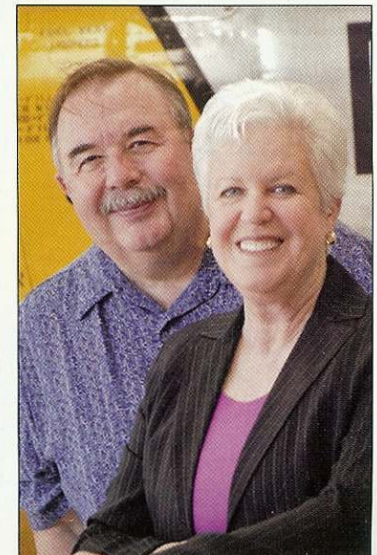
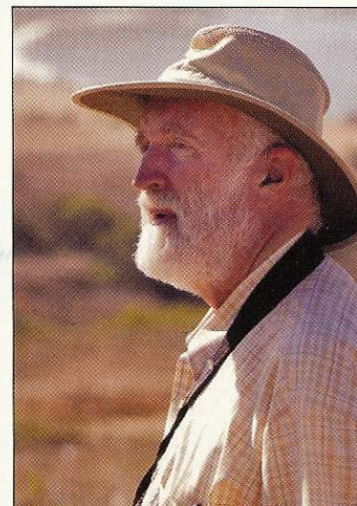
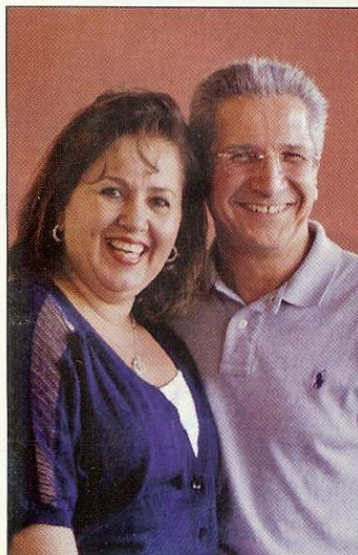
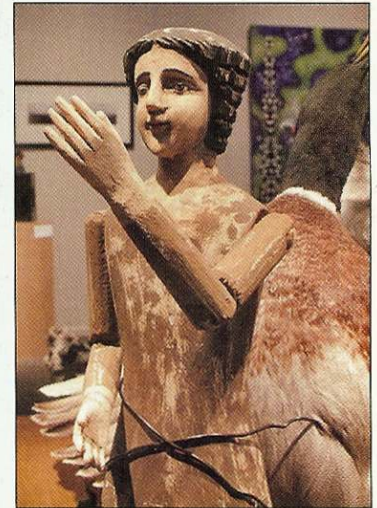
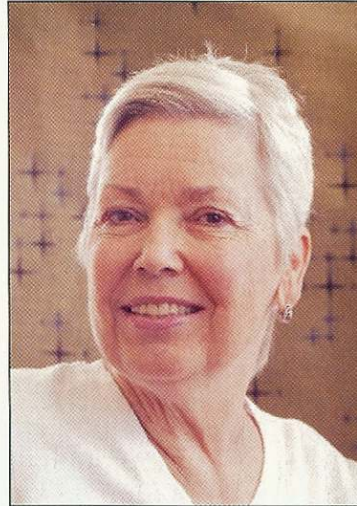
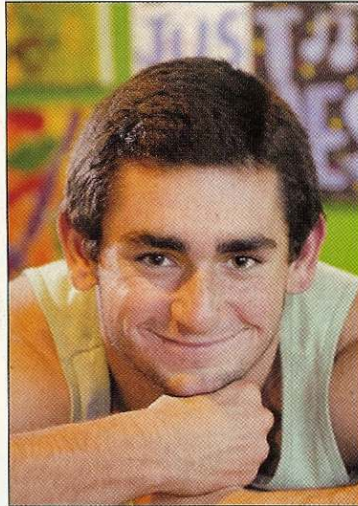


OUR TOWN

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2011 Movers & Shakers of the Hill



Tom Underhill, Peninsula News

Wheatons capture local events while 'Out & About'

By Michelle Fisher

A shared history can be the strongest bond among members of a community. For the past three years, Jarel and Betty Wheaton, of Rancho Palos Verdes, have filmed dozens of personal histories to share with television viewers in the South Bay and beyond. Dozens of libraries and museums, including the Smithsonian Institute, have received copies of their programs about illustrious local residents, visiting dignitaries and celebrity personalities, such as famed race car driver Parnelli Jones.

In 2007, the Wheatons approached Ken Dyda, then-president of Peninsula Seniors, with the idea to create local programming aimed at older area residents. When the couple volunteered to produce all the programming, Dyda said the offer was too good to pass up.

"I was so intrigued with their proposal, and we knew we only needed the equipment, so I ran a notice in our newsletter and requested donations," Dyda said. "It turned out to be not only a fantastic program, but it also brings so much to the

community that we never would have had."

After just a few classes, Jarel and Betty were ready to cover Peninsula Seniors lectures at Fred Hesse Community Park and monthly talks at the Western Museum of Flight in Torrance.

"We began with some basic video training and then developed our own style and improved our skills as we produced new programs," Jarel said. "There's nothing like experience to hone skills. We've received local and national recognition for our programs, so it's working."

Keeping history alive

The Wheatons would prefer to focus on the colorful assortment of people they have filmed; yet, they have won several Stanley Video Awards since 2008, including Best Talk Show for their program "Marthe Cohn — Behind Enemy Lines." Cohn served as a French-Jewish spy during World War II but only recently received a commendation from the French government. Jarel said she didn't even tell her own children about her top-secret wartime missions until they were adults visiting her native France.

"We really look for opportunities to cap-

ture stories of people who have lived some piece of history," said Jarel, noting that impromptu stories can be the most powerful.

When a member of the famous Flying Tigers lectured at Hesse Park, a local Japanese veteran stood to share his experiences as a WWII pilot who wore a special flight jacket identifying him as friend, not foe, to the Chinese. Suddenly, a Chinese attendee, who had been a student during the bombing of China, rose from his seat to thank the former pilot for saving the lives of his countrymen.

"You never know what you're going to get sometimes," Jarel said.

Dyda emphasized that the Wheatons remain humble about their success.

"They are not looking for awards or a pat on the back," he said. "They get a kick just knowing the programs are going out to kids, patients, shut-ins and many other people — not just seniors."

A longtime hospice and bereavement counselor, Betty said she initially considered this effort an outreach program to bring community events into the homes of people unable to attend.

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WHEATONS

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"I was able to take my laptop computer when I visited her and shared our TV programs," Betty said of a particular patient. "One of my favorite programs was the one we produced about the Santa Fe 3751 steam locomotive. It was especially meaningful to her during her final days because it brought back fond memories of traveling cross-country by train with her two young boys."

Traveling through time and space

Since establishing Peninsula Seniors Productions in 2007, the Wheatons have traveled places beyond their wildest expectations without their feet ever leaving the ground — except for the time they rode the blimp.

"We were invited to produce a program about the Goodyear blimp that included a flight over the Peninsula. We included on-the-ground interviews at Farmers Market, the [Point Vicente Interpretive

Center] and Founders Park," Betty said, adding that she also enjoys the filming of special events, such as the Palos Verdes Concours d'Elegance, where she hands over the mic to let people tell their stories.

Dyda said he appreciates the Wheatons' "casual and comfortable" interview style.

"Viewers participate more intimately with the program because of the format, just like they are sitting there and hearing right from the person telling the story," Dyda said. "It's amazing what the people will tell you. It's like a recorded history of their experiences."

Betty and Jarel have produced more than 100 shows that are shown daily on four stations in PV and Torrance but once appeared on 15 stations prior to the economic downturn.

"We have many more opportunities than we can possibly accept," Jarel said. "Each program is a labor of love and takes 30 to 60 hours to complete, including program selection, planning, coordination, shooting, edit-



Tom Underhill, Peninsula News

Betty and Jarel Wheaton meet some interesting people, like this pilot, while filming their TV show, "Out & About."

ing, copying and distribution."

Their programs have featured the Tuskegee Airmen, WASPs (Women Air Service Pilots), artists, barbershop quartets, band organs, bird watching, the South Coast Botanic Garden, the PVP Land Conservancy, hot-air ballooning, the history of medicine, the Gatling gun, the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, whale watching, historic railcars, asteroids, Teddy

Roosevelt, Gen. George Custer and the education of Saudi Arabian women.

"We see our programs as a way of building community and capturing firsthand accounts of historical events," Jarel said.

Added Betty, "We're frequently amazed by the stories from members of our community. It helps bring history alive for the younger generations."