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## May is Older Americans Month – Honoring Older Americans Active in the Arts

Paula M. Gourley

**Nationally designated as Older Americans Month, this May the Lane County Coalition of Senior Programs honors six inspiring artists over 60 years of age, who are active in the arts. As photographers, musicians, composers, fibre artists, watercolorists, and educators, these individuals exhibit vitality, mastery and creative energy, while making valuable contributions to our community through their gifts of artistic expression.**



**Ayala Talpai** of Marcola, highly creative at 67, has done pioneering work in fibre arts, using tiny felting needles, which she describes as “the perfect tool for translating my visions into physical realms. Not only do they allow me infinite latitude in correcting errors and engineering changes, but also I get to work with the most engaging, approachable, compliant, affordable art material I've yet to encounter. Besides, wool seems to have an inherent sense of humor... how serious can one get with this stuff?? It's lightweight, and lends itself so easily to levity.”

A member of the Eugene Saturday Market since 1991, Ayala's business is conducted as Scurvy Louts – Clothier to the Barbarian Hordes. All original designs by the dynamic artist, her work includes clothing, dolls and decorative items for the home and person. A teacher and artist mentor, she has written, illustrated and published two instructional workbooks, *The Felting Needle – From Factory to Fantasy*, *The Felting Needle – Further Fantasies*, and *The Key to Dream House*, a bedtime story/coloring book. She teaches workshops in needle felting, fiber and felting workshops at venues around the world.

In addition to her fibre artistry, Ayala raised five sons, along with her husband, in a 10-man tent in the woods without electricity or running water. She serves on the Board of the Eugene Saturday Market, and is an ordained Sister in the Church of the Open Forest, under the wing of the International Association of Spiritual Healers and Earth Stewards. She performs marriages, Blessing Ways, wakes, and ceremonies for other life passages. Ayala lives her philosophy of “opportunity” and “discovery”, merging her artistry into her household and surroundings, a habit of folk artists the world over.



**Kenge Kobayashi**, is an award-winning 81 year old watercolorist, graphic and art director, active teacher and historian. One of his most significant contributions is his design of the Japanese American Art Memorial in downtown Eugene. Located by the Hult Center Plaza, the memorial is near the former Civil Control Office, where, in 1942, Japanese Americans were directed to report and register for relocation to the internment camps during World War II.

A two-time “Best in Show” Springfield Mayor's Award winner, Kobayashi enjoys teaching watercolor painting at Petersen Barn, encouraging his students' discovery of the inner artist. Described as a patient and kind teacher, he generously shares his artistry – and his experiences as a youth interned at Tule Lake Internment Camps during the war. This is where he began his paper and pencil drawings, eventually leading to art school and a long career in advertising design. He says he finds great joy in teaching, and wants to continue that as long as he is able. Ever active, right now Kenge is working on an actual Mulan, like the Disney movie.



Music conductor **Philip Bayles**, 61, has a distinguished career in both music and computer-related fields – from performing on clarinet, organ and piano, to conducting, composition, and Moog mainframes. He has led symphonic, ballet, operatic and choral ensembles in the Northwest since 1971, receiving critical acclaim for his “precision, judgment, scholarship – and fire.” His work bridges all periods and styles, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he is stunningly prolific.

In addition to founding the Eugene Opera in 1977, and the Riverside Chamber Symphony in 1999, Bayles has composed, performed and conducted throughout the Northwest, from Roseburg to Corvallis, Ashland and the Rogue Valley. Among his honors, he was awarded the Eugene Arts and Letters Award for “outstanding contribution to the arts”, was twice recipient of the Loraine G. Close Music fellowship and earned teaching fellowships at the University of Oregon School of Music and Honors College.

With a second career in computers and networking, Bayles served on the Board of Directors of Oregon Public Networking, a non-profit devoted to bringing technology to the disadvantaged. He has taught numerous courses in computer literacy, internet research and word processing. Since 2001, he has been conductor of the Riverside Chamber Symphony, Music Director of United Lutheran Church and Coordinator of the Campbell Senior Center Computer Learning Lab. He spends summers conducting and coaching at the Ashland Chamber Music Workshop. What is Philip Bayles most proud of? He says he is “pleased and honored that ensembles (he) helped to start and build are continuing to thrive, and bring great works to the public.” He is currently working on an ecology-related oratorio for voices and instruments, based on the text of his brother David Bayles’ book, *Notes on a Shared Landscape*.



**Juretta Nidever**, just 75, is an inspiration to the people at the Eugene Symphony who are privileged to work with her. She has creative gifts in photography, which allow her to capture and preserve moments in music, and the people who perform and support this artistic form. Her work is concentrated on photography of the Eugene Symphony, Arts Umbrella and the Bach Festival. Not one to rest, Juretta also serves as Secretary of the Arts Umbrella Board of Directors, is a Sexton in her church, and sings in the choir of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church.

Juretta grew up with photography, inspired by her Dad and an aunt who had a darkroom and introduced her to the mysteries of developing her own photos. She worked for Dot Dotson’s for many years, along with her husband, who did outside sales. Her career has included commercial photography for a sawmill manufacturer and her own home studio. Though she still prefers film for “people shots”, she transferred to digital photography 10-15 years ago.

Her favored accomplishments? She went to the University of Oregon for a year in 1950. In the late 1970’s, because of her work with the Bach Festival, Juretta was inspired to complete her education. In 1986, she received her BA, with a major in German Studies and a minor in Music. She cites the highlight of her life is the work with Arts Umbrella, furthering music education for young people. She believes that “music is a necessity of life.”



**Shirley Froyd** of Cottage Grove is 82. She works in an arts studio in her log home, which she helped to build. An active exhibitor, she keeps busy at watercolor and oil painting and photography, capturing the beauty of flowers, the interests of people, and scenes of nature. Friends say, “Shirley is an inspiration to all of us for her creativity and the productions of her many visions.” Her work is in several water media – watercolor, acrylics, gouache, plus stained glass, oils, silk screening, photography and leatherwork. About the role of art in her life, Shirley says, “I know I’m happy when I’m doing it.” And that “artists look at the world a little differently – the color, the design, they all tie together.”

She’s been drawing, “since I was a kid,” and has one Master’s degree in art. She earned her first Master’s in aviation – she taught flying, as well as ground school, for some years. She has remained creative as her life evolves, and has not slowed down. Shirley is an active hiker and a volunteer for Mt. Pisgah Arboretum, a member of the Watercolor Society of Oregon and the Cottage Grove Art Guild. What she strives for? Shirley says she enjoys becoming better skilled as an artist. And she’s proud of being accepted as a juried member of the Watercolor Society of Oregon.



“**Con Sheffer** isn’t content to just play his own fiddle,” according to Ginevra Ralph. “He wants to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy music making. That is why he is the President of the Board for The John G. Shedd Institute for the Arts.” This 79-year-old is a leader in local fundraising and the creation of this music school and performing arts center, dedicated to making music education opportunities for everyone, regardless of income or ability. The Shedd presently teaches 300-400 students every week. Con is often quoted as saying, “Students will never forget their time learning an instrument, or taking voice lessons at the Shedd. It will make a difference for the rest of their lives.”

And he practices and plays, too. Con performs locally on violin, an avocation since the age of 5. He also played the trumpet for about 20 years, starting in high school. At the U of O, he was a member of *The Baker’s Half Dozen*, a Dixieland band.

Whether performing as part of the group *Swang*, in an impromptu ensemble, supporting the Shedd, or in performance at a community event, music is “practically his whole life right now,” according to Con’s wife, Mary.

His passion isn’t fading. He wants to “play music as long as (I) have the physical and mental ability to do it.” Con wants to keep working with students, encouraging them to love and play music. For him, he says, playing with “younger guys” has helped him in his musical endeavors.

These inspirational Older Americans will be recognized in a **public reception** at **Willamalane Adult Activity Center** in Springfield on **Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup> from 4 – 6 p.m.** At this event, the Lane Coalition of Senior Programs will unveil a specially-designed poster, “Lane County Honors Older Americans - Active in the Arts,” featuring a photo of each of the honorees.

There will be photo opportunities at the event. **Contact Mary Ann Meyers (741-6000, x 147) or Paula Marie Gourley (682-4374)** for biographical information on the honorees, or **to arrange an interview.**

The Lane County Coalition of Senior Programs is a collaborative of 12 area agencies serving older adults. They include Senior & Disabled Services, Senior Connections, the Senior Meals Program, American Red Cross, Campbell Senior Center, Cascade Health Solutions, OASIS, RSVP of Lane County, River Road Parks and Recreation District, Senior Companion Program, Viking Sal Senior Center, and Willamalane Adult Activity Center.