:** Leisure World Historical Society

art of plants. To Wolfson, horticulture has never been considered work.

"I'm very lucky. My hobby is my occupation," he said.

Wolfson, who serves on numerous committees, is the mastermind behind the lush landscaping and exotic cactus garden at Garden

See GARDEN, page 2

# GARDEN

From page 1  
Center 2.

When the center opened in 1977, Wolfson converted the grassy lands to a cactus garden of more than 70 rare and fruit-filled types, shady resting spots and different sized plots where residents craft their own gardens.

The garden center now serves as a popular recreation for many creative residents. Since its development, the center "has grown like topseed" with a waiting list of residents seeking a plot for their own creations, he said.

"Ivan is tenacious in his pursuit of the very best for this community," said Milt John, director of Leisure World's landscaping operations.

"In the last five years, we changed, streamlined and expedited the way landscaping has been performed by the significant savings we've made," added Johns, who has worked with Wolfson for seven years. "Ivan has been key in catalyzing all of those changes."

An active member and former president of the Leisure World Garden Club, Wolfson also participates in the Rod and Gun Club, the Shrine Club and the Film Club.

Since 1976, one year after he retired at Leisure World, he has been involved with the Third Mutual Grounds Committee and the Garden Center Advisory Committee.

When not playing plant doctor, Wolfson consults on landscaping projects, many which have included the garden centers, for

Irvine Valley College, the Costa delSol Retirement Community and the Palmyra Adult Community both in Mission Viejo.

Wolfson also was the creator of the Blue Ribbon Award, which recognizes Leisure World gardeners whose efforts brighten the community.

His goal, Wolfson says, is to spread a sense of appreciation for the community's beauty by recognizing individuals' dedicated care for their community.

"Leisure World is my home. If one person works hard to keep this place beautiful, the feeling of appreciation will rub onto others," he said.

The 77-year-old native Californian has a decorated history in horticulture and initiating community service. While studying agriculture and plant science at the University of California, Davis, Wolfson maintained the grounds of university personnel housing and communities.

Sensitive to students' needs, he initiated the first cooperative living programs at the campus. His activism earned him recognition from the president of all the UC campuses and an award from the Honorary Society at Davis.

After graduating from college in 1941, Wolfson served in the military for about six years. Upon release from active duty, he began teaching horticulture and science in the Los Angeles School District. Throughout his 30 years of teaching, Wolfson taught students who ranged from young elementary age to the mentally challenged, to adults

seeking skills for other employment opportunities.

Despite his strict expectations of neatness and hard work from his students, Wolfson says he usually "got down on my hands and knees with the students.

"Students respected me because I would do the things I expected them to do as well," he explained.

Wolfson later continued to explore the vastness of horticulture by attending the UCLA graduate program in ornamental horticulture. Through a grant from the National Science Foundation from the University of Wisconsin, he spent the summer of 1963 studying soil and plan nutrition.

With his expert skills he not only taught horticulture but also spearheaded first time high school vocational horticulture programs across Los Angeles. The success of these programs reached school districts stretching from Sacramento to San Diego.

Even after his move to Leisure World, he battled the long commute to Los Angeles where he continued to develop vocational landscape design, construction and maintenance programs. Most of these programs targeted urban students not intending to pursue college.

Now that he spends his most of his time helping active gardeners at Leisure World, his horticulture hobby never ends.

"Ivan brings to the community a tremendous amount of practical and academic horticulture knowledge," Johns said.