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Citizen of the Year exemplifies 'service above self'

By Pippa Fisher



Don Jenkins Photo Pippa Fisher

This year's Citizen of the Year does not sit still and let life come to him; he makes things happen. Don Jenkins was given the honor this year in a unanimous vote, selected from an extremely talented pool of nominees.

Jenkins has taken on leadership roles in so many organizations over the years it is hard to keep track of them all. He says it all started soon after he graduated, with the Junior Chamber of Commerce - an organization for the young in business - and their efforts on a project to get seat belts in all cars.

Born in Berkeley and raised in Danville, Jenkins, the son of a naval chaplain, spent some time in Rhode Island where he graduated from high school before returning to California, graduating from UC Berkeley in 1963 and marrying his wife Linda (Becky) the same year. Linda, a nurse, is no slouch herself with much of her volunteer work done overseas.

"She's as much a part of this as I am," Jenkins says.

The couple moved to Lafayette in 1970, and have two daughters, Renee and Diana, who attended Acalanes High School. Jenkins coached soccer, "despite not knowing any of the rules," he says. He also coached softball and baseball for his daughters through their junior year. He and Linda now have three grandchildren.

Jenkins owned and operated Lafayette Square Insurance Services until he retired three years ago. He received the Business Person of the Year award in 1996 and was the Chamber of Commerce President in 1995.

Jenkins served on the Mt. Diablo Estate Planners Council and Planned Giving Council of Northern California and has helped countless people find what they want to make as their legacy, through foundations. He says by sharing his financial expertise he is able to act as an intermediary between organizations and individuals.

He was a founding member of the Lafayette Community Foundation in 1999, which led to involvement with the financial planning for the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

LCF Board President Cheryl Noll says that Jenkins gets more accomplished in one day volunteering than most people do in a month or even a year.

"The Lafayette community has been so fortunate to be on the receiving end of his generosity and spirit. Part of Don's energy has been funneled into the Lafayette Community Foundation, where he was an integral part of raising money for the Lafayette Library and Learning Center," comments Noll.

Jenkins says he enjoys being involved in the early stages of projects. He was part of the fundraising team that made the California Shakespeare Festival in Orinda a reality, and is a member of the Sunrise Rotarians, where he served as both Rotary president and national advisor to the Rotary Foundation.

Last year's Citizens of the Year, Dick and Robin Holt say the community is the better for his accomplishments. "Don has given so much to our community over many decades.

He epitomizes the Rotary motto of service over self," says fellow-Rotarian Dick Holt.

Jenkins has traveled with Linda to many countries to deliver artificial (LN-4) hands - a project sponsored by Rotarians worldwide. He has also accompanied Linda teaching English to non-English speakers, most recently to Taiwan.

He was a founding member of the Lamorinda Village and says that Marshall Duncan, whom he met at the Lafayette Community Foundation, has been a role model for him and is one of the reasons he co-chaired the Senior Symposium for five years. Duncan thinks Jenkins is very deserving of the honor and notes his ability to "keep things going," adding, "He's helped an awful lot."

Jenkins is active within the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church and was a founding trustee. He said

following his election as an elder, his responsibility was for seniors. He brought in "Thursday Fellowship," a weekly lunch, with activities and speakers for seniors. He points to work that was being done by the Rotarians on a monthly basis providing home care to seniors that he introduced at LOPC and which eventually led to Lamorinda Village.

It is really in the service to seniors, he says, that he has found his passion. He says it is about helping people as they age find where they fit. His work with Lamorinda Village helps people stay in their own homes, and he stresses the importance of creating meaningful service work for seniors, too. "Their activity gives them meaning and purpose," he explains.

Jenkins is currently involved with the new Cancer Support Community, working to bring the new building to Lafayette, which he says will offer so much. His family has been on the receiving end of such support. He wants to see Lafayette set the precedent with this new facility.

Somehow this man manages to find time for other interests too. He enjoys sailing, which he says he took up at age 16 in Rhode Island. He has more than 18,000 miles of ocean sailing experience, including trips from New Caledonia to New Zealand and Fiji to New Zealand plus coastal sailing, delivering boats from the Caribbean to New York and from Canada to New York.

Linda Jenkins says that she considers herself so privileged to live so many years with this man. "He does so much for so many," she adds.

Jenkins' service will be celebrated at a dinner at the Lafayette Park Hotel on April 13. To register, visit the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce website: www.lafayettechamber.org.

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