

HISTORY

Supples offered Palm Springs a certain allure

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Rozene Richards Supple turns 96 years old this week and the entire valley is so very fortunate that she lives in the desert. Rozene has a deep affiliation with the desert, going back to the 1930s when her father, George A. Richards, bought a house at Smoke Tree Ranch. She arrived on the desert, became an accomplished rider with Diamond, her trusty horse, attended Palm Springs High School, and when a little bit older, followed the music scene at the ChiChi and other jazzy establishments.

Rozene has had a remarkable life. The list of potentates, dignitaries, powerful businessmen and cultural leaders with whom she has been acquainted is amazingly diverse. J. Edgar Hoover was a friend of the family. William Clay and Martha Firestone Ford were her contemporaries and close friends. Trauma surgeon Frank Ercoli was her best pal. If asked, she has a ready story or amusing anecdote about them all.

But perhaps most interesting is Rozene's knowledge of the most popular jazz bands of the 1930s and 40s. Her father owned important radio stations and his business grew up alongside that of the jazz and swing craze in the country.

While most teenagers and young adults were hanging around record stores, Rozene would breeze into her father's Los Angeles radio station, KMPC, and hang around with the bands waiting to play live on the air. The most famous musicians and singers in the world were there to broadcast and she witnessed the now legendary performances of some of the biggest names in the big band business. Les Brown, and his Band of Renown, was a lifelong friend. She watched Frank Sinatra during his early radio performances grow into a huge star (and eventually land in the desert too).

Rozene's first husband and her father tragically passed away practically at the same time. She was lost. For no particular reason, she decided to attend her Stanford reunion. There, she ran into Ric Supple. Ric was a handsome football player and back in college they'd gone on a single date. He'd brought her home late, and she'd gotten in trouble. That was their last and only date in college. At the reunion, more twenty years later, Ric reported he'd also lost his wife. Their second date, all those decades later, went better.

Ric had been very successful in the insurance business in San Francisco and lived in tony Belvedere over-



Ric and Rozene Supple attend the Palm Springs International Film Festival.

COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

looking the bay. Rozene was living in Grosse Pointe and Los Angeles. They married and decided to decamp to the desert.

Immediately Ric and Rozene actively involved themselves in every aspect of desert life. They donated \$1.4 million dollars to Desert Hospital for the improvement of the emergency room in honor of her father who died in 1951 (it is still appropriately called the Richards Trauma Center). Ric served on the board of the hospital for many years. Together they worked for countless good causes culminating recently in making possible the Richards Center for the Performing Arts at Palm Springs High School and their donation of the Camelot Theatres to the Palm Springs Cultural Center.

That the desert should have an independent art theater is entirely courtesy of the Supples. A town as small as Palm Springs really shouldn't expect to have a first-rate movie house, but because of their love of movies and desire to give back, this little community has enjoyed cultural offerings much larger cities would envy. Originally purchased to be a venue for the Palm Springs International Film Festival, the Camelot Thea-

tres grew and diversified eventually becoming the locus of the Palm Springs Cultural Center. In addition to first-run movies, it hosts multiple other festivals like the Film Noir, Cinema Diverse and AmDocs.

The couple's philanthropy is impressive, but not more so than their business partnership. They dove into the radio business after moving to Palm Springs. It was the late 1960s, during what a Los Angeles Times article described as the "dog days of summer" in a sweltering August heat, Rozene made a deal to buy a defunct radio station, KPAL. Twenty years later, after having built their radio empire, R&R Broadcasting, by turning KPAL into KPSI, pioneering new formats, particularly talk radio, and purchasing three more stations, Rozene reflected for the Los Angeles Times saying, "I must have been out of my mind." She was certainly brave.

A few years ago, after almost fifty years in business and some solemn contemplation about getting older, Ric and Rozene decided to wind down the radio business.

In a tribute to his boss of almost two decades, radio personality Steve Kelly wrote a Valley Voice for The Desert Sun: "I had a lovely chat recently with Rozene Supple...I will neither bore you nor embarrass her by the listing of all the marvelous philanthropic deeds she and her husband Ric have initiated in our Valley. Instead we talked about the local radio market and how it has changed from when she got involved almost half a century ago...we have seen a departure from local family owned radio stations to a rise of corporate radio...it is not the same as having an owner who lives in the community. The age of fun, fraternal, local radio has been replaced by the soulless sound of automated machine type communications."

Ric turned 95 years old the 24th of August. Rozene will have her 96th birthday later this week, exactly one month later. After that second date, the Supples have now been married 48 years. Ric teases that, Rozene says, it is really more like four-hundred and eighty years. Along the way, they have had a lot of fun and contributed greatly to the desert. Their inestimable talent, energy and kindness have enriched all our lives. Happy Birthdays Ric and Rozene, and many thanks.

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