

## **Cathedral City – Dirk Tacke**

Dirk, 70, was born in Anchorage, Alaska, where his father was stationed as a doctor serving in the Air Force. Dirk grew up in Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

Dirk attended Princeton University and Hamilton College where he earned his bachelor's degree in English in 1975. With a diverse background in education, he went on to become a teacher. Dirk taught middle school English and drama at the Cathedral School for Boys in San Francisco and Princeton Day School. He also coached track and running teams.

Professional success for Dirk is determined by how well his students were prepared for the next stage in their lives. He taught them to think critically and be good people. Dirk taught for 40 years, retiring in 2015.

While in San Francisco, witnessing homeless individuals with children on the streets was a profound wake-up call and a source of inspiration to make a difference, no matter how small.

As a Cathedral City resident since 2018, Dirk has acknowledged the importance of compassion and community support through his volunteer work. He started volunteering with Martha's Kitchen and the LGBT Center. He primarily volunteers with the Cathedral City Senior Center and the Boys and Girls Club of Cathedral City.

Philanthropy is a cause close to Dirk's heart, however, he notes that what's important is not the extent of one's resources, but the impact created by our actions.

The most significant influence on Dirk's life was his mother, who taught him to understand the difference between needs and wants, and shaped his core values.

Dirk's interest in art is steadily growing, as he is rediscovering its joys and significance.

Dirk has rescued five Pitbulls. Two have crossed the rainbow bridge. Caring for rescue dogs is a responsibility, one that brings even greater joy into Dirk's life.

## Coachella – María Ávila Hernández

María, de 65 años, nació en Mexicali, Baja California, México, hija de José Ávila y Guadalupe Comparán. Tiene tres hermanos: Epifanio, Arturo y Leonardo.

María vivió en México hasta los 14 años. Pasó su infancia viviendo con su tía Lina Fernández en Guadalajara, Jalisco. Cuando tenía 12 años regresó a Mexicali y vivió allí dos años más, donde asistió a la escuela. Practicaba deportes y le gustaba especialmente el baloncesto.

Luego, su familia se mudó a Coachella, donde comenzó a asistir a la Escuela Media Dateland y más tarde a la Preparatoria de Coachella.

En 1972 conoció al amor de su vida, Gabriel Rincón Hernández, con quien se casó en 1974. Este año celebrarán su 50 aniversario, sus bodas de oro.

María trabajó en el campo y se quedó en casa con sus hijas mientras crecían. Luego aprendió a hornear pasteles y comenzó su negocio haciendo pasteles para bodas, cumpleaños y fiestas de quinceañeras. Cuando las niñas crecieron, empezó a trabajar durante muchos años para *ampm*. También cuidó personas mayores durante algunos años.

María trabajó como voluntaria en el Programa Misionero del Valle durante muchos años. Cuando sus hijas practicaban deportes, ella se ofrecía como voluntaria para sus equipos en la Preparatoria de Coachella.

Años después, María se unió al Centro para Personas de la Tercera Edad de Coachella y se convirtió en voluntaria a tiempo completo. Ella participa en todos los eventos, ayudando con ideas para sus fiestas y ayudando a servir el almuerzo y limpiando.

Durante los últimos dos años, María fue la presidenta del “Golden Girl Club” del centro. Planificó almuerzos, trabajó en rifas y les consiguió regalos, especialmente en los cumpleaños.

María está felizmente jubilada, disfruta ser voluntaria en este Centro para Personas de la Tercera, y vivir la vida con su familia.

María y Gabriel tienen cinco hijas: Maribel, Angélica, Susana, Vanessa y Gabriela. Tienen 12 nietos y un bisnieto: Tashina, Gabriel, Yanette, Rosario Jr., Shiloh, Julian, Chris, Aliyah, Jace, Lorenzo, Gianna, Vida y Zuya.

María, 65, was born in Mexicali, Baja California, México to Jose Ávila and Guadalupe Comparán. She has three brothers: Epifanio, Arturo, and Leonardo.

María lived in México until the age of 14. She spent her childhood living with her aunt Lina Fernández in Guadalajara, Jalisco. When she was 12, she returned to Mexicali and lived there for another two years, where she attended school. She participated in sports and was especially fond of basketball.

Her family then moved to Coachella, where she began attending Dateland Middle School and later Coachella Valley High School.

In 1972, she met the love of her life, Gabriel Rincón Hernández, whom she married in 1974. This year, they will celebrate their 50th anniversary.

María worked in the fields and stayed at home with their daughters while they were growing up. She then learned to bake cakes and started her side business making cakes for weddings, birthdays, and sweet 16 parties. After the girls grew up, she began working for *ampm* for many years. She also became a caregiver for a few years.

María volunteered at the Valley Missionary Program for many years. When her girls were in sports, she volunteered for their teams at Coachella Valley High School.

Now, years later, María joined the Coachella Senior Center and became a full-time volunteer. She participates in all events, helping with ideas for their parties and helping serve lunch and clean up.

For the past two years, María was the president of the center's "Golden Girl Club." She planned luncheons, worked on raffles and getting them gifts especially on birthdays.

María is happily retired, enjoys volunteering at the Senior Center, and living life with her family.

María and Gabriel have five daughters: Maribel, Angélica, Susana, Vanessa, and Gabriela. They have 12 grandchildren and one great-grandchild: Tashina, Gabriel, Yanette, Rosario Jr., Shiloh, Julian, Chris, Aliyah, Jace, Lorenzo, Gianna, Vida, and Zuya.

## **Desert Hot Springs – Linda Crowson**

Linda, 77, was born in Dallas, Texas and grew up in Pasadena, Texas.

Linda attended Southern Methodist University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts in 1969. She also received her master's degree in education from the University of La Verne with her fifth year in the program attending San Diego State University and studying out of Calexico.

Linda moved to Brawley, California from Texas for a teaching job and has lived in the desert for 34 years. Her husband, Glenn, was employed by the City of Desert Hot Springs after moving here and together they raised three children while living in Desert Hot Springs.

Linda was an elementary school teacher for 42 years. She taught at Edward Wenzlaff Elementary School while living in Desert Hot Springs and was teacher of the year in 1994 for the Palm Springs Unified School District.

Linda has been a volunteer with the "Friends of the Library" since 1992. Education and literacy are her inspiration behind her service to the library and community. She was proud to advocate for a new library in Desert Hot Springs. Riverside County built the new Desert Hot Springs Library in 2021, a new addition to the city that is four times larger than the branch that had served the city since 1972.

Linda also volunteers with the Citizens on Patrol in Desert Hot Springs, and has kept that program active.

Linda's interests include: sewing, crafts, reading, working in the yard, Ocean Beach in San Diego, and her 1964 Porsche. The one thing Linda would like to give advice to for the younger generation is to always be positive and give back to your community.

Linda and Glenn have three children: Rachel (Mike) Kloos, Ben (Sarah) Crowson, and Gretchen (Derrick) Spaniol; and four granddaughters, Samantha and Jenny Kloos, and Giada and Francesca Spaniol.

## **Indian Wells – Steve L. Ellyson**

Steve, 74, was born and raised in Baltimore. He was the only child of Sidney and Odette. Sidney, an American, met and married Odette, from France, when he was stationed there during World War II.

Steve's academic pursuits led him to Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, attending on a full National Merit Scholarship. It was there that he met the love of his life and married his wife of 47 years, Carol Olson.

He pursued graduate education at the University of Delaware and earned his Ph.D. in Social Psychology at the age of 24. His passion for academia and commitment to lifelong learning led to a successful university teaching career at four different universities in Pennsylvania, Oregon, California and Ohio.

In 2011, Steve and Carol, a law professor with three MA degrees, a Ph.D. and a JD degree, retired and moved to the Coachella Valley. His retirement didn't last long before he would join the faculty at the Palm Desert Campus of California State University, San Bernardino.

Steve started volunteering through basketball, first in high school as an unpaid volunteer coach with the Baltimore County Rec Center. For 30 years, he refereed high school, then NCAA games and NBA Hoop-It-Up summer charity tournaments and World Championships!

Since moving to Indian Wells, he has continued his dedication to various volunteering endeavors. He has volunteered at The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, and actively contributes to several programs for Friends of the Desert Mountains and the Bureau of Land Management, as well as Southern California Adaptive Sports, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting inclusivity in sports.

For five years, Steve volunteered at the former Banning Pinball Museum, which at the time was the world's largest collection of operating pinball machines. Steve volunteered as a technician one weekend a month, and learned from a team of 30 technicians how to fix these machines, going from a novice to having a new skill.

Steve's grandmother was his influence and role model for volunteering, as she helped the Baltimore community bridge racial divides through her involvement in the 1950s with an organization called the Fellowship House.

In addition to his volunteer activities, Steve goes when he can to donate at the Life Stream Blood Bank.

“Steve's unwavering commitment to community service truly embodies the spirit of Indian Wells, and we extend our heartfelt appreciation for his invaluable contributions,” says Indian Wells Mayor Greg Sanders.

## **Indio - Phillip La Torre**

Phillip, 81, was born in San Francisco. The grandson of immigrants from Italy, he grew up in the North Beach and Visitacion Valley neighborhoods of the city.

In his teens, he moved to San Mateo County where he would later attend San Mateo Junior College.

Phillip's working career began as a mechanical draftsman at GTE Lenkurt. He spent 18 years at GTE before moving on to Hewlett Packard designing microchips. In 1986, he began working for Micro Power Systems laying out microchips. In the process of arranging the components of computer chips, Phillip held the key role of lead mask designer for 30 of those years.

In 2005, in retirement, he made his way to the Coachella Valley with Patricia Mathews, his best friend and partner. They bought a house at Desert Collections and made Indio their home.

Phillip and Patricia have been together for 34 years. Patricia has a daughter, Kerri Martinez, and two grandchildren, Taryn and Tyler Martinez.

Phillip's mechanical mind and a train hobby found a match with a volunteering opportunity, as he dedicated 10 years volunteering at The Living Desert in the train display.

Phillip volunteered for six years with the La Quinta Citizens on Patrol. For the last seven years, he has served closer to home with the Indio Police Department.

In addition to interacting with the community, fellow volunteers and police officers, volunteering contributes to Phillip's continued good health, study and self-improvement.

Phillip's interests also include cooking, woodworking and traveling. He has traveled Russia and has enjoyed visiting Las Vegas, Hawaii, Boston, New York, and New Orleans. His favorite spot in the world to visit is Venice, Italy, and he also enjoys Sicily, where his grandparents hailed from.

## **La Quinta - Marge Dodge**

Marge, 73, was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and was raised in both Minnesota and La Jolla, California.

She attended San Diego State University from 1968 to 1971. Marge met her husband, Norm, in San Diego, and they have been married for 52 years. They moved to Houston, Texas, then to Oklahoma City, then to Tulsa where Marge began her career at IBM. After a move back to San Diego, a move to Santa Fe, NM, a move to Phoenix, AZ. the two landed in Sunriver, Oregon.

Marge's career spanned 30 years at IBM in the technical sales and consulting department. She enjoyed IBM immensely, as every day was a learning experience working on challenging projects and solving complex problems with technology.

While on a trip south to search for a warmer winter climate, Marge and Norm ended up camping at Lake Cahuilla in La Quinta. They also happened to come across the La Quinta Art Celebration, LQAC. They attended La Quinta Art Celebration Signature Event and saw how the arts were embraced, and decided they never wanted to leave La Quinta!

Since 2004, Marge has volunteered with the LQAC that originally captured her attention for the La Quinta area. She serves in the valuable role as captain of ticket sales, and has opened her home to LQAC artists to stay so they can participate in the event.

Marge serves on several local nonprofit boards supporting her passions of education, literacy, and the arts. The organizations include Friends of the College of the Desert Library, College of the Desert Foundation, National League of American Pen Women, Old Town Artisan Studios Advisory Board, and the Literary Society of the Desert Advisory Board.

In addition to her involvement with these causes, Marge supports the whole nonprofit community as a guest reporter for the Desert Sun, spotlighting their great efforts to fill needs and provide services in our desert communities.

Marge and Norm relish travelling as experiencing new places adds to the kaleidoscope of life. When Marge has leisure time she enjoys reading, Pilates classes, relaxing in their 105-year-old cabin in Big Bear Lake, and going on walks with her dog, Colt.

## **Palm Desert – Charles Ara**

Charles, 93, likes to say he was born in Los Angeles “through the power of God and the love and cooperation of his parents!”

Affectionately known by many as “Charlie,” he began his education in public school for kindergarten and first grade. His parents decided to send him to a Catholic school for second through eighth grade.

While in sixth grade, Charlie first heard a calling to the priesthood. At the age of 14, he began his journey to ordination, enrolling in the Junior Seminary of the LA Archdiocese. Charlie was ordained a Catholic priest upon his graduation with a B.A. in Philosophy.

During his senior year, his history professor, Father Bernard McCoy, had him do a term paper on Taft-Harley law. This sparked Charlie’s interest in the labor movement and workers rights. Charlie’s social conscience was awakened and has lasted to this day in his ongoing efforts for civil rights and the well-being of the community.

For 15 years, his ministry took him to five large parishes in Southern California. It brought him here for travel in the 1950s, as it was a custom of many priests to take a vacation in Palm Desert to recover from the hard work and long days from Christmas and Easter services.

In 1970, Charlie followed the calling to add matrimony to his priesthood and married his loving wife, Shirley. For 53 years, they have shared love and life together, a marriage that has blessed the Aras with five children as well as grandchildren.

Charlie’s strong sense of love and compassion has guided him to his active involvement and volunteer endeavors. He has been a member of Rotary and Optimist clubs, a member of clergy aiding farmworkers during farm labor disputes, and a counselor for Volunteers of America.

At the community level, he has been a leader in political clubs and civic engagement in the city, the valley, and Riverside County.

Father Charlie continues to be driven to do his part, in religion, politics, and social justice to improve the quality of our time on Earth and our eternal home.



## **Palm Springs – Lynn Hammond**

Lynn, 69, was born in Palo Alto, California and grew up in Portola Valley, a small town located on the San Francisco Peninsula in San Mateo County.

Lynn attended nearby Menlo College, a private institution with a renowned business administration program and rich letters and sciences curriculum. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1977.

Lynn was grateful to have many experiences formed with her parents and siblings which provided opportunities for growth and shaped who they would become.

While Lynn was living in Boston, she signed up to be a “big sister.” Her “little sister” lived with eight family members and worked three jobs in order to make ends meet. This was eye-opening and began Lynn’s quest to help others, especially children, the key for the next generation. One of Lynn’s goals in volunteering is to ensure young children grow up with clothes on their back, food on the table and the ability to get an education.

Lynn moved to Palm Springs 23 years ago after visiting friends who were living here. She fell in love with the desert and, on the sixth day of her stay, she purchased a home in Canyon Country Club.

Lynn, a popular and sought-after caterer, built her business from the ground up. She started with nothing and now she caters for parties of 1,000 people. She donates her catering services – her time and food - to charities so they have more revenue for services. She hires staff that come from rehab facilities to help them get back on their feet.

Lynn has been a longtime volunteer for organizations including DAP Health, LGBTQ Community Center of the Desert, Well in the Desert and Human Rights Campaign.

She has volunteered with DAP Health for 12 years, and is proud of DAP Health’s expansion to serve women with full healthcare services and its quick reaction to the COVID crisis that saved many lives.

Lynn likes to spend summers on any New England beach, particularly Massachusetts and Rhode Island, for the relaxed atmosphere, long days, big clapboard houses on the horizon, fresh corn and berry pie, and the smell of barbecue.

She also enjoys entertaining, trying new recipes on willing friends and spending time with her 93-year-old father, Pete Hammond, who lives in Palm Desert.

## **Rancho Mirage – Richard “Rich” Ronzello**

Rich, 74, was born in Hartford, CT and grew up in Farmington, CT. Rich has lived an amazing life with a multifaceted journey spanning military service, corporate management, real estate, and community engagement.

Joining the U.S. Army in 1969, Rich honed his skills in communications within the Signal Corps stationed in South Korea. His dedication and expertise earned him a notable assignment at Fort McArthur in San Pedro, California, where he made significant contributions to unit operations.

Transitioning seamlessly into the corporate world, Rich excelled as a Document Production Manager with a prestigious international law firm. His professional acumen was matched only by his fervent passion for exploration and adventure.

Rich met his husband, Jeff, in 1994. In 2001, Rich made the decision to leave the law firm and secure his real estate license. Rich and Jeff then teamed up to begin a career in real estate.

Rich and Jeff had a vacation home in Rancho Mirage with plans to retire there. However, their fondness for the desert lifestyle led them to establish permanent residency in Rancho Mirage in June 2001.

Rich’s commitment to community welfare shines brightly through his active involvement with the Rancho Mirage Citizens on Patrol program (COPS). Serving as a cornerstone of neighborhood safety, he plays a pivotal role by assisting the Sheriff’s Department with traffic control during events and traffic collisions, extending aid to stranded motorists, and assists the city’s Code Compliance officers when needed. Rich’s unwavering dedication undoubtedly fosters a greater sense of security within our community, making our neighborhoods safer and more secure.

In addition, he recently started volunteering his services with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department office in Palm Desert. At this point, he will be conducting data entry and later on down the road will be trained in other necessary positions.

In their leisure time, Rich and Jeff enjoy an array of activities that include going to the gym, hiking, regular visits to the shooting range, and taking care of their beloved rescue puppy Bella. Traveling holds a special place in their hearts, as they eagerly explore destinations such as the Mediterranean and Kauai, Hawaii, immersing themselves in the rich tapestry of cultures and lifestyles each locale has to offer.

Driven by a steadfast commitment to service, Rich continues to make meaningful contributions both personally and professionally, leaving a lasting impact on those around him.

## **Riverside County – Linda Harmon**

Linda, 72, was born and raised in Mondovi, Wisconsin.

Linda attended Sawyer School of Business in Minneapolis, Minnesota from 1974 to 1976, and National University Customs I in 1980. She worked as an import specialist in Minneapolis.

In 1983, she came to the desert for a new opportunity and warm weather. She first lived in Rancho Mirage.

In the late 1980s, Linda took a drive with her husband, Robert, up Thousand Palms Canyon. Struck by the breathtaking beauty of the northern Coachella Valley area, they returned the next week and found their home in the community of Indio Hills. Robert was a doctor in the valley. For 30 years, Linda successfully managed his medical office in Bermuda Dunes.

They raised their family in Indio Hills. Linda was a mom to three grandchildren after they lost their mom.

For the past six years, Linda has worked part-time for the Desert Recreation District, which provides programs for the community at the Indio Hills Community Center. As a community service worker, she likes to bring people together in her community.

Linda has helped maintain and continue to develop the Indio Hills senior program. The senior program meets three mornings a week at the community center and provides activities. The seniors go once a month to a different restaurant in the Coachella Valley. They also get together with seniors at other Desert Recreation District senior programs in Mecca, North Shore, Thermal and Thousand Palms.

In addition to helping the Indio Hills senior program, Linda assists Desert Recreation District with many other programs at the community center, such as the youth afterschool programs, community events such as the Indio Hills Chili Cook-Off which is over 25 years in the running, community council meetings, and the food distributions. Once a month, she helps give out food from FIND Food Bank at the community center for Indio Hills residents. She has taken food to peoples' homes if they can't come to the community center.

Linda has dedicated lots of volunteer time, and is very active and hardworking. She assists her fellow residents when they visit the community center and have questions about the community and has helped feed and care for stray dogs and cats in the community. She creates bonds and partnerships with multiple agencies that are resources for the community.

She does all this too because she loves her community of Indio Hills, and enjoys meeting new people and trying to help any way she can.

Linda treasures her family, her two children; nine grandchildren; great grandson, Julian; great granddaughter, Allie; as well as two dogs and two cats.

## Riverside County – Juana Romero

Juana, de 66 años, es un gran ejemplo de superación y elección de vivir para los demás.

Juana nació en Mexicali, Baja California, México. A la temprana edad de cuatro años, sus padres emigraron al Valle de Coachella para darle a su familia una vida mejor. Y lo lograron.

Al crecer en los Estados Unidos, en la comunidad de Mecca para ser exactos, ella recuerda a todos los que vivieron allí. Menciona que siempre se cuidaban unos a otros. Ella no los llamó vecinos: los llamó familia.

El lugar favorito de vacaciones de Juana es ir a San Felipe con su familia. Ella tiene recuerdos divertidos de ese lugar, y hoy lo considera un espacio ideal para llevar a sus nietos y continuar construyendo allí recuerdos maravillosos juntos.

Juana trabajó muy duro y se convirtió en paraeducadora del Distrito Escolar Unificado del Valle de Coachella. Permaneció allí durante 33 años. Uno de sus sueños se hizo realidad cuando vio a 12 de sus estudiantes que tenían necesidades especiales, ella los vio batallar, pero lograron recibir sus diplomas de preparatoria. Juana se sintió muy honrada de ser parte de esa gran victoria.

Durante los últimos ocho años, Juana ha sido voluntaria en el programa para personas mayores de Mecca, dirigido por el Distrito de Recreación del Desierto. A ella le gusta ayudar a todos, cocinar, ofrecer transporte y planificar actividades. Juana dedica aproximadamente 200 horas al año al programa como voluntaria.

“Juana es alegre y siempre llega con una sonrisa en el rostro. A pesar de luchar contra el cáncer, ella siempre va al centro y anima a otros a asistir,” dice Belén Navarro del Distrito de Recreación del Desierto.

Cocinar, ver películas, leer poesía, hornear, realizar manualidades y viajar son algunos de los pasatiempos favoritos de Juana, y si pudiera cuenta que ¡viajaría a las siete maravillas del mundo! No es de extrañar, su consejo para la generación más joven: sueñen en grande, tal como le enseñó su padre. Su progenitor le enseñó los valores, la ética del trabajo duro, nunca esperar nada sin dar primero y soñar en grande porque los sueños se hacen realidad.

Juana tiene un hijo y una hija y nietos. Ella agradece al Distrito de Recreación del Desierto y al personal por hacer de sus años dorados unos momentos que siempre apreciará, y por los que ella estará por siempre agradecida.

Juana, 66, is a great example of overcoming and choosing to live for others.

Juana was born in Mexicali, Baja California, México. At the young age of four, her parents migrated to the Coachella Valley to give their family a better life. They succeeded.

Growing up in the United States, Mecca to be exact, she remembers everyone who lived there. They always watched out for one another. She didn't call them neighbors, she called them family.

Juana's favorite vacation spot is going to San Felipe with her family. She has fun memories and today cherishes it as a vacation spot to take her grandchildren and continue to build wonderful memories together.

Juana worked very hard and became a para-educator at Coachella Valley Unified School District and stayed for 33 years. One of her dreams came true when she witnessed 12 of her students who struggled with special needs care receive their high school diplomas. Juana was very honored to be part of that great victory.

Over the past eight years, Juana has volunteered with the Mecca senior program run by the Desert Recreation District. She likes to help everyone, cook meals, provide rides, and plan activities. Juana dedicates approximately 200 hours per year to the program as a volunteer.

"Juana is cheerful and always arrives with a smile on her face. Despite fighting cancer, she always goes to the center and encourages others to attend," says Belen Navarro of the Desert Recreation District.

Cooking, baking, reading, movies, poetry, arts and crafts and traveling are some of Juana's favorite things to spend her time on, and if she could she would travel to the seven wonders of the world! It is no wonder, her advice to the younger generation is to dream big, just as her father taught her. Her father explained values, hard work ethic, to never expect anything without giving first and to dream big because dreams do come true!

Juana has a son and a daughter and grandkids. She thanks the Desert Recreation District and staff for making her golden years ones that she will always cherish and be grateful for.