

SPOTLIGHT ON LENORE TOBY-SIMMONS

By David Udoff

The Citizens Interested in the Arts, Inc. installed Lenore Toby-Simmons, Williams Island resident, as the newly elected President of the 190 member group. This is the other CIA that sends cultural aficionados to infiltrate art organizations and decide where grants are appropriated. I interviewed Lenore and asked her about this philanthropic organization and commitment in preserving the visual and performing arts in South Florida.

Enjoying the view from her exquisitely decorated condominium overlooking the Intracoastal amid her collection of antiques and delicate ivories from around the world, I then started our interview.

Q: You mentioned that your career background is in hospitality and hotel management. Tell me more about that.

A: Well, it's very interesting. I was born in Boston and moved to Puerto Rico and attended the University where I became interested in Fine Arts. I later became involved with tourism development in Puerto Rico. I became involved and created many events at the Ponce Intercontinental Hotel before returning to the states. In Miami Beach, I started my career at the Eden Roc when I arrived in 70's.

Q: I heard those were the heydays when entertainment was at the different lounges in Miami Beach.

A: Yes, it was very exciting and I met many celebrities.

Q: I learned that The Fontainebleau Hotel had all the big name stars that performed there. Were you the General Manager of both these hotels?

A: I started out with a smaller position at the Eden Roc and over the years was advanced until I became the General Manager. The Eden Roc closed so I was hired to go over to the Fontainebleau Hotel and was there for a number of years. I've travel worldwide developing business for these hotels. In 1977, I was named in Who's Who as the first female Manager of a major hotel in the United States. Later, I was plucked by a headhunter to go to work at the Diplomat Hotel in Hollywood.

Q: How did you get involved in the arts and entertainment scene in South Florida?

A: My background is my love of the hotel business. Tourism is still very strong in South Florida. We went through our lows in the 70's but came back. I really credit the television show, 'Miami Vice,' for putting Miami Beach back on the map.

Q: As the newly elected President of the Citizens Interested in the Arts, can anyone join this organization?

A: Yes, it's an all volunteer group and the membership is \$125.00 per year and is tax deductible. All the monies we collect and raise is given back to the community for the arts.

Q: Tell me more about your fundraising events. Do you have art receptions and entertainment programs?

A: This past year, we gave out 25 grants. We meet once per month from October to May. Our members pay for their luncheons at different restaurants and hotels around the community. We'll have one of our grantees entertain at a luncheon and members get to see what the artists are doing.

Q: Do you personally collect art or have a particular favorite art form?

A: I am a lover of all arts, such as: Dance, theater and classical music. I opened and managed The Colony Theater which became the cultural anchor for Lincoln Road. I joined the Concert Association of Florida and they brought in world-renowned artists, as you can see from these photographs on the table, Luciano Pavarotti, Isaac Stern and Mikhail Baryshnikov and Itzhak Perlman.

Q: Do you enjoy contemporary music?

A: I like everything contemporary up until Hip Hop.

Q: In addition to music, you mention that The Citizens Interested in the Arts, founded in 1997, has raised more than \$350,000 for theatre, dance, and visual art companies. In addition to the luncheons, how else do you obtain funds for these art groups?

A: Dues are all we ask. Sometimes we have monthly gifts or raffles. Basically, our major fundraiser is during the spring; our big event in March. We have some special events where we do theatre parties or go to the ballet or Fairchild Gardens and try to have as many events to raise money. One of the most exciting things I have done was to get Pavarotti to perform on Miami Beach.

Q: Many of the grants are given to art organizations in Dade County. Are there any grants given to potential Aventura cultural art groups?

A: We are open to all people who submit for a grant. There might be some dance companies in our area. I understand when I was on the Cultural Committee for the City of Aventura we had the original plans to put a theatre in the city.

Q: Yes, that is still on the agenda and is planned to be built near the charter school. According to the city, it will be an inside facility with 300 seats with a stage and will have the ability to put on a variety of performing arts.

Thank you for an interesting interview and good luck in your endeavors for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Join the CIA and become an operative. Further information is available at their website www.cia4arts.org