

Published June 22nd, 2011

## Lunch of the (Three-Quarter) Century

Cathy Dausman



The Longest Married Couple: Aileen and Tom Deahl. He's 96; they've been married 70 years. She says the secret to their happy marriage is same as the song: Accentuate the Positive Photo Doug Kohen this community."

Orinda residents Tom and Aileen Deahl were recognized as the longest-married couple in attendance. They have faithfully attended Three-Quarter Century Club luncheons since the very first, held at Wagner Ranch Elementary. Deahl was a research chemist for Shell Oil in Emeryville; his wife substitute taught in Orinda schools until she was 80. "We haven't missed one [lunch]," said Aileen. Added Tom: "I've never seen so many old people in one place!" Aileen says the secret to their 70-year marriage comes from the song "Accentuate the Positive." Except for four years in Texas, the Deahls have lived in Orinda since 1951. "The smartest thing was we never sold our house in Orinda," said Aileen.

Orinda resident Molly Gravelle was crowned Century Club queen. Gravelle taught for twenty years at Miramonte High (Mechanical Drawing and Home Design) before she retired in 1975. The baby, the king and the queen each received a commemorative plaque, and Mayor Victoria Smith marked the event with a proclamation. "These people worked for [city] incorporation and made Orinda what it is today," Smith said.

This year's guest speaker was Bette Budde, a former Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) who joined in 1943. "How many of you remember World War II?" she asked in her opening remarks. Every hand shot up. Accompanying Budde were fellow WASPs A.J. Starr and Maggie Gee. The trio explained how each came to belong to the highly selective women's corps. Budde and Gee wore scarves commemorating the Congressional gold medals they received at a Washington, D.C. ceremony honoring WASPs last year.

Shaffer says next year's date has already been reserved (in June), and says her volunteers will all be back. The event closed with Orinda Idols Neris Newton and Jacqueline Garrel singing "Sentimental Journey." For those in attendance, it was sentimental indeed.



Ron Loos, the "Baby of the Year" turned 75 in May. Tom Deahl and Molly Gravelle, the club's new King and Queen, are both 96. And the Longest-Married Couple, Deahl and his wife Aileen, has been married 70 years. Welcome to the Three-Quarter Century Club luncheon, held June 15 at Orinda Community Church. The free lunch celebrated Orinda residents who've reached their seventy-fifth birthday milestone, and keep on going. It is only the second Three-Quarter Century Club in the U.S.

The Orinda luncheon originated in 2000, when Rotary member John Fazel borrowed the idea from his hometown of Perry, Iowa. Fazel recalls attending the Perry lunch with his mother and delighted in seeing old neighbors and his Boy Scout leader. Three organizations sponsor the event: Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, Fazel's employer, Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate/Mason-McDuffie, and Orinda Community Church. Fazel, who co-chairs the event, emceed the lunch wearing his father's tuxedo.

While 130 seniors dined on a roast chicken meal, a staff of 30 volunteers worked behind the scenes to make it successful. Co-chair Lisa Shaffer, a BHG Mason-McDuffie realtor, was busy overseeing volunteers who set up, prepared and served food and cleaned up afterwards. "This community is what it is today because they [seniors] did what they did...We're so fortunate that we are a part of

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From left, Maggie Gee, A.J. Starr and Bette Budde Photo Doug Kohen

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