

Our La Quinta Legends



Louise Rodarte-Neely

A La Quinta Treasure

La Quinta has been shaped through the decades by people who saw beauty and opportunity beyond the desolate desert floor surrounded by our majestic mountains. They rolled up their sleeves and contributed time and energy into making La Quinta the Gem of the Desert. We have introduced you to some of these “movers and shakers” in our past newsletters and will continue to do so. In this issue we are once again honoring our own Louise Rodarte-Neeley, who this summer celebrated her 90th birthday!



Much has been written about this dynamic lady and her life long service to the communities in our valley. Accolades, news articles and awards easily fill to overflowing a large file box. With this summer’s milestone behind her, there is no sign of slowing down. When asked for advice to our readers, Louise exclaimed, “Keep busy... make new friends!” adding, “It’s always good to be needed.”

A true La Quinta native, Louise was born at Point Happy Ranch to one of the Coachella Valley’s pioneering families, the Rodartes. Her parents managed the ranch, which had been purchased in 1922 from Norman “Happy” Lundbeck by philanthropists Chauncey and Marie Clark. Louise, her siblings and cousins all grew up on the one hundred forty acre ranch amid vegetable gardens and fruit trees at the base of her beloved mountains. “We used to roam the land and swim in the reservoir. I had a very happy childhood.” Louise attended school at the old Roosevelt School in Indio. Her education continued at the Catholic Girl’s Academy in San Luis Rey, sponsored by Mrs. Clark.



After graduation, Louise enrolled in a San Diego nursing school. Several months after she started, her father died and she returned to La Quinta. During the war years and after, Louise worked on and off at the local hospital as a nurse’s aide, eventually training new staff and assuming the duties of an LVN. Nursing remains one of her favorite career memories.

It was while working at the California Farm Labor Camp in Indio that Louise met and married her boss, Charles Neeley. Charles was a true gentleman, always loving and thoughtful. Louise credits Charles with supporting her through a paralyzing bout of polio, a serious automobile accident, and nearly a dozen surgeries. They were happily married for fifty-four years, raising a son, Charles Jr., who now lives with his wife on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Louise is also blessed with two bright, beautiful granddaughters and a new great-grandson.



Using her business skills, Louise held positions as a credit manager and a doctor's receptionist before starting a nineteen-year career as secretary at Westside School in Thermal. She loved the children and staff. She worked tirelessly as representative for the California School Employees Association at the state level. For her hard work and dedication, Louise was honored as State Employee of The Year in 1985.



Retirement came in 1988, but if you know Louise, you know that word is not part of her vocabulary. Never one to "rest on her laurels," Louise has embraced retirement with her signature enthusiasm. She began baking, entering countless jams, cookies, pies and cakes in the Riverside County Fair and Date Festival, and eventually adding a sweepstakes award to her collection of blue and red ribbons. Charles had built her a sewing room, nicknamed Louise's Play Pen, and she soon became an accomplished seamstress.

It was Louise's dedication to preserving the history and early memories of the Coachella Valley that brought her to the fledgling La Quinta Historical Society in the early 1990's. She was very active in the group, providing much needed documentation and historical perspective on a personal level. Louise went on to serve as curator/manager, docent director, program chair, board member and city liaison. Currently she is the Society's official ambassador, representing us at civic events throughout the valley. Always dressed stylishly with a twinkle in her eye, Louise is ever ready with a story to share, bring our history alive for young and old alike.





Nancy Lynn artist/
Louise Neely/ and
Kathleen Smith-
Schooley

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Metalrevelations

Louise Neely
Barbara Irwin
Unknown to me.
and Judy Vossler



In addition to her involvement with the La Quinta Historical Society, Louise has been an integral part of the following valley organizations: The Coachella Valley Historical Museum and Cultural Center, The Historical Society of Palm Desert, The Riverside County Historical Commission, The American Legion Auxiliary, The Mexican American Pioneers, The 1909 School House Ad Hoc Committee, History Hunters, and St. Francis of Assisi Church. In each of her many endeavors, Louise's boundless energy has garnered respect and admiration.

Themes of gratitude and giving continue to guide this remarkable lady. "Whenever I drive down Washington Street, I see the beautiful mountains that surround us – Charles used to say we live in a teacup – and I am reminded of dear friends and family all over the valley."

Louise Rodarte-Neeley is truly an inspiration and genuine La Quinta treasure.

Article written By David and Nancy Salvatierra