

Force behind the library

# Miss Wright named January Leisure Worlder

In the summer of 1927 a young Harvard graduate returned to his home in Los Angeles and suddenly was stricken with paralytic polio. He became a patient of Dr. John C. Wilson, and therapy was prescribed. Dr. Wilson recalled a young lady therapist at the University of Southern California, now a teacher of corrective physical education in the school system and asked if she would administer to the young man.

Catherine Wright agreed to do what she could for him; hot packs, massage, passive exercises. In less than two years the youth was taking long mountain hikes with the Sierra Club.

Miss Wright's life story is replete with incidents of her humanitarianism. As a coed at USC, she volunteered as a therapist for World War I battle victims. She was an active participant with the patient service program of the Los Angeles County chapter of the Muscular Dystrophy Association and when she moved to Leisure World it was only natural for the Orange County association's chapter to call on her for help. This was in addition to her projection for a library for Leisure World in 1965 and the bringing of that to fulfillment.

In discussing these things Catherine Wright protested: "I'm just a retired school teacher," when informed her friends and admirers had recommended she be honored as Rossmoor Corporation's Leisure Worlder of the Month for January.

A beautiful color portrait of her will be hung in the rotunda of the Rossmoor sales office in an informal ceremony at 10 a.m., Tuesday, Jan. 2. Her many friends are invited. The picture will hang there until Thursday, Feb. 1 when it will be presented to her.

Catherine Wright's story is one of a university graduate therapist turned health educator, becoming a successful librarian in Leisure World without previous training.

"I was the second president of the Panhellenic Club of Leisure World," Miss Wright recalls. Membership was 16 at the time. I told them we needed a project; something we could do for Leisure World with our time and limited funds. I pointed out the lack of a library for residents and it was agreed to make that our project."

Panhellenic, with Miss Wright leading the way, went to work on their project.

She talked Golden Rain into assigning one

of the smaller game rooms at Clubhouse 2 for a library and appealed through the Leisure World News for books and volunteers.

"The first thing we knew, because of many duplicates, we had more books than we could handle," she recalls.

Miss Wright has led the library through the

traumatic experience of moving from Clubhouse 2 to what had been the snack shop in the early days; then to a trailer while the present library was being built, and finally into its present home.

"It was a terrific job, trying to keep the books sorted out in categories during the moves. Ad-

ding to our confusion was the fact that the help we had in the moving spoke little or no English; in itself a sort of Tower of Babel experience. Today the library has over 17,000 catalogued books and around 20,000 paperbacks.

A native of Iowa, Miss Wright was a young girl when the Wright family came to California after a 12-year stopover in Minnesota.

It was following her enrollment at USC that Miss Wright's penchant for helping others first became apparent.

The army had sent out an appeal for therapists during World War I, setting up a training center at Reed College, Oregon. A teen-age coed at the time, Miss Wright took a train to Portland and applied at the school.

"Because of my age, they didn't want to accept me," she relates, but her tearful explanation of paying her own travel expenses won a chance to enroll in the training course. After its completion, a disappointed Miss Wright was sent home. However, a heavy influx of disabled overseas veterans resulted in a call from the war department and she wound up in Letterman Hospital, San Francisco, where she served as a physical therapist for more than a year.

With this background, upon her return to USC, she was offered a position as physical therapist for orthopedic doctors. Following graduation she carried on full-time. But Miss Wright quickly learned teaching in the Los Angeles School System was more lucrative, "with a full summer vacation as well," than being a therapist.

Assigned to Virgil Junior High School as the first corrective physical education instructor, she organized the department.

Later she became the school's health coordinator and eventually was named president of the Los Angeles City Health Coordinators' Association.

Miss Wright was asked to serve on the executive committee when the Los Angeles County chapter of the Muscular Dystrophy Association was organized in 1954. As might be expected, when she moved here she became a member of the first group of "Pink Ladies" at the Leisure World medical center.

In Leisure World she is a member of Panhellenic Club, Ebell Club, Geneva Presbyterian Church, Delta Kappa Gamma, and a charter board member of the Leisure World Historical Society.

Yet the impact of what Miss Wright has contributed to her fellow residents in other areas is eclipsed by her work in making possible the library with its almost 20,000 catalogued books.

Once the new library had been transformed from the old snack shop with the \$165,000 she had induced the Golden Rain Foundation to expend, Miss Wright decided the motley assortment of book shelves would look hideous in such a splendid structure. So she became a fund raiser again. This time she canvassed Leisure World's residents and clubs in quest of an additional \$15,000 for respectable shelving and furniture to put in the new library. This drive netted \$18,000.

On Nov. 19, 1976, Ernie Billman, Golden Rain president and Robert Price, Leisure World administrator for PCM joined Catherine Wright in the ribbon-cutting ceremony as 800 residents cheered.



Catherine Wright