

Fairview Register

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Remembering Ruth Levin

BY MARY ELLEN GODDARD

Ruth Levin, who with her husband Richard Duree, has several times graced us at the Estancia with their Spanish dancing, has died.

Ruth and Richard are long-time members of the historical society, and often came to our monthly programs. Several times, they WERE the program. Richard is a folk dance educa-

tor, and Ruth often sewed costumes for the many types of folk and ballroom dance that they demonstrated. When we were re-doing one of our exhibits, Ruth made a complete outfit for our mannequin. It stands today as proof of her quality work.

Ruth was a lovely woman and will be greatly missed.

Left: Ruth Levin with husband Richard Duree. Photo by Dick Oakes.



Society Intern Puts Names to Faces

A new face can be seen around the Historical Society Museum this summer.

Jared Comini, a student at Vanguard University, is working with Mary Ellen Goddard and Bob Palazzola to identify and catalog Santa Ana Army Air Base class photos and the cadets they show.

The historical society's SAAAB collection contains hundreds of class photos. Many are poorly captioned. Others are captioned, but written in a scrawl difficult to decipher. Some, unfortunately, are not captioned at all.

Comini is adding information about the photos to the society's database. The goal is to make the photos easier to find for researchers, veterans, family members, and anyone else interested in those who trained here.

For the photographs to be found, it's



essential that the data is entered accurately. This is especially important when recording a person's name. Comini laboriously ensures the correct spelling for each name by cross-checking it with the society's collection of army records.

SAAAB opened during World War II, operating from 1942-1946. The sprawling complex covered over 10% of Costa Mesa's current area, and, fittingly, included Comini's Vanguard University.

Heroes Hall to Get Military Jet

A real A-4 Skyhawk will soon be mounted outside of Heroes Hall just north of the Walk of Honor. Groundbreaking is scheduled for 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Thursday, August 8. The unveiling will take place on November 9 during the Veterans Day celebration. The Vietnam-era aircraft will be relocated from the Santa Ana Civic Center to its new permanent home at the OC Fairgrounds.

AUGUST CALENDAR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Museum	Adobe
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Promoting and preserving Costa Mesa's history is our mission

STARTING THE COSTA MESA PLAYHOUSE

It took a long time for the “City of the Arts” to earn its name. When the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse was founded in 1965, community theaters had already sprung up in Huntington Beach, Newport, Laguna, Santa Ana, Tustin, and Westminster. Costa Mesa had some catching up to do.

But the city’s first cultural arts coordinator, the industrious Bette Berg, was the woman to do it. She founded the city’s first Cultural Arts Week, organized a community band, and launched the city’s classes in music, art, bridge, and knitting. The Playhouse grew out of one of these programs.

The program was created to form a teen drama workshop. At first, the city had a hard time keeping it going. Then one day Berg asked a local theater director whether she had a script the kids could borrow. Yes, the director said. She met with Berg, and soon she agreed to help get the workshop off the ground. The director’s name was Pati Tambellini.

Tambellini had made a name for herself in the world of “little theater,” both as an actor and a director, in Newport, Laguna and Huntington Beach. A year prior she had won best director, best set designer, and best supporting actress for her work with the Newport Harbor Players. By the end of 1964, after 12 years of directing, she was ready to “retire for about the 80th time.” Then fate took over.

She went into the workshop with low expectations. It would be a small group and she would have to take it slow, with just the basics.

But when she arrived that first Saturday morning, she found a large group of “the most enthusiastic batch of kids I have ever met in my life.” Before the day was through, they made her guarantee that they would produce a play.

The theater was then located in an old Air Base building on the OC Fairgrounds. Everything had to be built from scratch. Tambellini liked to refer to the Playhouse as “Pinchpenny Theater.” They had no lights, no flats, and no money. Mothers donated old furniture and brought in patio lights to illuminate the stage. Old bed sheets were repurposed to cover the flats. And the flats were built from — well, it’s possible a nearby housing contractor needed to refill his wood supply.

The kids rehearsed after school and Saturday mornings. On Sundays, Tambellini and her brother-in-law, Jack Murray, a respected theater technician, hammered away at the sets, bringing them to life. Tambellini worked without pay.

Finally, at the start of 1965, *Girl Crazy* debuted to the public. It was a hit. It was carried over, and parents of younger children began asking Tambellini for a workshop for them. Later, an original production of the *Bedraggled Dragon* debuted with a cast of 49 kids.

Adults started paying attention, including two prominent

Costa Mesans: councilman and former mayor Alvin Pinkley and his wife, the tireless philanthropist Lucille.

“This is something that has long been needed,” Pinkley said. “We’ve been behind many other cities in this regard for some time.” Bette Berg, he said, has “done an outstanding job with our cultural program and this new group will have the wholehearted support of the city.”

Tambellini called the Pinkleys the “guardian angels” of the Playhouse.

They brought audience members, publicity, and donations to the burgeoning theater. When Lucille invited a group of wives of city staffers (and a *Daily Pilot* editor) to a tea party, she said, “You guys are the ones who should support it,” and the Playhouse Patrons’ association was born.

The first adult production of the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse opened in June 1965. Pati Tambellini directed a version of the hit Broadway comedy and Rock Hudson movie, *Send Me No Flowers*. Although the night began, according to one critic, with “awkward staging, opening night jitters, and what might be termed an uncomfortable tempo of communication,” by the time the final curtain fell the cast had delivered “top-notch situation comedy.”

The opening night audience was filled with city officials. Unlike professional theaters such as South Coast Repertory (which arrived in Costa Mesa two years later), community theaters welcome actors with little or no experience. One first-timer remembers being so intimidated on opening night he forgot all of his lines as soon as he stepped on stage. Nevertheless, he would later credit the Playhouse and Pati Tambellini with changing the course of his life. That actor was Tom Titus, theater critic for the *Daily Pilot* for the past 54 years and director of the Irvine Community Theater for 31.

Another recognizable name associated with the early Playhouse is Barbara Van Holt. Before she became Estancia’s award-winning drama teacher, she directed teen productions and acted in adult productions at the Playhouse. Oh, and another occasional actress? Bette Berg.

The Playhouse staged its second production, *Night Must Fall*, in September, followed by *Enter Laughing* and *The Women*. The blockbuster line-up of the second season featured *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Mister Roberts*, and *Come Back, Little Sheba*. The teen division continued right along, too.

Pati Tambellini served as the driving force behind the theater until 1988, capping off her career by acting in a production of *Harvey*. During those 23 years she saw the Playhouse rise to an award-winning company and spearheaded the theater’s move to Rea School, where it remains today.

The Costa Mesa Playhouse’s 55th season is now underway. It’s independent now, no longer sponsored by the city. But its mission remains the same: quality performance at an affordable price, welcoming everyone to the magic of the theater.



Pati Tambellini



Bette Berg



Kathy Bequette (fourth from left) is retiring after many years of service.

Thank You, Kathy Bequette, for Your Years of Service

A special luncheon was held in July to say "thank you" to Kathy Bequette for the many years of service she dedicated to the historical society. As a volunteer, the former schoolteacher did a little bit of everything. She was a docent at the adobe, she managed the society's collection of newspaper clippings, she provided treats for monthly events, and more. Even those who have never met her may recognize her voice: For years she made the monthly telephone calls inviting members to upcoming events. Kathy served on the society's board from 2003-2013, and in 2007 she was honored with the society's Living Memorial Award. We are sad to see Kathy go, but wish her the best in retirement. Thank you for everything, Kathy!



Wahoo's Founders Named Costa Mesa Notables

The Costa Mesa Historical Preservation Committee has named Wing Lam, Ed Lee, and Mingo Lee as Costa Mesa notables. The brothers started what would become the Wahoo's Fish Taco empire right here in 1988. They chose their location on Placentia because of its proximity to Costa Mesa's surf industry.

Award-Winning Architect Cesar Pelli Passes Away

The architect behind two of Costa Mesa's most significant buildings passed away this July. Cesar Pelli designed the Segerstrom Concert Hall and the award-winning Plaza Tower office building nearby. Pelli is best known, perhaps, as the architect of the Petronas Towers, the tallest twin towers in the world. The photo at left shows the landmark Plaza Tower near South Coast Plaza, mirrored by Richard Serra's "Connector."

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Every time you start your order with Amazon Smile, Amazon will donate to the Costa Mesa Historical Society – at no cost to you. Visit costamesahistory.org/smile before making your next purchase. You can use your existing Amazon account.

Temporary Parking Instructions

Entry to the historical society parking lot is currently limited to Anaheim Avenue, but this is subject to change. If Anaheim is closed, try Park Avenue. The project should be completed by spring 2020.

Make a Difference – Volunteer

We're looking for part-time volunteers to set up and conduct tours of the **adobe**. We'll train you on everything you need to know. We're also looking for a volunteer to sit on two committees: the **Newsletter Assembly Committee** prepares the newsletter for mailing, while the **Adobe Committee** recruits volunteers to plan an event, become a docent, or work on exhibits. Committees meet monthly and are chaired by board members. Interested? Visit costamesahistory.org/volunteer. Isn't it more fun to work as a team?

Dues Overdue?

Make sure your dues are up to date by looking at your **dues expiration date** on the address label to the right of your name. If your dues are due, renew online at costamesahistory.org/membership, mail in a check, c/o Susan Weeks, Treasurer, or drop it off on a Thursday or Friday from 10am to 3pm. Membership dues are listed on the back page.

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* Or schedule an appointment at 949-631-5918.

I N S I D E

Costa Mesa Playhouse: Year One
Remembering Ruth Levin
Putting Faces to Names & More!

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