

## **Green highlight = Update complete**

### **Nancy Baldwin**

A veteran member of the Aquadettes, Nancy is 77 and joined the team in 2016. She learned to swim as a child and earned a swimming badge with her Girl Scout troop, but says “artistic swimming is a whole new experience. It’s a higher level of swimming with stunts and artistic swimming routines. I love it.”

Nancy grew up in Redondo Beach, Calif., played flute and piccolo in her high school band, then became a second-grade teacher. She has three daughters and two grandchildren.

“I want to thank the Aquadette veterans for teaching me how to do artistic swimming. It takes prodigious practice with patient coaches.”

### **Pat Bell**

Pat is from Portland, Ore., where early on she learned to swim in the lakes and the Pacific Ocean with family and friends.

A Village resident for 25 years, Pat swims often for exercise, relaxation, and long-lasting friends at the pool. Her signature move is to end every swim with a handstand, which once caught the eyes of the Aquadettes.

After her retirement from her physical therapy career, she joined the team and continues to grow and perfect techniques with skilled and inspiring coaches and choreographers. Pat’s advice to potential swimmers is to “participate at whatever level you are at and ENJOY.”

Pat has medaled twice in The Village Games: Once in 2002, and again in 2025. Pat has been in three Aqua Follies shows and was filmed in the introduction to the TV series B Positive.

### **Charlotte Davis**

Charlotte grew up in a small Indiana town where she learned to swim in a lake when she was two and a half. When she turned nine, she started going to summer camp in northern Wisconsin. At 15, along with her cabinmate and counselor, she took a five-day, 25-mile canoe trip around Lake Superior, an amazing experience. When she moved to Los Angeles, she learned another water skill: body surfing.

Charlotte became inspired to teach special education after her son was born with Down Syndrome. During her 40-year career, she and her son have made a difference in her students’ and families’ lives.

After seeing her first Aquadettes show, Charlotte knew that she wanted to join. When she started swimming with the team, she realized that alas, muscle memory does not last 30 years. But Charlotte says she feels kindness, encouragement, and love from her teammates.

## **Chrissie Fenton**

Chrissie was born in NYC. When she was 10 the family moved to Las Vegas, into a complex that had a pool. That's where she discovered her love of the water and swimming. Later Chrissie started her professional career in data processing and various types of office jobs. Next she became a 21 dealer in Vegas before owning a Sports Information Service. She and her husband bought a vacation home in Laguna Woods in 2007. After 61 years in Las Vegas, she retired in 2022 and the couple moved here permanently. She swam three days a week and met some Aquadettes, who proceeded to "talk me into trying out," Chrissie says. "I'm having the time of my life at something I never thought I'd be doing." In addition to being a member of the team, Chrissie has served her mermaid community as vice president, chair of the events committee and as one of the choreographers.

## **Angela Gregory**

Born in Downey, Calif., Angela moved with her family to Lake Forest (then known as El Toro) at the age of seven. In her backyard pool, she spent countless hours swimming and experimenting with mermaid moves. One could easily recognize Angela by her green hair, changed from blonde courtesy of the chlorine.

Following graduation from San Diego State University, Angela pursued a career in law. For 26 years, she lived in Westborough, Mass. practicing corporate technology and pharmaceutical law. She has two grown children, Bryn (27) and Wyatt (25), who still live in the Bay State.

Since she could never understand those heavy New England accents nor was willing to further tolerate cold winters, she moved to Laguna Woods in 2023. After reading an article in The Globe about the Aquadettes, Angela knew that this was her group. Now, however, she protects her hair from becoming green with conditioner and a bathing cap.

## **Karen Hawthorne**

In the 1950s on an Air Force base in Japan, Karen took one summer swimming course but never had the opportunity to join a swim team. Later, living in the 1960s Brooklyn before Brooklyn became cool (then it was Saskatchewan), Karen's exercise routine became running down and up subway steps, then away from muggers. In 2020 Karen moved from Boston ("Love that Dirty Water") to be near her beloved LA TV writer daughter.

Karen's most rewarding work: For 10 years she taught freshman writing at Boston's Bunker Hill Community College to mostly immigrant students...the most diligent, respectful, and grateful young adults she has ever met. Both a Phi Beta Kappa and a self-described "computer idiot," in her free time Karen is an enthusiastic cook, yogi, alto 1, world traveler and cancer conqueror.

### **Chris Holtshopple, Assistant Coach**

Chris spent summers at Pittsburgh's Chapel Gate Swim Club. Soon she began teaching beginner swim lessons and worked as a lifeguard. In high school, Chris was a cheerleader and was on the swim and gymnastic teams (Go Vixens!) and even swam in a few artistic swim shows having long ago learned to nail that ballet leg.

Chris became a pharmacist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Go Badgers!). Shortly after graduating she married, and the new couple left the Midwest for Southern California. She raised her son and two daughters in the OC and now is a Nana to three amazing grandkids.

Upon her 2023 move to Laguna Woods Village, Chris read in The Globe about artistic swim tryouts. She was both happy and honored to be asked to join the team and to be offered the assistant coach position (Go Aquadettes)!

### **Lou Ann Hughes**

For as long as she can remember, Lou Ann wanted to learn how to swim. However, growing up in Canada, the closest she could get was bobbing around in the lake on her floatie while on summer vacation with her grandparents.

In 2022 she learned about the Aquadettes on Jeff Goldblum's TV show and had an epiphany! With six weeks until tryouts, she studied swim videos on YouTube. With dear Margaret in the pool guiding her, she managed to execute some of the basics and backstroke the entire length of the pool for the first time! Lou Ann is so grateful to Coach Bunny for taking a chance on her, and to her fellow mermaids for their patience, support, and encouragement.

She has been married to Mr. Wonderful for 45 years, enjoyed her career in hair and make-up, and has raised two awesome kids. She says, "I am truly blessed."

### **Susan Jereb**

Susan was born in Rock Springs, Wyo. and grew up in Alhambra, Calif. After college and a trip to Europe, she moved to the East Coast. Susan has worked as a change girl at Lake Tahoe; a social worker in Los Angeles County; with the health department in Albany, NY; and as a physician assistant in Albany and Syracuse, NY.

She is delighted to be a part of the Aquadettes. They work hard to achieve difficult skills. She says, "I am somewhat of an apprentice after almost two years, as I keep getting injured, but I hope to catch up." Susan is grateful for her coaches Bunny Quartararo and Chris Holtshopple. Bunny's advice still motivates Susan: "Trust the water. It will hold you up."

### **Kim Knotts, Treasurer**

When Kim was 15, she moved from Alhambra, Calif. to Newport Beach. She is a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and member of Saddleback Church Laguna Woods. Kim is blessed with two daughters, Leah and Emily, and three grandchildren, Abel, Ken, and Lacey. Her biggest delight is

being a mom, grandma, and praying for her family.

Aquadette President Cindy Toerner, credits Kim with putting the Aquadettes on a resolute financial footing. “Kim is an inspiring treasurer.”

A retired teacher, Kim loves being an Aquadette. “As a child I swam for fun in the Spinelli’s pool; I loved swimming all the time.” A synchronized swimmer in high school, she never imagined she would be an Aquadette 50 years later! “I love the encouragement from my Aquadette friends. It is good for mind and body, it is fun, and I never feel like I am exercising.”

### **Melinda LeBlanc**

Born on the bayou, water play was a way of life for Melinda. From swim lessons at age two, she says she has always felt at home in the water. After several health issues, she again turned to the water to rehabilitate her body and mind. The gentle resistance and buoyancy provided a path to healing that felt both restorative and empowering. Upon becoming an Aquadette in 2023, she found a “true sense of belonging” in the team’s collective spirit. She defines her journey by the rewarding challenge of mastering the technical skills required for artistic swimming—a discipline that demands both physical strength and mental focus. She says, “There is a unique magic that happens in the water when the practice pays off.” Melinda has found few things as fulfilling as that moment when everything clicks and the entire team moves in synchronicity.

### **Cathy Lee**

Cathy values her training to excel as an artistic swimmer in the mermaid hands of the Aquadettes. Her first name is Sungja, but at Pool 1 she’s known as Cathy, her middle name. She was born in South Korea then immigrated to Chicago where she lived for 45 years. She learned to swim at the YMCA in 1976, also participating at LA Fitness off and on for about 38 years. In Laguna Woods Village, one day she was watching Nancy and Sydney practice diving when they asked her to join them. Since joining the Aquadettes in 2022, she says “artistic swimming has become my post-retirement challenge.” Cathy recommends swimming it to anyone who enjoys being in the water and would like to learn more to join Jan’s free swimming lessons at Pool 2 on Tuesdays from noon to 2 p.m.

### **Marina Levitanus**

Saint Petersburg Russia native Marina has called the U.S. home since 1979. A self-taught swimmer with a lifelong love of the water, she thrives on being in the Aquadettes because of the group’s camaraderie and the harmonious movement of this fantastic group of women. Marina is dedicated to mastering artistic swimming stunts while also having a whale of a time.

Marina and her husband of many years have a son in Laguna Niguel and a daughter in Israel.

When not making waves at Pool 1, one can find Marina on the tennis, pickleball, and paddle tennis courts, or perhaps dabbling in some visual art. Just do not expect her to draw a mermaid doing stunts...unless you want an abstract interpretation.

Her parents were clairvoyant when they named her “Marina,” which in Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish means “of the sea.”

## **Lynne Liebelt**

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## **Beth Luymes**

Beth was grateful to move from Fargo, ND, at age seven and learned to swim in her backyard pool in Newport Beach – “thank you Dad!” She earned her SCUBA certification in high school, a nursing degree in college, then dove straight into an ICU nursing career, eventually trading scrubs for wetsuits on Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Her worldwide adventures also include stints as an Alaskan cruise ship nurse, a spa nurse in Mexico, and a Hyperbaric and Diving Medicine RN while living aboard a 30-foot sailboat in Los Angeles. Chasing warm-water diving, Beth later moved to a Floridian barrier island, where she reluctantly weathered 20 years of hurricane-riddled misadventures.

Now happily back home in SoCal with her rescue dog Annie, Beth has found her latest calling as an Aquadette. She's thrilled to add Artistic Swimming to her aquatic resume... proof that the current always knows where to carry this determined mermaid.

## **Karen Massetti**

Karen began swimming at an early age while staying in Pasadena with her grandparents during summer breaks. Over time, Karen became a certified Red Cross instructor and lifeguard and has taught aqua group exercise classes for many years.

While Karen has been a Laguna Woods Village resident for nine years, this is her first year as an Aquadette. Karen states, “I am proud and excited to be in my first Aqua Follies and a member of this talented women’s team.” The Aquadettes are thrilled to have her too, especially since she won three gold medals, a silver medal, and placed first in the mixed relay 100-yard freestyle event in this year’s Laguna Woods Village Games. She had so many medals around her neck that they began to affect her posture.

## **Judith McCourt, Vice President PR and Fundraising**

Judith does not remember learning to swim—she suspects she was born into a family of fish. Growing up in Wales, her early memories include swimming with her sister in the frigid, deep waters of an old quarry. In high school she swam on the swim team and that led to lifeguarding and teaching swimming in the summers. Before moving to Laguna Woods in 2020 with her husband Mark, Judith swam with SoCal Masters.

Judith joined the Aquadettes in 2023. She says, “swimming is one thing...doing synchronized stunts while smiling? Whole different galaxy.” She is grateful for the support of her family, her team members, and her coaches, Bunny and Chris, who have infinite patience.

### **Maribeth McFaul**

From an early age, Maribeth has loved swimming. She has trained in diving, gymnastics, and dance and still studies ballet, Zumba and Pilates.

“Swimming with the Aquadettes combines my passions for physical fitness and dance with artistic movement in the water,” she says.

Originally from the San Francisco Bay area, Maribeth and her husband have raised five boys, living in Mission Viejo for 40 years before moving to Laguna Woods Village in 2023. Maribeth, who works as a visual artist and art teacher, is recognized for her larger-than-life ephemeral pavement chalk drawings. Currently Maribeth’s paintings are displayed at the Laguna Woods Community Center. She is a frequent exhibitor at the summer art festivals in Laguna Beach.

### **Denise Medina**

From the moment her dad taught Denise how to swim in their three-foot backyard pool, she was hooked. Her early obsession evolved into years of competitive swimming, lifeguarding, sailing with the family, beach trips to the Texas Gulf and the California coast, and every opportunity for beach vacations.

With a huge and supportive family, a 43-year marriage to Ralph, two wonderful sons Jason and Corbin, a 30-year career with IBM, a fun women’s boutique, and an apparel manufacturing company with Ralph, Denise moved to Laguna Woods Village in 2023. In addition to making new friends, experiencing so many activities, and finding a beautiful home, she enjoys sailing with the Laguna Woods Yacht Club, learning golf, and swimming with the brilliant Aquadettes since 2023.

### **Susan Nielson**

Susan was born in Utah and moved to So Cal with her family in 1964. She competed in swimming on a national level in butterfly. She loves artistic swimming and her dream to participate came true when she joined the Aquadettes in 2025, combining her two loves of dancing and swimming. Her family calls her a mermaid who needs to get her fins wet often.

For many years, Susan taught aqua aerobics, played and refereed basketball and ballroom danced. She learned to surf at age 62, raised 11 kids (his, hers and ours) and survived two husbands. She married her current sweetheart eight years ago.

She moved to Laguna woods in 2025 to care for her mother and feels blessed to have found a place a block away. Susan loves taking advantage of all the activities in Laguna Woods.

### **Bunny Quartararo, Head Coach**

An Aquadette since 2017, Bunny is the head coach of the team. She says, “I’m so grateful to lead these amazing women. We’re an active, thriving group who love to swim and spend time together creating artistic routines to music. We gain physical strength and endurance by swimming, new skills by working together as a team, and finally, emotional and spiritual joy.”

Bunny began swimming lessons when she was three. At five, some of the older kids took her

under their wings and showed her some “water ballet” moves. “At seven I entered my first competition. I continued to compete, but artistic swimming won my heart.” Bunny competed in her first national competition in Bartlesville, Okla. and continued to compete nationally until her 1974 “retirement.”

Bunny shared this ironic story: “When I was 10, swimming with the Tustin Meraquas Synchronized Swim Team, we did an exhibition swim with the brand new Aquadettes of Leisure World. Then I used to kid that I would swim with them one day. And here I am! Swimming is so peaceful, so calming. Being creative in the water to music. The flow. The glide. The feel of my body moving gracefully through the water.”

Bunny wants to continue with the Aquadettes for a long time. “They hold me accountable. I love the exercise, the camaraderie. I love watching friends grow in confidence and physical strength. We have a great outlook for the future...more fundraising events, more performances, and growing the team.”

### **Kathryn Robbins**

Kathryn was born in Long Beach, Calif. and has lived a life guided by curiosity, faith, and a love of learning. She spent 47 years as a medical aesthetician doing work she loves. In this season of life, she embraces joy and purpose—staying active, dancing, cooking, and saying yes to new experiences. Her journey has included being crowned Mrs. California, running for Laguna Woods City Council, and, in 2022, joining the Aquadettes, where she found friendship, teamwork, and joy in the water. Kathryn is a soldier in the Salvation Army and president of Liberty Matters O.C. Known as “Kathryn the GREAT,” she is a proud mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. With God’s grace, she continues to live her best life, showing that purpose, service, and joy have no age limit.

### **Judy Sterrett-Rizzo**

Judy, a native Michigander, is a loyal University of Michigan and Michigan State University sports fan. She earned degrees in nursing from both.

She learned artistic swimming at age 13 at an inland lake, and then participated in the sport as a freshman at Michigan State University. When she moved to Laguna Woods Village in 2008, she saw the Aqua Follies and thought, “I can still do that.” She joined in 2010, and 16 years later, she is still doing that.

Judy is a past vice president and a team choreographer. When swimming she says she leaves her personal issues behind. Once a practice is completed, her worries are minimized. In other words, “being an Aquadette is better than therapy. Cheaper, too.”

Judy thanks her partner Mike, her daughter, four granddaughters, and three great-grandchildren for their enthusiastic support. She is grateful to be able to participate in this challenging, yet beloved sports-dance activity. She is humbled to be swimming with such a dedicated group of senior women.

## **Catherine Titus**

Royal Oak Michigan native Catherine traded snow boots for swim fins in 1985 when she moved to California. As an Aquadette she is known as the Bedazzler-In-Chief and leads the costume committee from design to production. Catherine draws on decades of “mom magic” sewing for her two incredible adult children, Katelyn and Trey, and her grandson, Mason. Her costume portfolio spans from Peter Pan and Aladdin to Glinda the Good Witch and full Renaissance Faire regalia.

After 40 years teaching children with autism, Catherine is retired but remains a vital force in education, currently subbing and consulting for IUSD’s Education Specialists. She has stayed active in the water, swimming in her first triathlon at age 50 because, “who doesn’t start a hardcore athletic career in midlife?”

Today, Catherine loves to help choreograph artistic swimming routines and make waves. For her, the fierce Aquadette friendships are the heart of it all, but, she says, “the sequins definitely don’t hurt!”

## **Cindy Toerner, President**

Cindy moved to Lake Forest when I was five years old. Summers were filled with swimming at the Lake Forest Beach and Tennis Club alongside her siblings and friends. After the tragic drowning of her brother at that very club, her parents made the courageous decision not to shield the other children from the water. Instead, they encouraged Cindy and her siblings to keep enjoying it and to stay connected to the activities we loved.

Years later, swimming became an important part of her health journey. While swimming laps, she met some Aquadettes who “encouraged me to give artistic swimming a try. It definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone—but I think that’s a good thing. My teammates inspire me every day,” Cindy says.

She met her husband, Martin, while delivering to his workplace during her time at FedEx. She says, “we’ve built a life full of the things we love—bike rides, camping, dancing, swimming, and spending time with friends.” One of the most defining moments of her life happened in 1997, when she rescued two people from a plane crash in Lake Isabella – “an experience I’ll never forget,” she says.

## **Ruth Wardwell**

When Ruth retired from her career as a strategic communications and PR manager, she envisioned finding new activities to enrich her life. No way was swimming with the Aquadettes among them! But here she is, initially drawn into the Aquadettes by two members, then

welcomed by all when she joined in 2024.

Originally from the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, her extended family is here in SoCal. So as a youth, she was here often, then moved to OC as a young adult. One of her favorite cousins taught her how to body-surf when she was only eight.

In high school, she took what was then called synchronized swimming. Her two adult daughters were also high school swimmers. Ruth won her first-ever swim race at the 2025 Village Games.

A Laguna Woods resident since 2017, she likes to hike, beach walk, ride her bike, “try” to golf, play pickleball, and generally look for outdoor fun.

**Jean Zeman**

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