

Rockhaven Sanitarium, Celebrating 75-Years of Distinguished Service By Pat Kramer

Founded in 1923 by the late Agnes M. Richards, R.N., Montrose's Rockhaven Sanitarium has been widely hailed as one of the finest institutional care facilities for women throughout its 75-year history. In its earlier years, the public was fascinated by the presence of Rockhaven's celebrity residents like Mrs. Flo Ziegfeld - actress Billie Burke, best known for her role as 'Glinda the Good Witch' in the "Wizard of OZ," Clark Gable's first wife Josephine Dillon, and Marilyn Monroe's mother, Gladys Pearl Eley. What drew these celebrities to Rockhaven was the same principle that is being practiced today: personalized care provided in a private and comfortable, home-like setting which distinguishes Rockhaven from all other institutional facilities.

Rockhaven Administrator Pat Traviss states, "Our goal has always been to provide good nutrition, physical activity, and mental stimulation to residents in an institutional setting. We take great pride in creating an environment which offers a sense of normalcy to people's lives. Our residents live in homey cottages with a central living room surrounded by a campus of gardens. Here, they can retain their individuality and most importantly, their dignity, in a secure setting with 24-hour a day care."

Rockhaven was founded by Ms. Traviss' grandmother, Agnes Richards, who came to California in the early '20s after serving in the American Red Cross during the war. "She was discouraged by the way women were treated at the state-run mental institution," notes Ms. Traviss, "so she decided to start her own private care facility on a shoestring budget of \$1,000." To house the first residents, Agnes rented the "Rockhouse," [which was demolished after the Sylmar earthquake] naming the facility "Rockhaven Sanitarium."

Now, 75-years later, Rockhaven remains true to its purpose, serving as a supervised long and short-term care facility for 69 women suffering from Alzheimer's disease or dementia. "We try to enrich our residents' lives as much as possible by providing lots of activities which stimulate their minds," notes Ms. Traviss. Weekly sing-a-long with a certified music therapist, cooking classes, slide shows, bingo, lifelong learning seminars, international dinners and themed holiday parties keep residents looking forward to upcoming events.

Meanwhile, those who are more active are taken for picnics in the park, field trips to area locations or supervised walks around the community. Says Pat, "The more they are entertained and active, the more they interact with one another and that support system really goes a long way to helping them enjoy their lives."

Ms. Traviss is a longtime resident of the Crescenta Valley having graduated from Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, where a bridge bears her name for her generous support. This year marks her 45th anniversary with Rockhaven, "a home where the heart is" and a place "Where Somebody Cares."