

Pathfinders: A powerful force for Palm Springs' good

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A most distinguished group of scientists from Cal Tech and Harvey Mudd College were special guests at a black-tie dinner dance at the Tennis Club in 1961. Included in the group of invited dignitaries were Dr. Lee Bu Bridge, president of Cal Tech and his wife; Mr. Louis Jones, dean of Cal Tech, and his wife; Mr. William Pickering, the head of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and his wife; and Joseph Platt, the president of Harvey Mudd College and his wife; and Mr. Emery Walker, Jr., dean of Harvey Mudd College, and his wife.

As was the convention, the couples were identified only by their husband's names, the women being referred to as the Mrs., or wife. That some of the most preeminent scientists in the world would be in attendance in Palm Springs was remarkable and reflected the social prominence of the hostesses of the party. The scientists likely received their invitations through their wives and were part of a special philanthropic group called the Pathfinders.

The newspaper reported, "The black-tie dinner dance...set a new record society-wise by being a swanky but happy occasion. Limited as it was to Pathfinders and Associate members and a few invited guests, it had all aspects of a big private party."

The Tennis Club was at its loveliest, "Overhead cherubs seemed to drift with white silken swags giving a cloud-like effect...on the tables golden cherubs and arrangements of pink carnations, white stock and white tapers set the décor with the gold motif picked up by the gold and white programs and favors."

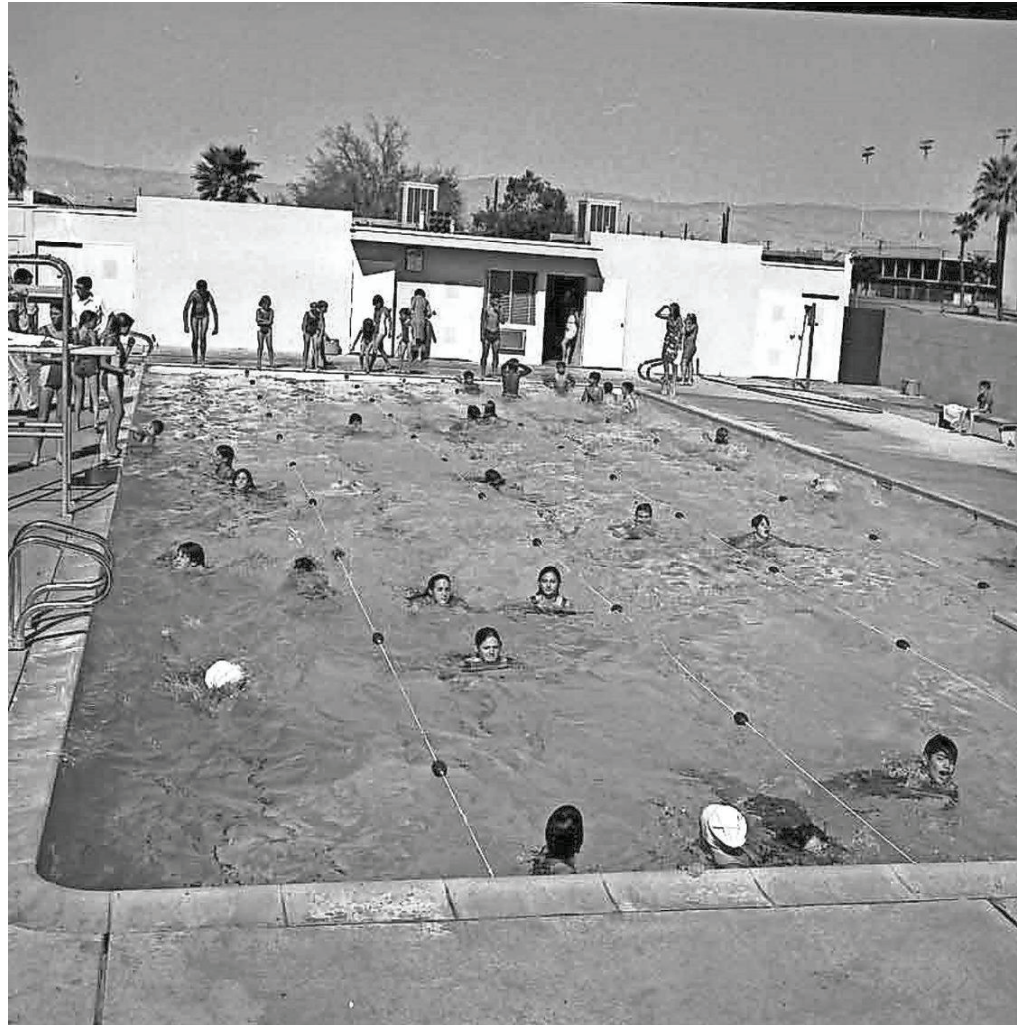
The dance floor was crammed with attractive couples. Inches of ink were devoted to describing the couture gowns worn that evening. Again, the wives of these prominent men were only identified as wives rather than by their first names. Despite their being eclipsed in print by their husbands, these women were a powerful force for good and clearly equal matches for their important spouses.

Started in 1957, the Pathfinders was one of the first women's not-for-profit charity organizations in the Coachella Valley. Over half of the founding members were residents of Thunderbird Country Club who set out to help youngsters in the desert to better their lives through community, education and sporting activities.

Soon after their founding, the Pathfinders settled on supporting the Palm Springs Boys' Club. And by 1961 their major focus was building a pool as recreation in the desert climate requires.

So important was the task that when the newspaper wrote about the effort to build a pool, the article used a first name: "Margaret (Mrs. S.P.) Manasse spent six weeks at La Jolla earlier this summer. Now that she is home, she is busying herself again with the Boys' Club swimming pool project of which she is chairman."

The ladies were serious. They hosted a Hat Parade at the Starlite room of the Chi Chi nightclub on Nov. 4, 1961. A hat was required to gain entry. There were numerous categories and elaborate prizes for the best in each. Celebrities Troy Donahue and Suzanne Pleshette attended. They then set about further fundraising with high teas, every man-



People frolic in the Pathfinder Pool at the Palm Springs Boys' Club. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Pathfinder Pool was dedicated on April 15, 1962, and became a source of enjoyment for many. Funds raised by the Pathfinders charity organization paid for the pool's construction.

ner of luncheon and fashion show.

By January 1962, just a few months into the project, an impressive \$18,684.50 had been raised and the contract for the swimming pool for \$15,965 was let.

The plans provided for a 30-by-75-foot swimming pool of the "standard American competitive type. Primarily designed for instruction and competitive swimming, it is the first water deck level pool in the county, with water and walking deck at the same elevation. This means a constant overflow, with

the water going back into the filter system."

The contract covered only the pool area, additional costs for the completion of the deck and dressing rooms were anticipated. With characteristic Pathfinder industriousness, President Mrs. Victor Hugo-Vidal said that if additional funds were required, the Pathfinders would raise them.

And given that the entirety of the project was due to hard work by a women's group, the club leader generously appended, "It is the intention to make the swimming pool available to girls groups too." Amazingly, the dedication of the pool was set for just a few months later on April 15, 1962.

The intrepid ladies of Pathfinders did not rest on their laurels. Having conceived of a swimming pool addition to the club, raised the money for it, and accomplished having it built all within a single year, they immediately launched into fundraising for a proper gymnasium. And they kept on going.

By the end of the 1960s, they adopted what would become known as Pathfinder Ranch. Operated by the Boys' Club, the Pathfinder Ranch was located on land donated by two Pathfinder husbands, (presumably in conjunction with their wives.) "Amid a sylvan mountain setting of fresh air, tall pines and Western flavor...it provides boys, many of

them underprivileged, with a summer camping experience that would be available in no other way. Maintaining a Western approach, the ranch emphasizes riding and care of horses as one of its major programs."

"Each of the boys will earn \$10 on his own but will need \$25 more for his eight-day stay in camp." The Desert Sun appealed to "local residents to give the boys a hand toward what to most of them is their first experience at camping out...Many of the members of the Boys' Club are those who view \$35 as an astronomical figure...something beyond their present reach. Last year not one boy was turned down on his request to go to camp...because readers responded to a plea for help."

More than six decades later, the Pathfinders continue their good work. The Boys' Club is now the Boys & Girls Club. It services the needs of hundreds of kids in myriad ways promoting community, education and industriousness. With the help of the Club, youngsters aspire to grow up to be world-renown scientists like those in attendance at that first Pathfinder gala back in 1961.

On Feb. 29, at Thunderbird Country Club (naturally), the Pathfinders are hosting another black-tie dinner, continuing the long tradition. The tickets for the glamorous evening are available at palmspringspathfinders.org.