

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Realtor Debby Harrington Makes History as President of Optimists

By EVELYN BARGE
Palisadian-Post Intern

As the Pacific Palisades Optimist Club prepares to observe its 50th anniversary in April 2006, the organization is also celebrating another landmark event in its history: the election of the club's first woman president.

Debby Harrington, a lifelong Palisades resident and daughter of Celeste and John Harrington of Harrington's Camera Corner, was elected president of the club in October.

"It was sort of a process of elimination," Harrington said of her election. "I think they were looking forward to having a woman as president, just something different."

Out of 59 members, Harrington is one of five women who are actively involved in the club. Given the club's preponderance of men, Harrington said a few of them were reluctant to elect a woman president, but that any initial uncertainties have been smoothed over.

"The guys are just incredible with their support," she said. "It's been wonderful."

As president, Harrington said she has several plans on her agen-

da to help strengthen membership and the club's 30 committees.

"My main focus is to get new members," she said. "Right now, we're a good, solid group, but we can improve." To achieve this goal, Harrington said she will divide the club into four groups that will compete to recruit the most members.

"The winning team will be rewarded by the team that comes in last," she said. "My goal is to increase our membership to 84 by the end of the fiscal year," next October 1. She also wants to support the club's individual committees, which oversee all aspects of the club and its charity events.

An Optimist Club member for six years, Harrington said she joined after being recruited by her friend Don Scott, a former club president.

Currently an agent at A.M. Realty on Sunset, she has been selling real estate in the Palisades and Westside for nearly 20 years. She attended Palisades High and spent much of her childhood helping her parents run the camera store.

"I joined because my roots are here," she said. "I wanted to help the club and help the youth. I decided to focus on the Optimist

Club, so I could be more effective in the group."

Chartered in 1956, the Pacific Palisades Optimist Club is one of more than 3,200 autonomous Optimist Clubs in communities worldwide.

Among the Palisades club's service activities is fundraising for the Optimist Youth Home near downtown Los Angeles, which houses up to 100 boys between the ages of 12 and 18. Therapists, social workers, youth-care counselors and educators work with each boy and his family in individualized treatment plans.

The group also contributes money and labor to the Optimist Scholarship Fund and the Fourth of July Will Rogers 5K/10K Run, among other philanthropic activities.

Harrington said she has enjoyed seeing the Optimist Club's efforts pay off in the local community. "It really makes you think of others, instead of yourself," she said. "It has changed my life."

She will be club president for one year, before Conrad Solum moves into the elected position. "It will probably take that long for me to just figure it all out," Harrington joked.

Until then, she said she hopes the club, which still has some of its original founding members, will grow and prosper.

"I've never really been so involved in the community as I am now, and it feels really good." The Palisades Optimist Club meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 a.m. in the Oak Room at Mort's Deli.



Palisades native Debby Harrington is the first woman to serve as president of the Palisades Optimist Club. Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer