Column: New Salvation Army honorees have host of hidden talents

It appears that the San Diego area women tapped as The Salvation Army’s newest “Women of Dedication” bring with them a wealth of hidden talents, stories and backgrounds, some nearly worthy of “Ripley’s Believe It or Not.”
Tech entrepreneur Martha Dennis was brave enough to once cook for Julia Child and her husband, Paul.

Pharmaceutical consultant Janice Kurst walked across the Grand Canyon, rim to rim, in a single day.

Kim Alessio, a community volunteer for more than 32 years, is the daughter of the child actress Darla Jean Hood, who played the coquettish Darla on the TV series, “Our Gang,” from 1935 to 1941.

Every year, The Salvation Army Women’s Auxiliary recognizes a dozen stellar females who have volunteered countless hours of community service. They are respected business operators, career women and philanthropists. But there are many other aspects of their busy lives.

When Sandra Maas introduced the 2023 Women of Dedication on Nov. 4, she also highlighted some unrelated — and unexpected — feats and talents.
Twelve San Diego County women will be honored at The Salvation Army Auxiliary’s April 21 luncheon as 2023 Women of Dedication. (Dave Siccardi)

“We’ve asked each honoree to surprise us with fun facts about them,” Maas related at the announcement tea, a precursor to the Hearts of Gold main event April 21 at the downtown Marriott Marquis.

Some additional notable facts about the 2023 honorees:

Seasoned fundraiser Michele Prescott helped rescue her 4-year-old sister who was hanging from the side of a cliff in Okinawa, Japan.

Travel industry expert Suzanne Newman was a contestant on the “Dating Game” quiz show in the ‘70s. But there’s more to the story ... the chaperone assigned to her by the show ended up stealing her bachelor “date.”
Experienced birth doula Maria Provencher is involved in anti-terrorism and explosive detection work on the side. She is a part-time dog team agent who flies to airports across the country helping TSA agents with security work.

During her adventures to 125 of the world’s 195 countries to date, management consultant Cindy Goodman once fed a captive-born 9-day-old gorilla.

Former Sweetwater High School Assistant Principal Vivian Tuck is also a seasoned globetrotter who is preparing for a trip to Antarctica where average temperatures range from 14 degrees to minus 76 degrees Fahrenheit.

Prior to her corporate marketing V.P. position, Stephanie M. Brown was drafted after graduating from college to play professional women’s softball for the Chicago Bandits in Illinois — and she did.

Linda LeGerrette, executive director of the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs, is accomplished at a far different sport — she’s an expert marble player.

Sara Napoli’s professional wardrobe as CEO of the crime-fighting San Diego Police Foundation surely has little in common with that of her past life as a teenage ballerina.

A former V.P. of defense firm SAIC, tech-savvy June Chocholes, is adept at using her head and her hands. She is a published poet, artist, classically trained violinist, and a self-trained home repair expert.

However, these 12 women will be celebrated for none of these accomplishments but rather their long histories of volunteer service in a variety of causes and commitment to the community, helping those in need. Auxiliary President Dee Ammon says these fun facts show another side of these Women of Dedication.
As for an unusual fact about herself, Ammon, a World War II buff, confesses that during a trip to Luxembourg about eight years ago, she found the American Cemetery and Memorial closed. So she jumped over the cemetery wall to visit the grave of Gen. George S. Patton.

Curb appeal...

For 20 years, County Treasurer/Tax Collector Dan McAllister has said thank you the old-fashioned way.

Just as he did when campaigning before Election Day, he stood on a busy downtown street corner on Nov. 9 with his campaign sign, except he added a second poster — a handwritten thank-you to voters.

Because cold, sporadic light showers, he was bundled up in a quilted parka instead of a white shirt and tie. Despite the chill, he says the drive-by reception was warm and friendly with motorists honking, waving, shouting congratulations and giving an occasional thumbs up as they drove by his spot at Ash and Front streets.

“It’s a great way to share quick comments with people,” McAllister says. He returned from election festivities at close to 1 a.m. Wednesday, then arose at 5 a.m. to hit the street to catch early rush hour traffic by 6:30 a.m.
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