

Cathedral City – Bill Kelly

Bill, 72, was born in San Diego and grew up in Los Angeles. His parents owned a travel trailer in the Coachella Valley, where he frequently spent his weekends during the winter.

After graduating from George Washington High School, he attended Los Angeles Harbor Junior College. Bill moved to Riverside in 1965 and transferred to Riverside City College where he continued taking classes in law enforcement.

In 1967, Bill started a part-time job with Pacific Telephone while waiting to begin a law enforcement career. He reconsidered his path and continued to work for Pacific Bell/AT&T for 30 years. As a manager, he traveled and worked between San Francisco, San Diego, Orange County and Riverside County. Bill managed more than 100 employees and implemented a self-management program for non-management employees.

During that time, Bill joined the Free Masons to honor and follow in his father's footsteps.

Bill retired in 1997, and moved to Lake Arrowhead. He moved to Cathedral City in 2010.

Bill greatly enjoys volunteering and giving back when he is able. During his working career, he volunteered with little leagues and at the YMCA, coaching baseball, softball and basketball at Notre Dame High School in Riverside and Rim of the World High School in Lake Arrowhead.

Passionate for public safety, Bill began volunteering with the Citizens on Patrol in his community, Date Palm Country Club. He composed the community newsletters until recently.

In 2014, Bill joined the Cathedral City Citizens on Patrol and began volunteering at S.O.S. (Soldiers Organized Services). With S.O.S., he gives back to the military by picking up Marines from the Palm Springs International Airport and driving them to the Twentynine Palms Marine Base and other local destinations.

When Bill is not volunteering, he enjoys fishing, playing golf, and traveling with his family.

Bill's wife, Mary, had the biggest impact on his life. Mary keeps Bill focused and is understanding.

His advice to younger generations is to be caring to others and your elders. He also stresses the importance of not being afraid to ask questions. He wishes he had asked more questions of his parents about family history.

Bill has two daughters, a son, four grandchildren and a rescue German Shepherd named Gunner.

Coachella – Grace Vega

Grace, 74, was born in Indio and is a lifelong resident of the Coachella Valley.

She attended all local schools: John Kelley Elementary School, Bobby Duke Middle School, and Coachella Valley High School. After high school, Grace worked at a manufacturing company for a year.

Grace worked for the Coachella Valley Unified School District for 40 years, starting as an instructional aide. She enjoyed working and caring for the youth, from kindergarten to high school students.

Throughout that time, she met the love of her life, Joe, and married in 1967. They have been together for more than 50 years.

After her retirement, Grace began volunteering at the F.I.S.H Food Bank of the lower Coachella Valley. For the last 12 years, she has spent most of her time volunteering and helping those in need. Grace starts her weekdays at 8 a.m. assisting and distributing food to families and stays until 11:15 a.m. The gratitude and smiles on the faces of families makes her volunteer experience worthwhile.

Grace appreciates the time she spends with her family. Her family has a longstanding tradition of getting together on Sundays for barbecues. All her family gathers and spends great quality time with each other. Some of her favorite places to visit are Disneyland and Laguna Beach.

She enjoys sewing as well as watching and attending NFL games. Her team of choice is the Rams, especially now that they have returned to Southern California. Grace and Joe belong to the Coachella Valley Rams Forever Club in Coachella.

Her advice to younger generations is to stay in school, go to college and get a great career. Her husband and her children have made the biggest impact in her life.

Grace is proud to have a large family. She has three children, seven grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and an adorable Chihuahua named Lala.

Desert Hot Springs – Rosemary Stonick

Rosemary, 91, was born and raised in Elk River, Minnesota, one of 11 children.

Rosemary attended St. Cloud College in Minnesota, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Education in 1964. In 1967, she traveled to Ponce, Puerto Rico and took numerous courses to learn Spanish. She taught in Puerto Rico and was proud of her ability to teach the first grade curriculum in complete Spanish. She received her Master's in Education from Flagstaff College in 1974.

Rosemary's passion is teaching. After returning from Ponce, she wanted to go out west. She applied for teaching jobs in Arizona, California and New Mexico. Ever since "California answered" in 1974, Rosemary has been in the Coachella Valley and Desert Hot Springs. She was assigned to Desert Hot Springs Elementary School. Among her notable kindergarten students is Desert Hot Springs Mayor Scott Matas.

Rosemary's teaching career spanned more than 36 years. Last year, she fully retired when she quit subbing, at the age of 89!

Rosemary began volunteering with local philanthropist Guy Tedesco more than 42 years ago, long before he founded Food Now, the nonprofit he is famously associated with starting in 1989. Food Now began in Guy's house, which he stocked with extra food and opened his doors to anyone needing food assistance.

Rosemary has continued her commitment to providing food to those who need it. Her duties include separating and boxing donated food items from local Desert Hot Springs stores. Rosemary has earned the nickname, the "Egg Lady," for her attentiveness in going through egg cartons to ensure none are cracked before being placed into boxes for Food Now clients.

Rosemary was fortunate to travel the world with her husband, Michael, before his passing in 2010. Their favorite vacation spot was the Galapagos Islands. Rosemary and Michael were "rock hounds" who, for 35 years, did lapidary work: hunting for rocks, picking up rocks, cutting them, polishing them and displaying them at shows in Yucca Valley. They even spent six months mining gold in Alaska.

Rosemary continues her various craft works, completing approximately two craft projects per month.

Rosemary encourages today's youth to follow their instincts, be good, do what they think is right and be kind to others.

Indian Wells – Margaret “Peggy” Bernthal

Peggy, 88, was born and raised in Binghamton, New York.

Peggy attended the Hospital School of Nursing in Rochester, New York in 1951 and was a Registered Nurse (RN) for seven years. She worked in the intensive care unit and the operating rooms. Peggy traveled and worked at UCLA hospital, one of the first hospitals to have an intensive care unit. She was also a camp nurse at the Adirondacks Park in New York.

Peggy and her husband, Hal, married in 1958 and have been together for 60 years. They moved to the Coachella Valley in 1986. The warmth of the valley during the winter months drew them to stay.

Peggy’s favorite vacation spot is Lake Geneva in Wisconsin, just across the border from Illinois, and 55 miles north of their summer home in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Peggy has been actively involved with The Living Desert since joining as a Life Member 30 years ago. After becoming acquainted with what they do, she became a park volunteer to further her interest in interpreting the desert and its animals to teach the importance of desert conservation to schoolchildren.

Peggy has served as a docent with students on field trips, giraffe host, special events and zone interpreter. In 2001, she joined the board of trustees and was part of the executive committee from 2005-2014 and Chairman of the Board from 2009-2011.

She has also given support to the College of the Desert, Hidden Harvest, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Coachella Valley, Eisenhower Medical Center and Palm Springs Friends of the Philharmonic.

Her hobbies include painting with watercolors and acrylic. Peggy is a member of the Artists of Ironwood Country Club and participates in their art shows. She is member of a book club, and has also volunteered in the Women’s Auxiliary at Lake Forest Hospital.

Peggy encourages the younger generation to pay attention to other people in the world, take part and do something positive for humanity.

Peggy has three children and three grandchildren. She is very proud that there are three generations of nurses in her family.

Indio – Nellie Ortega

Nellie, 78, was born in Granada, Colorado, and grew up in Stockton, California and Los Angeles. Her father, Jose, instilled in her a strong work ethic and giving mindset.

Nellie began her career with Metropolitan Transit as an information operator. In 1971, she started working for the Greyhound Company as an information manager and in finance. She climbed the ranks to become general manager of the information center.

For three years, Nellie traveled the country on behalf of Greyhound to train managers. She stayed in Florida, Texas, Oregon, Idaho, New York and Washington, among many. Although these were work trips, she felt as if she was on vacation. Her favorite place was New York, where she stayed for three months.

In 1986, she transferred to the Greyhound agency in Indio, and has made the Coachella Valley her home ever since.

In 1993, Nellie made a career change and went to work for SunLine Transit Agency as a supervisor in the Telephone Information Center. Her duties included coordinating outreach events and reviewing applicants for the para-transit service, which she found very rewarding. She retired with SunLine in 2007.

Since 2009, Nellie has worn a uniform and a badge as a volunteer with the Indio Police Department (IPD) and Citizens Helping Indio Police (CHIP) Program. Nellie has served as CHIP Field Training Officer and CHIP Corporal, and currently is the CHIP Sergeant. Nellie's main activities include coordinating community outreach, attending community events and coordinating activities for the volunteer outreach unit.

Nellie has contributed nearly 3,000 volunteer hours with IPD and CHIP, the equivalent of nearly two years of full-time service.

Nellie's colleagues in the CHIP program say that she "is not loud or seeks attention or recognition. She humbly and respectfully goes about her day throughout the station, always with that genuine and warm smile of hers lighting up people's days."

Nellie and her partner, Daniel, have been together for more than 35 years. Nellie's joy in her life are her two sons. Her youngest son passed away in 2009.

Nellie and Daniel have two dogs, a toy poodle and a malamute.

La Quinta – Patricia “Pat” Clapp

Pat, 81, was born and raised in Los Angeles, California.

As a teenager, Pat frequented Catalina Island and vacationed there with friends. She enjoyed the beach, restaurants, friendly people and the beauty of the island. To this day, she has fond memories of these good times, and Catalina remains a favorite go-to location, remaining mostly unchanged from when she visited in her youth.

Pat worked in the automobile leasing business, held different positions at accounting firms and worked part-time when she moved to the Coachella Valley with her husband, Sonny, 24 years ago.

Pat cherishes the memories of welcoming their son, Donnie, and daughter, Laura, both through adoption.

Pat enjoys all types of crafts and volunteering. She is the co-founder of the Culver City Historical Society and has volunteered with the Culver City YMCA and the Reach to Recovery Program through the American Cancer Society in Los Angeles for more than 10 years, assisting patients who have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Pat was a volunteer at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. She and her friend volunteered at the gymnastic competitions held at UCLA.

Locally, Pat has been involved with the Barbara Sinatra Children’s Center, animal therapy at the Curci Cancer Center at Eisenhower Medical Center, and is presently active with the La Quinta Wellness Center.

At the Wellness Center, Pat helps with weekly sign-ups for participants in the FIND Food Bank Bread Program. She assists in the monthly luncheon, helping to serve food and aiding with set-up and tear down.

She particularly enjoys interacting with the people at the La Quinta Wellness Center and making people laugh and smile. She still has her Olympic volunteer uniform and has worn it at the center’s Halloween parties.

It is no surprise that Pat’s advice for today’s youth is to smile more, be kind to one another and to be more understanding.

Pat is a 38-year breast cancer survivor. In June, she and Sonny will celebrate 59 years of marriage.

Palm Desert – Jacqueline “Jackie” Wagner

Jackie, 85, was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. As a child in the 1930s, she visited the Coachella Valley on numerous occasions and developed an early interest in the desert.

Jackie earned her undergraduate degree at the University of California, Berkeley in 1954, began teaching in the Bay Area, and later earned her Master’s degree.

In 1965, Jackie came to the Coachella Valley to teach in the original Cathedral City Elementary School. She taught for more than 30 years, teaching bilingual, and gifted second, third and fourth grade students.

Jackie was named Teacher of the Year several times for her outstanding work. She was instrumental in creating a two-night outdoor education science camp for third graders at Pathfinder Ranch in Mountain Center. The program was a success and spread to other elementary schools in the district.

After retirement, Jackie began volunteering at the Living Desert where she is currently a Giraffe Safari Host. Over the past 24 years at the park, she has served as a docent mentor, animal handler, and butterfly host. Jackie excelled in leading school tours, and she worked to develop high quality outreach curriculum for Coachella Valley schools. She is passionate about guiding younger children to appreciate nature and develop a love for the plants and animals of the desert.

In 2015, out of nearly 500 active volunteers, Jackie was selected as The Living Desert’s Volunteer of the Year. The Living Desert keeps her connected to a learning community.

She works with youth to develop a greater level of interest in their surrounding ecosystems. Her advice is to, “put down the electronic devices. Go outside, learn about and enjoy your natural surroundings.”

Jackie loves the surrounding Coachella Valley mountains, and has hiked many of the trails with her family.

Jackie and her husband, Kenneth, have been married for more than 62 years, and have four daughters. Each of them have followed in their mother’s footsteps and become teachers.

She has three grandchildren, all of whom are passionate about the natural world. She also has a Border Collie named Fly and two rescue dogs, Tucker and Red.

Palm Springs – Kenneth “Ken” Behrens

Ken, 80, was born and raised in Georgetown, Texas. He completed his college education at the University of Texas and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Ken worked for the J.C. Penney Company for 30 years. He worked his way up to become a manager in 1971. Founder James Cash Penney personally pinned Ken with his manager pin during a ceremony honoring new managers. It was the last ceremony that Mr. Penney attended, and Ken’s proudest professional moment.

Ken managed several stores in Texas, and worked on a special project for J.C. Penney in New York City for two years.

While in Texas, Ken was part of the Temple, Texas Rotary Club and served on its board and became president of the club. “Once a Rotarian, always a Rotarian” is his motto.

In 2002, Ken and his partner, Hal, decided to retire in Palm Springs. Ken never experienced the desert before, and the change was an adjustment for him. He enjoys living in the desert and the history of Palm Springs and Nellie Coffman holds his interest.

Although retired, Ken still keeps his hand in retail, having volunteered at Revivals and currently at the thrift store at Mizell Senior Center. He teaches the AARP safe driving course at Joslyn Center and every month at Mizell. The course aids mature drivers to drive longer by developing new strategies and tactics.

Ken volunteers at his church, the Metropolitan Church of the Coachella Valley.

Before Hal passed away in 2017, it was their goal to travel to Italy. Last October, Ken completed this trip to honor Hal’s memory. He visited Venice, Florence, Sorrento and finished the trip in Rome. He traveled with a good friend who spoke fluent Italian. Ken and Hal were together for 16 years.

In his spare time, Ken enjoys reading and gardening.

His advice for the younger generation is to never be afraid of trying something new, saying that the way to stay young is to think young and do things that get you off the couch.

Ken has a son and daughter and three grandchildren.

Rancho Mirage – Patsy “Pat” Manhart

Pat, 85, was born and raised in Illinois.

Pat’s career was in the hearing aid profession. She got her start in the field when she was 25. In 1966, she moved her business and family to Pasadena, California, where she stayed for 26 years.

Throughout her career, Pat has been active within the Hearing Aid Association. She became the president of California Hearing Aid Association, which represented hearing aid dispensers in California that were members of the Association. She became National Board-Certified in Hearing Instrument Sciences (NBC/HS) in 1973, the first year the certification was available. Pat taught Hearing Aid Dispensing at Cerritos College in California for three years, 1972-1975.

Pat and Joe married and moved to Menifee, California with the intention of retiring. However, after only four months, they purchased a hearing aid office. They later sold the business in 1999 and moved to Rancho Mirage, again with the intent to retire. After only three months in Rancho Mirage, they purchased Advanced Hearing Systems and ran the business together. On their fourth attempt, they officially retired in 2014!

Pat and Joe are avid volunteers and patrons of the Starkey Hearing Foundation, whose mission is to give hearing aids to children and adults who cannot afford them. Pat has visited 26 countries on various Starkey Hearing missions providing and fitting hearing aids for children and adults in impoverished and low-income regions.

On a mission to China, Pat encountered a 102-year-old man, who had not heard in 70 years. The man’s 70-year-old son brought him in to be fitted for hearing aids. He was fitted with moderately powered aids and he heard beautifully! Father and son embraced each other, cried and laughed, sharing that moment of joy with Pat.

Pat and Joe are still active in the Starkey Hearing Foundation and recently returned from two missions in Armenia and the Philippines.

Pat is also an active Rotarian in the Rancho Mirage Rotary. She has served as president of the Rancho Mirage Chamber of Commerce Board and was a board member for more than four years.

Pat and Joe will celebrate 29 years of marriage. In 2010, the duo was recognized as Distinguished Citizens of the Year for Rancho Mirage.

Pat has two daughters, a son and a stepson. Her family constantly reminds her that she is a trendsetter. Four of eight grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren are in the hearing aid business.

Riverside County – Joe Fleischman

Joe, 87, was born and raised in Tampa, Florida.

In 1951, Joe enlisted in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, and was stationed in Cuba. Joe later attended the University of Florida and graduated with a degree in journalism in 1955.

Joe's career spanned from diplomacy, advertising, the music industry, videos and film studios, working at the United Nations, Billboard and Republic Pictures. While at Billboard, he worked on the 40-page Bee Gees special edition magazine, the largest issue Billboard ever had to that point.

Joe volunteered on John F. Kennedy's campaign and traveled coast to coast for him. He spent election night at the Grand Canyon. President Kennedy's youthful energy and timelessness continues to inspire him.

Joe lived and worked in New York. On a late, foggy night, Joe called a cab for a woman standing on the corner of 3rd Avenue and 61st Street, outside the UN Building. When he opened the door for her, Joe was stunned when he recognized that he just assisted Eleanor Roosevelt!

For the last 22 years, Joe has been a sworn volunteer with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department at the Palm Desert Station. He has been involved in different aspects of the department, including the crime analysis department. His work in that unit included piecing together all the clues and details of a crime together for the investigators, similar to a roadmap of what transpired.

Joe leads an active lifestyle. He goes to the gym to work out four to five times a week, waking up at 3:30 in the morning!

He enjoys watching old movies, which he considers to be new to him. His favorite is "GWTW" – Gone With The Wind, for Hattie McDaniel's strong performance.

Joe encourages the younger generation to keep trying even if you fail, to dust yourself off and start all over again. He holds that advice as part of his career success, as it has never failed him.

In 2007, Joe was recognized as Riverside County's Volunteer of the Year for his longtime service within the Sheriff's Department. The City of Palm Desert proclaimed November 23, 2007 as "Joe Fleischman Day."

Joe is extremely humbled and honored to be recognized as one of this year's Senior Inspiration Awards honorees, stating that this honor is his crown achievement.

Riverside County – Juanita Linares

Juanita, 69, was born in the capitol of Mexico, Mexico City. At an early age she moved to Zacatecas, where she was raised by her grandparents. In 1964, Juanita immigrated to California with her parents.

When Juanita first moved to California, she lived on a farm in Mecca, where her father, Jesus, worked for many years.

In 1969, she married Ramon and started a new family. In the late 1970s, after her children began to attend school, she worked in the agricultural industry for nearly 25 years.

Juanita worked for an agricultural company for 12 years. She started picking crops for the first few years and then shifted to sorting citrus products such as limes, oranges and grapefruit. After many seasons in the company, Juanita moved on to Sun World and worked there for approximately 12 more years. At Sun World, she mainly sorted a variety of crops like carrots and corn.

Juanita loves her community of Thermal, where she has lived since 1984. She enjoys volunteering at the Jerry Rummonds Memorial Community & Senior Center, located in Thermal. She visits the center frequently, from Monday through Friday, and has been going for about 10 years now.

Juanita helps to make various crafts for different events and luncheons at the center. She enjoys knitting and painting.

Christine Pimentel, community services coordinator at the center says: “Juanita is very patient and extremely giving. She enjoys helping her fellow seniors with crafts. When she learns a new method, she is happy to teach others how. She is very humble and motivating without expecting anything in return.”

Juanita loved her work, but what she really appreciates is spending time with her grandchildren and watching them grow. One of Juanita’s fondest memories and what affected her life tremendously, was being raised by her grandparents. She did not travel much throughout those years, but when she did have a chance, her favorite places were Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Seattle, Washington. Juanita has family in both cities.

Juanita’s advice to today’s younger generation is to never give up and fight for your dreams.

Juanita has four children, six grandchildren and two great grandchildren. She hopes to watch them achieve their goals and dreams by choosing great careers.

Juanita, de 69 años, nació en la capital de México, la Ciudad de México. A una edad temprana se mudó a Zacatecas, donde fue criada por sus abuelos. En 1964, Juanita emigró a California con sus padres.

Cuando Juanita se mudó por primera vez a California, vivía en un rancho en la comunidad de Mecca, donde su padre, Jesús, trabajó durante muchos años.

En 1969, se casó con Ramón y comenzó una nueva familia. A finales de 1970, después de que sus hijos comenzaron a asistir a la escuela, trabajó en la industria agrícola, donde trabajó durante casi 25 años.

Juanita trabajó para una empresa agrícola durante 12 años. Ella comenzó en la cosecha durante los primeros años y luego paso a clasificar los productos cítricos como el limón, naranja y toronja. Después de muchas temporadas en la compañía, Juanita se mudó a trabajar a Sun World, y trabajó allí aproximadamente 12 años más. En Sun World, principalmente se encargaba de clasificar una variedad de cultivos como las zanahorias y el maíz.

Juanita ama a su comunidad de Thermal, donde ha vivido desde 1984. Disfruta ser voluntaria en Jerry Rummonds Memorial Community & Senior Center, ubicado en la comunidad de Thermal. Ella visita el centro con frecuencia, de lunes a viernes, y ha estado yendo durante 10 años.

Juanita ayuda a hacer varias manualidades y comidas para diferentes eventos en el centro. Le gusta tejer y pintar.

Christine Pimentel, coordinadora de servicios comunitarios en el centro dice: ‘Juanita es muy paciente y muy servicial. Le gusta ayudar a sus compañeros con manualidades. Cuando aprende nuevos métodos, ella está feliz de enseñar a otros cómo hacerlos. Ella es muy humilde y motivadora sin esperar nada a cambio.’

Juanita amaba su trabajo, pero lo que realmente valora es pasar tiempo con sus nietos y verlos crecer. Uno de los mejores recuerdos de Juanita y lo que afectó su vida tremendamente fue que la criaron sus abuelos. Ella no viajó mucho durante de esos años, pero cuando tuvo la oportunidad; sus lugares favoritos eran Milwaukee, Wisconsin y Seattle, Washington. Juanita tiene familia en ambas ciudades.

El consejo de Juanita para la generación más joven de hoy, es nunca rendirse y luchar por sus sueños. Juanita tiene cuatro hijos, seis nietos y dos bisnietos. Ella espera verlos alcanzar sus metas y sueños eligiendo grandes carreras.