



Milt and Rita Jones at the Chi Chi for a Desert Circus event. PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

‘Renaissance Man’

Milt Jones, former Palm Springs Life publisher, loved the desert

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A demographic survey conducted in 1988 revealed the subscribers of the magazine to be mostly female, married and aged 35 to 64, with an average household income of just under \$200,000. More than half owned a second home and had a half a million dollars in investment income.

But unlike his subscribers, Milt Jones always kept a low profile. He and his wife, Rita, lived in a modest two-bedroom house on Farrell Drive. The only thing remotely obvious about Milt was that he was easily recognizable driving his signature baby blue 1957 Thunderbird around the desert. Perhaps it was a coincidence that the car was built the same year he moved to Palm Springs. Perhaps that was just a very good year.

Milt came to the desert to help a friend open Sun Air Pharmacy in Cathedral City in 1957 after graduating from University of Southern California with a degree in pharmacology. He fell in love with the desert and was determined to stay. He was quoted years later saying that back then, “it wasn’t easy to make a living in this town.” He didn’t want to move back to Los Angeles and was willing to work at anything to stay put. Another friend got him a job selling radio advertising at KDES. “In those years, we sold spots for a dollar a holler.” He was a natural salesman, gracious and charming. He did very well.

Milt was perfectly suited to the desert lifestyle. He would come to define it. His success, ingenuity and industriousness led him to his own advertising agency in partnership with Bud Taylor. One of their early clients was Palm Springs Life magazine.

Starting in 1958, the magazine’s first issue was 12 pages. Illustrated by Earl Cordrey, it featured fashion and desert doings and was intended to replace homemade newsletters of the many country clubs. Milt quickly learned the monthly magazine business and soon took over with two partners, Donald Cromie and Russ Wade. Over the ensuing years, he would buy them out as well.

He was an unabashed proponent of the desert he loved, promoting its sybaritic lifestyle. “There are no cockroaches, no crime” says novelist and public relations man Tom Ardies, an editor of the magazine “...it doesn’t address those issues. It’s beautiful—that’s the kind of magazine his readers want.”

The decade of the 1960s saw the magazine become full-color and as glossy and pretty as any national publication. The Desert Sun noted, in April 1965, “Milton Jones, owner of a Palm Springs advertising and public relations agency, today was named editor and

publisher (of Palm Springs Life Magazine by new owner Donald C. Cromie. The sale of the magazine by former owner Robert P. McCulloch to Cromie was announced last week. The purchase price was not disclosed. Jones said there would be no changes in publication dates of the monthly magazine and that no staff changes are planned. “We seek to improve the magazine through the greater use of color inside the book,” Jones said. “We feel the magazine is a type of slick brochure that promotes Palm Springs through our mail circulation. We want to make it look the way a quality magazine should.” The new publisher said he would continue to operate his public relations and advertising agency.” Aptly named, the magazine under his leadership would come to define the genre of lifestyle regional magazines.

By 1970, Milt was a scion of the community. The newspaper noted in April of that year, “This week’s Business Service Award Winner is Milton W. Jones, publisher and editor of Palm Springs Life Magazine. We hear talk now and then of the Renaissance Man, but seldom get to see one in action. Milt Jones is such a person in action in our community. His title of publisher and editor gives a clue of the Orson Wells-type writer, producer, director activity. Milt Jones rivals this sort of reputation as he not only functions as a publisher-editor but serves as advertising agency executive and business letter publisher. In these capacities he must understand and function in all known advertising media: direct mail, newspapers, radio, TV, etc. To wear all these caps and function successfully as Mr. Jones does, is credit to a modern Renaissance Man. This week Mr. Jones is honored by the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce.”

He’d earned the respect of the community through his business efforts, but his philanthropy won the hearts of his neighbors. He had always been involved and was constantly developing exciting ways to help a variety of causes. He was president of the Desert Press Club and created a charity golf tournament against the Greater Los Angeles Press Club, pitting local paper and radio personnel against those of the big city. “Scores may soar into the 100s, but Desert Press Club president Milt Jones predicts a big fun time for everyone.”

He was integral to the start of the Bob Hope Desert Classic. An editorial in the Desert Sun in February 1965 acknowledged, “The Classic’s prime purpose, forgotten by some, is to publicize this desert resort area. It has done that superbly each year. The results were even better this year. The Chrysler nationwide TV showings of the Classic Saturday and Sunday presumably sold some cars for the sponsor. It had to sell millions on the advantages of desert living. Midwestern temperatures during the viewing of the Classic ran from an endurable eleven below zero to an impossible

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20 below. A viewer there would have to be completely numb not to envy those who could putt on a sun drenched green while his own clubs were in cold storage. Newspapers throughout the country devoted columns of space of pictures and stories about the big event, the kind of coverage money can’t buy. They all publicized the desert...”

Milt’s life’s work had been publicizing the many charms of the desert he deeply loved. He was around for the inception of the Spa Hotel. He was a cheerleader for downtown businesses. He was part of the Sinatra Invitational Golf Tournament. He conceived of the Reader’s Choice awards to rate businesses, particularly restaurants, and put customers on a par with critics.

By the 1980s he owned a few restaurants presaging his company’s production of Restaurant Week. His companies would expand to produce magazines for other destinations, including Rancho Mirage, Monterey, Carmel and Santa Cruz, Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Taos. He organized the press tent, program and marketing for the first Dinah Shore women’s golf tournament in 1972 and helped establish it as one of the premiere events of the desert. All the while starting other spin off businesses, and helping others succeed.

He was the consummate gentleman and continued to celebrate the desert throughout his life.

His magazine has had a few swanky milestone birthday parties, illustrative of the lifestyle it touted, in its decades-long tenure. People still talk about them. Milt’s imaginative and innovative son Frank is now at the helm and the magazine is as gorgeous as ever.