January 19, 2023

East Sacramento News

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Soroptimist International of Sacramento celebrates 100 years of community service

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Sacramento native helped acquire, preserve original Rosa Parks bus

His career includes curatorship of Smithsonian's African American history museum

By Lance Armstrong
vcneditor@gmail.com

William S. Pretzer, who grew up in the Arden area, has the notoriety of having helped a Michigan museum research, acquire and preserve the well-known, Montgomery, Alabama bus associated with civil rights icon Rosa Parks.

It was 67 years ago this month that Parks, who was an African American woman, refused to give up her seat to a white man who had entered the bus.

Parks was subsequently arrested for violating Montgomery's segregation laws. But it was that Dec. 1, 1955 incident that helped launch the civil rights movement.

The acquisition of the bus by the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation in Dearborn, Michigan is among the highlights of Pretzer's career.

At the time that the Ford museum purchased the bus in an auction, Pretzer was serving as one of that museum's curators. He is currently a curator at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, D.C.

Pretzer recently spoke to this paper about the bus, as well as other details about his life.

"In 2001, there was a newspaper article that claimed that the Rosa Parks bus had been found, and we saw the newspaper article," he said. "The president of the museum called me up. I was a full-time curator there. (He) said he wanted me to look into that issue, that if that bus was going to be put up for auction, and if we could prove if it was the real bus.

"This was, you know, 50 years after her having sat in the bus. How do we know that it's the real bus? Nobody else said it was the real bus in all these years."

Prior to reaching the point that the museum would seek to acquire the bus through the auction, Pretzer contacted the bus' owner in Montgomery, and also hired a former FBI agent who had worked as a forensic document examiner.

The former FBI agent ultimately convinced the museum's officials that it was the actual bus associated with Parks, Pretzer noted.

"We did things like go down and look at the paint on the bus and take off the plaque, where the number of the bus was, and see whether or not the paint underneath was different," he said.

"We looked at the number to see if somebody had repainted the number, because the number was the way we were checking on the bus. We talked to lots of the neighbors who knew about the bus and then went to bid on it at auction."

Working with the Ford museum's administration, Pretzer helped put together the funding for the museum's successful auction bid, and he later assisted in writing the grant for the financing of the bus' restoration.

The total cost for the museum to purchase the bus and have it restored was about $700,000.

Pretzer also shared other details about the bus' history, noting that it remained in service until 1971 when it was sold privately to a Montgomery resident.

"The sale didn't get any press at all; it was just the bus disappeared," he said.

In about 2000, several years after the death of the man who purchased the bus, his son-in-law attempted to sell the bus for $100,000. However, eBay would not allow him to sell it, because he had no documentation to prove that it was the bus associated with Parks.

Pretzer mentioned that the unsuccessful attempt to sell the bus received media coverage, which resulted in a New Jersey "political junkie" seeking to help have the bus auctioned with proof that it is the bus linked to Parks.

Ultimately, a paper with a mid-1950s newspaper clipping about Parks' arrest, along with handwritten notations of the bus' number and the name of its driver, were located at the home of the widow of the man who had been the manager of the bus company.

Pretzer referred to that discovery as the "smoking gun" that validated the authenticity of the bus associated with Parks' history-changing refusal to give up her seat.

Altogether, Pretzer spent 21 years as a curator and educator at the Ford museum.

As a person who has achieved much success in life, Pretzer noted that his road to that success began with his good upbringing in the Arden area.

Pretzer, who was one of the two children of Stanley and Betty Pretzer, mentioned that his parents bought a house in the Arden Park subdivision in 1955.

They moved to the capital city from Fresno after Stanley obtained a job as a budget analyst with the state of California. He later became a business manager with the state, then worked as the chief financial officer for California State University, Sacramento.

During the earlier years of his life, Pretzer attended Mariemont School (today's Mariemont Elementary School), Arden School (today's Arden Middle School), and Rio Americano High School.

At the latter named institution, Pretzer was a member of its second graduation class, in 1968.

"The campus, there was only

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Photo courtesy of Phil Kampel Photography

William S. Pretzer speaks at the San Juan Education Foundation's 'An Evening with the Stars' fundraising gala in Sacramento on Oct. 7. During the event, he was inducted into the foundation's hall of fame.

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Cover by: Courtesy of Soroptimist International of Sacramento

Soroptimist International of Sacramento celebrates 100 years of community service

By Pat McConahay and Lance Armstrong

This year, Soroptimist International of Sacramento (SIS) is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

Soroptimist volunteers throughout the world have a mission to provide women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment.

The word, Soroptimist, is a combination of "soror," the Latin word for "sister," and "optima," the Latin word for "best." Soroptimist can be interpreted as "the best for women."

The Soroptimist movement began with the creation of its first chapter, which was officially chartered in Oakland as Soroptimist Club, Inc. on Sept. 26, 1921. Its original members consisted of about 80 Oakland area business and professional women.

An installation dinner for that new organization was held in the Ivy Room of the Hotel Oakland on Oct. 3, 1921.

The original chapter is recognized today as the "founder club," and has also been called the "mother club."

In the first constitution of the Oakland club, which was initially led by its founding president, Violet Richardson, the purpose of that club was described as follows:

"To foster the spirit of service as the basis of all worthy enterprises, and to increase the efficiency by its members in the pursuit of their occupations by broadening their interest in the social, business and civic affairs of the community through an association of women representing different occupations."

Soroptimist International of Sacramento has the distinction of being one of the oldest Soroptimist chapters in the world.

An early reference to Soroptimist presence in Sacramento was recorded in the Sept. 23, 1922 edition of The Sacramento Bee.

"Mrs. Helena M. Gamble of Oakland is in Sacramento organizing a local branch of the Soroptimist Club," notes an article in that edition. "Mrs. Gamble is the state organizer for the club."

At the time that this Bee article was published, there were only three Soroptimist chapters, with the other chapters, besides Oakland, being located in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Another chapter was then in the process of being established in Washington, D.C.

The inaugural Soroptimist meeting in Sacramento was held on Oct. 27, 1922 in the Tapestry Room of the Hotel Sacramento at 10th and K streets. It marked the first of this local organization's weekly luncheons.

Included in the program for that initial meeting was a speech by Richardson, and vocal performances by Irma Randolph of Oakland.

The Hotel Sacramento was also the site of a special banquet on March 2, 1923, in which then-recently elected officers were installed by Richardson.

Those officers were Winifred Louthain, president; Pearl Atkinson, vice president; Lula Adams, treasurer; and Emilie Connelly, secretary.

Among the special guests in attendance at the banquet were Gov. Friend W. Richardson and California first lady Augusta (Felder) Richardson, and Sacramento Mayor Albert Elkus and his wife, Cordelia (DeYoung) Elkus.

Charter members of the Sacramento chapter came from such diverse fields as law, engraving and growing olives.

During this local organiza-

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Photos courtesy of Soroptimist International of Sacramento

Soroptimist International of Sacramento Christmas party, 1949.



Pictured is a historic scene from the local Soroptimist club's annual California State Fair dinner.

Soroptimist:

Continued from page 3

tion's first few decades, it funded a wide range of community projects, including trees for Sacramento, a station wagon for Easterseals, laying the YWCA cornerstone at 1122 17th St., and contributing to boys and girls clubs.

"We evolved from being a women's service organization, supporting many different causes, to focusing on issues related to women and girls," said Idelle Claypool, who served as SIS president in 2015. "This not only allowed us to take on some critical issues, but it also gave the organization a specific identity."

Soroptimist International of Sacramento celebrated its 50th anniversary with a gathering at the Elks Building at 11th and J streets on March 23, 1973.

The event, titled "A Day to Remember," included a choral group performing music from 1923 to 1973.

Chairing the program was Carolyn Johnson, and special guests included Sacramento City Council Member Anne Rudin and Sacramento County Supervisor Sandra Smoley.

Many recipients of the services of local Soroptimists have expressed appreciation for the assistance they received.

One such recipient was Shelby Scott, who received an SIS scholarship that led to her earning a bachelor's degree in women's and gender studies at California State University, Sacramento.

"The scholarship gave me hope – the hope that I could complete my education and be able to support myself and my child," Scott said. "The scholarship not only covered some school materials, it helped me pay basic bills for my daughter and me, so I could concentrate on school."

Today, Scott works with a program that helps youth with literacy and how to advocate for themselves.

SIS disperses about $20,000 annually to women, so they can continue their education.

The "Dream Scholarship" is one of several programs the Sacramento chapter participates in as part of the global volunteer organization.

Soroptimists are dedicated to helping women and girls overcome challenges by pursuing education and training, so they can successfully support themselves and, in some cases, their families.

"We're proud of our mission to educate women and girls, because through education they are less vulnerable to sex traffickers, more likely to leave a domestic violence situation, and less likely to live in poverty," said SIS President Karen Smith.

That is certainly true for Nicole Openshaw, who benefitted from another Soroptimist International of Sacramento program, called the "Live Your Dream" awards.

"For the first time, I felt recognized for the individual that I am, despite what I've gone through," Openshaw said.

When Openshaw received a nearly $5,000 grant, she and her daughter, who is a preschool student, were living in a shelter for women escaping sex trafficking and domestic violence.

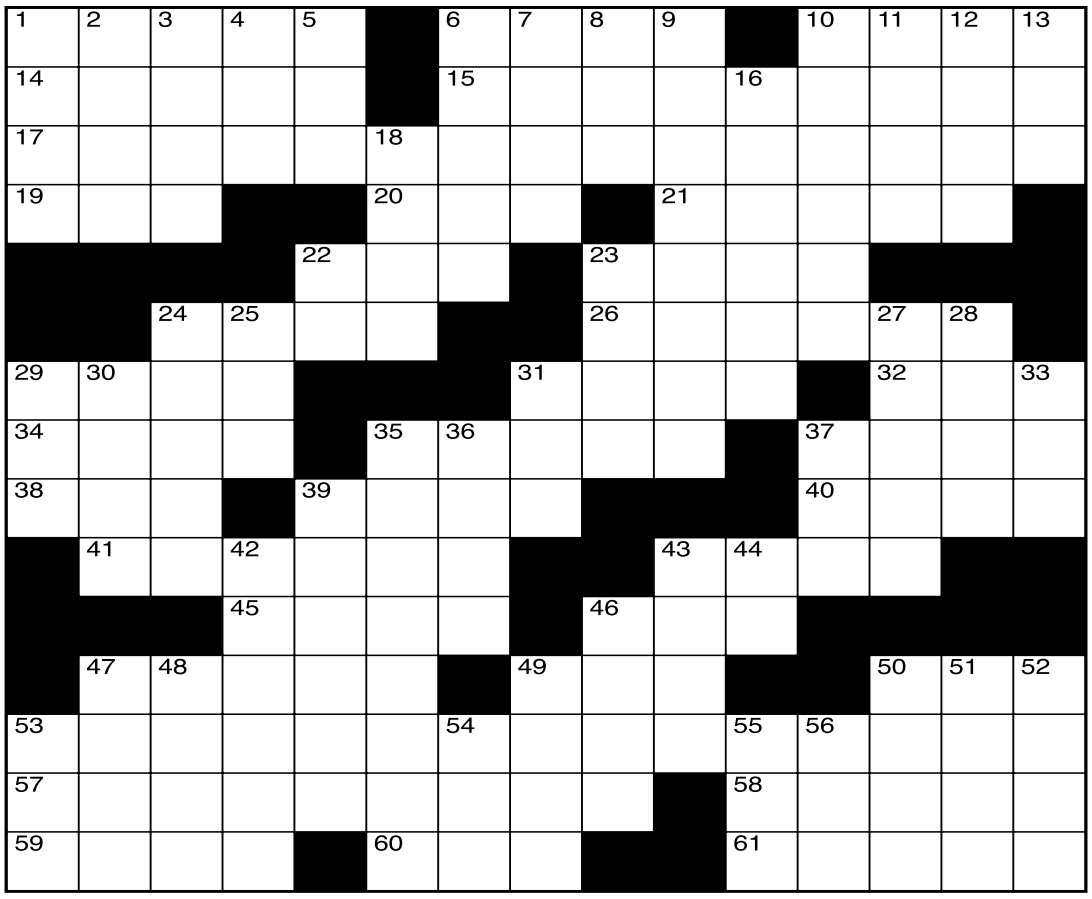
The "Live Your Dream" award allows women, like Openshaw, who are the heads of their households, to pursue a college degree or complete a technical training program.

They may use the funds in any way that helps them achieve their educational goals – whether it is to pay for tuition, rent or child care.

Openshaw was able to buy a car to get to and from Sacramen-

See SOROPTIMIST on page 5

CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS
1. Not invited
6. Whale ship captain
10. One point south of southwest
14. Small cavity in a rock
15. Recidivists
17. City of Angels hoopster
19. A way to mark with one's signature
20. OJ trial judge
21. Rice cooked in broth
22. One point east of due south
23. One point east of southeast
24. Complements an entree
26. Grouped by twos
29. Disfigure
31. Woods
32. Political action committee
34. Longer of 2 bones in the forearm
35. Kin groups
37. Philippine Island
38. Contrary to
39. Bluish-gray fur
40. Comprehend the written word
41. Natural depressions
43. Felines
45. Breathe noisily
46. Taxi
47. Pancake made from buckwheat flour
49. Swiss river
50. Foot (Latin)
53. Have surgery
57. Formal withdrawal
58. Monetary units of Peru
59. Greek war god
60. 2,000 lbs.
61. High points

CLUES DOWN
1. Green and yellow citrus fruit
2. A bright color
3. Thicket
4. Journalist Tarbell
5. A place to work or relax
6. Sharp mountain ridge
7. Helicopter
8. Mimic
9. Suggests
10. More musty
11. Large, flightless rail
12. Make beer
13. Soviet Socialist Republic
16. People who can account for you
18. Taunt
22. South Dakota
23. Cover the entirety of
24. Kids' favorite visitor
25. A way to save for retirement
27. Fencing swords
28. C. China mountain range
29. Type of sandwich
30. Team
31. Paddle
33. Partly digested food
35. Most cagey
36. Shoppers make one
37. Cathode-ray tube
39. Food supplies
42. Backbones
43. Concern
44. Blood group
46. Broadway songwriter Sammy
47. Dutch colonist
48. Full-grown pike fish
49. Deity of a monotheistic cult
50. Type of bread
51. S. Nigerian people
52. Scottish tax
53. Young women's association
54. Brazilian city
55. Hide of a young animal
56. Midway between north and northeast

Pretzer:

Continued from page 2

like two buildings, and only the girls gym," Pretzer said. "So, it was constant construction going on. There was very little landscaping, so, in the dry period when it got windy, we had huge dust storms across campus when we went from one building to the other."

A highlight during Pretzer's time as a Rio Americano student was speaking at his graduation.

Pretzer recalled rewriting his speech following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

"The (rewritten speech) basically argued that what we had received was an education that was, despite the best efforts of our teachers at Rio and the calm upbringing we received in the homes of Arden Park that we had, an education of violence," he said.

"And I talked about the violence, I talked about racial violence of war, I talked about the violence of political opposition. And I said that we were going to have to overcome that education. We were going to have to reject what we had learned about violence, and turn it into a different direction for ourselves, and hopefully for society."

Pretzer later attended Stanford University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science in 1972.

His education also included earning a master's degree and doctorate's degree in history at the Northern Illinois University.

In 1977, he received fellowships to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. to conduct research on his dissertation.

Two years later, Pretzer received another fellowship from Northern Illinois University. It was also during that time that he was married to Terry Moores, who he met in graduate school.

Pretzer was hired by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, where he worked on exhibits for the following four years.

The Pretzers moved to Delaware in 1984, and Pretzer began working at the Winterthur Museum.

After a year in that position, Pretzer obtained full-time employment at The Henry Ford museum, which is the largest indoor-outdoor history complex in the United States.

In addition to his work at that museum on an exhibit with the Rosa Parks bus as a main feature, Pretzer also worked on many other exhibits, including a Thomas Edison, Menlo Park laboratory exhibit. He later edited a book about Edison.

From 2006 to 2009, Pretzer ran the museum and taught museum studies and history at Central Michigan University.

It was in the latter year that Pretzer joined the Smithsonian in establishing its National Museum of African American History & Culture. The museum opened on Sept. 24, 2016.

Pretzer, who remains with that museum as its senior curator of history, spoke about his current work.

"I'm really, really pleased I got the opportunity to try to do something to educate the American public about the reality of race relations and the history of race relations in this country," he said.

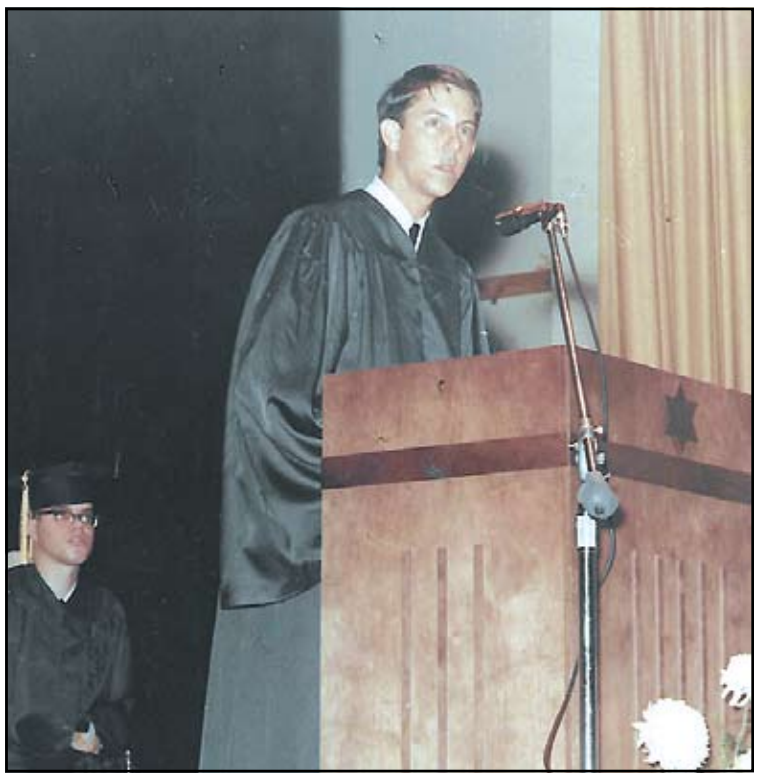


Photo courtesy of William S. Pretzer

William S. Pretzer speaks at his 1968 Rio Americano High School graduation ceremony.

"Because only if we acknowledge the reality of those relationships, and the way in which African Americans have been systematically discriminated against, in slavery and after slavery, and physically attacked, only if we acknowledge that and know about it, and can trust the information we get as truth. I like to think that that's a contribution to making a better world."

In recognition of Pretzer's notable career, he was inducted into the San Juan Education Foundation's hall of fame on Oct. 7, during a special ceremony held at the Milagro Centre in Carmichael.

Soroptimist:

Continued from page 4

to City College, where she was studying sociology. She could also drive her daughter to school.

Today, Openshaw has stable housing and is the program coordinator for the Inter-Tribal Council of California's sexual assault program.

This year, six women will share $12,000 in cash grants.

SIS also created "Dream It, Be It," a career mentoring and life skills program. It serves students at the Sacramento Academic and Vocational Academy, a charter, alternative high school in Sacramento.

The program includes the SIS chapter-developed money management course, "Money Matters."

"We teach young women how to handle their money, so it goes farther and lasts longer," said Nancy Wolford-Landers, who helps conduct the classes.

A student, who identified herself only as Maria, mentioned that the course has helped her to better manage her personal finances.

"Before I took this class, if I had money left at the end of the month, I would spend it going out to dinner," she said. "Now I put it in my rainy-day fund, and I have saved more than $700."

Another student, Angela, also spoke about how the course helped her manage her money.

"I learned the difference between a need and a want," she said. "Now I only spend my money on needs."

Soroptimist International of Sacramento also gives out additional grants to support community organizations aligned with the Soroptimist mission, like Wellspring Women's Center and My Sister's House.

SIS President-elect Nilda Valmores expressed pride in her association with this historic, local Soroptimist chapter.

"I'm proud of being part of an organization that has done so much for Sacramento over the last 100 years – especially what we've done to empower women and girls from underserved communities," she said. "We're excited to do even more as we embark on our next 100 (years)."

Soroptimist International of Sacramento will celebrate its centennial anniversary with a dinner at the Dante Club, 2330 Fair Oaks Blvd., on March 4 at 5 p.m.

Tickets are $100 per person and can be purchased through SIS.

For additional information, visit the website, www.SoroptimistSacramento.com.

Puzzle Solutions

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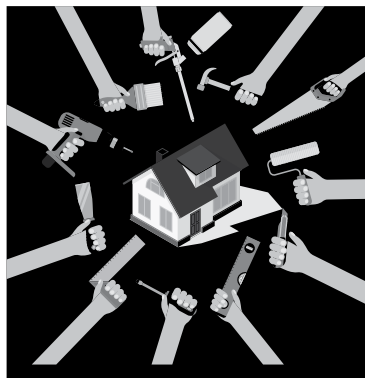
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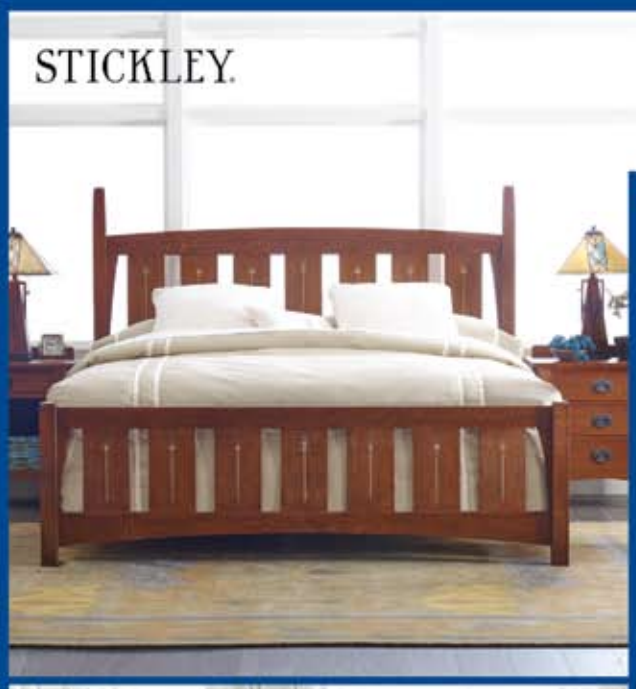
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