

Neptunians Celebrate 100 Years



Neptunians Jan Dennis and Karen Russo toast to the 100-year anniversary of the Manhattan Beach Women's Club. Photo by Chris Barnes.

By Karen Russo

Alas, the day came. Sunday, May 17 was The Manhattan Beach Neptunian Women's Club's official 100-year anniversary celebration. The Hyperion Outfall Serenaders welcomed members and guests as they arrived at the clubhouse. Alive with a bustling crowd, flowers and balloons, pictures and memorabilia of the past 100 years, a bar, refreshments, and hand-scooped ice cream with toppings, it was a festive, pride-filled afternoon. The C-Nile Barbershop entertained singing old favorites from Tiger Rag to Sentimental Journey. A video, organized by event chairman, historian and author Jan Dennis, was shown throughout. It was a timeline of pictures from Dennis's vast collection reflecting the 100 years in the life of Neptunian activities, with talks by Mary Morigaki, Madelaine Wilson, Wilma Robinson and Helen Darby.

President Mary Morigaki introduced 50-year member Helen Darby and 49-year member Bettelu Beverly, acknowledging their lifetime of service to the organization. Two great-granddaughters of early member and activist Maude Withers were recognized, as was Sherwood Milleman, great-great nephew of Neptunian founder Jesse Smith. Milleman spoke about the history of his aunt and mother, two proper Victorian ladies who wore their white hair in buns, coming to Manhattan Beach in 1896 when the family had a large ranch between Pacific and Highland avenues and Second and Eighth streets for wheat farming.

Stephanie Fong, a Mira Costa High School senior, was awarded a check for \$100 as winner of the Neptunian contest, offered to Manhattan Beach students, to design the logo for the "Love Your Library" canisters. The canisters are placed in shops about town for donations toward the rebuilding or refurbishing of the library. In recognition of their 100

years of library support, the Neptunians chose this as a special project. Jan Dennis will be turning over memorabilia and books collected over a lifetime to what is hoped will be a room dedicated to Manhattan Beach history.

Manhattan Beach Mayor and Neptunian member Portia Cohen read a proclamation awarded by the City Council commending the Neptunians for 100 years of service. Before reading the proclamation, she asked to share her sentiment about being a Neptunian. "I close my eyes," she said, "and visualize a chain of women's arms, linked together in a long flowing line through time, spanning generations of pride, spirit, ethic, valor and purpose, bonding these Neptunian women seamlessly. And I imagine myself, arms linked to the women in this room today, together with those who served before us and those who will serve tomorrow. The gradual evolution of fashion and facial expression through the roaring '20s on to the American Depression of the '30s, the war effort of the '40s; the age of gadget invention in the '50s, through the Vietnam war, civil unrest and cultural upheaval of the '60s and '70s, the financial growth in the '80s and '90s, and today. I wonder will we wear on our faces the global recession of today when history records our service? Those in the next century of Neptunian women will make that determination."

Steven Napolitano, Deputy for County Supervisor Don Knabe, presented the club with a hand-painted scroll in commemoration. Napolitano said, "No one gets elected in this city without stepping through the Neptunian doors. They represent the best of the past, present and future." Proclamations were also presented and read by Sharon Hooper from the California Federation of Women's Clubs, and Patti Mahoney from the Manhattan Beach Chamber of Commerce, and were sent from the offices of Ted Lieu, State Assemblyman, 53rd District, and Jenny Oropeza, State Senator, 28th District.

Though it has come to my attention that the Manhattan Beach Community Church began in 1905, The Neptunian Women's Club was the first social, philanthropic organization in Manhattan Beach, and was the mover and shaker behind the city's early development.

The Neptunians are well known for their beginnings and how they immediately impacted the city. Ten women came together in 1909 when there were only 600 people living in town. Before they could even vote, they were the force behind Manhattan Beach becoming a city. They wanted their own school district, fire and police departments. They were responsible for the first library, school, tree planting, botanical garden, and Boy Scout troop. During the great wars, they wrapped bandages, sold war bonds, organized blood drives, and opened their

Neptunian Awards Photos

Photos by Chris Barnes



Tuesday, the 2009-10 Neptunian officers were installed during the Annual Scholarship Awards. (From left to right) Seated are Linda LeRoy-1st VP-Dean of Chairs, Barb Marpe-5th Director-House, Mary Morigaki-President. Back row (L to R) Terrill Burnett-3rd Director-Philanthropies, Karen Russo-4th Director Programs and Publicity, Mary Ralls-Corresponding Secretary, Sharon May-5th Director-House, Cheryl Essington-Treasurer, Elaine Trotter-3VP-Ways and Means, Val Rae-Financial Secretary, Robin Kirk-3rd Director-Philanthropies, Julie Meidroth-Parliamentarian, Mary Sue Brubaker-Auditor, Grettel Fournell-2nd VP-Membership and Maria Zebrowski-1st Director-Luncheons & Teas.



Taylor Spivey (center) with parents Marc and Bonnie. Taylor was awarded the Neptunian Academic Scholarship for \$2,000.



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clubhouse, built by them in 1925, as a canteen to soldiers passing through and Red Cross headquarters. They hosted the dedication of the City Hall in 1916, and again in 1975, serving 5,000 pieces of cake. In 1954, they had a tea celebrating 200 members.

Through the '70s and '80s, membership dwindled as it did in most organizations with women going to work, playing tennis and taking classes. But the Neptunians have bounced back with a 67 percent increase in membership during just the last two years. Th philanthropic work goes on with increased vigor, effort and funding. Recipients of their donations are: Star, which supports two residential homes in Torrance for mentally disabled adults; The Roundhouse Aquarium on the Manhattan Beach Pier; LA Sea Lab in Redondo Beach; Relay for Life for the American Cancer Society; Manhattan Heights Senior Club; South Bay Civic Light Opera; El Camino Ed Foundation Book Fund; Enrichment for Employment, which assists women entering the workforce; holiday dinner and gifts for needy families; Manhattan Beach Botanical Gardens, the non-profit volunteer run center at Polliwog Park, which nurtures native plants and holds classes about water resistant plants and environmentally sound practices; and The Wellness Community, a non-profit support group offering free psycho-social care for cancer patients, their families and caregivers. This is all in addition to the thousands of dollars given each year in scholarships to local graduating seniors

and to young artists participating in the Neptunians' art contest for each grade level in every school. And before every election, the Neptunians provide a candidate's forum open to the public.

Funding for these worthy causes comes from several fundraising events, including the annual fashion show, garage sale, sale of refreshments at the Pier Lighting, Hometown Fair booth, Holiday Gift Wrap, and two endowments, as well as the rental of the clubhouse, available for classes, bar mitzvahs and receptions.

To further contribute to the "Love Your Library" campaign, a 2010 Toyota Prius will be raffled at a December party. Fifty-dollar raffle tickets are being sold all year. If a thousand tickets are not sold, there will be a 50-50 split of the pot. Half the proceeds from ticket sales will go to the winner, and the other half to the Neptunians.

Each year, the California Federation of Women's Clubs issues awards for achievement in a variety of categories. The Neptunians took first place in Membership, Membership Reporting (by Linda Leroy), Fundraising Reporting (by Elaine Trotter), and Health and Literacy. They also earned second place for Arts in the Community, Leadership, and Beautification.

The Neptunians are going on to the next 100 years, living up to their motto, "Labor Omnia Vincit," (Work Conquers All).

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Julie Chen from Riviera Elementary and Amanda Ramos from 1st Lutheran enjoy the cool ice cream cones at the Neptunian Women's Club Ice Cream Social this past Sunday. Photo by Chris Barnes.



Neptunian Helen Darby (50 years) and Bettelu Beverly (49 years) with Neptunian President Mary Morigaki are honored as two of the longest active members of the group. Photo by Chris Barnes.