

THE REVIEW

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM SAN FRANCISCO TOWERS

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Maylene Wong Knows The Meaning of Heart

Dr. Maylene Wong's move to San Francisco Towers in September 2005 was a homecoming to the City by the Bay after four decades spent living and working in Southern California. This personable and engaging cardiologist first moved to the Bay Area from her native Fresno in 1955 to attend medical school at UCSF. Her freshman year was spent on the Berkeley campus where she lived in International House while taking foundation courses in physiology and anatomy.

After graduation, Maylene completed her internship and residency at UCSF Medical Center and San Francisco General Hospital, and her fellowship at UCSF's Cardiovascular Research Institute. She moved to England for a year to serve as voluntary registrar at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith Hospital in London. After returning to UCSF in 1965 to complete her fellowship, she moved to Santa Monica the following year to become Chief of the Cardiovascular Diagnostic Laboratory at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (GLA). She became an Assistant Professor of Medicine at UCLA that same year, Associate Professor in 1975,

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JACK BIRD AND JOHN DARBY WERE THERE AT THE BEGINNING

Long before San Francisco Towers was dedicated in November, 1997, Jack Bird and John Darby knew they would live there. In fact, more than seven years earlier, when architectural plans were still being developed, they reserved an apartment in the Life Care retirement community that was years away from groundbreaking.



*Jack Bird (left)
and John Darby*

"We were 'cornerstone residents' who acted on an early opportunity to become members of what would surely be the premier retirement community in San Francisco," says John. "Now, years later, we know that the vision became a reality, and we've been living happily here since March 1998."

Jack and John, who have been partners since soon after they met in 1959, lived in Mill Valley for

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and Professor in 1988. During her distinguished career, Maylene was the recipient of 13 research grants and published more than 70 peer-reviewed research papers.

Although she “retired” in 1997, the indefatigable Maylene would spend the next eight years in the burgeoning field of medical information technology, working at GLA as a consultant in information management. Maylene lived in Manhattan Beach, 16 miles from her office on Wilshire Boulevard. She would grow weary of the commute and, as every year passed, the infamous freeway traffic of Southern California took its toll. “I began to practice ‘avoidance behavior’ by rising at 3:30 in the morning so I could get in my workout and still be on the road by 6:15,” she says. “Then, because I’d wait for the afternoon rush hour traffic to subside, I rarely got home before 8:30 at night.”



Maylene realized long ago that she would have to abandon her automobile if she were to live the life she wanted to. In 2000, she determined that she would move to a retirement community in five years and knew that it would have to be in an urban setting where she would have ready access to all the cultural and culinary riches of a major city. After researching her options, she discovered San Francisco Towers. As a physician, the concept of Life Care appealed to her because it provided

the assurance of comprehensive lifetime medical care, including hospitalization whenever necessary.

Maylene’s life plan has worked out well. She lives comfortably in her San Francisco Towers apartment, is a season subscriber to the San



Francisco Opera, and indulges in her passion for fine food and great wine by eating out frequently. She serves on the community’s Health Services Committee and was elected last year to the Residents’ Council.

Maylene loves to travel, and recently returned from a two-week sojourn to Yemen, where she visited her sister-in-law, an archaeologist, toured the remote country on the Arabian Peninsula, and even managed to have tea with the British ambassador. “I have always been fascinated by archaeology and the Middle East,” says Maylene, who has also worked in digs in Israel, Uganda and Brazil. Her interest in planet conservation has taken her to Borneo to follow orangutans, Zimbabwe to track rhinoceroses, and South Africa to study termite mound ventilation.

In May, for the third consecutive year, Maylene will return to Milan, Italy, where she is a cardiology consultant to the Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche Mario Negri. After her work is done, she is looking forward to a side trip to explore the Ligurian coast. Maylene’s journeys are not limited to international travel. Once a year, she spends a week in New York to attend performances at the Metropolitan Opera and, of course, visit some of the better restaurants that Manhattan has to offer. Before departing for Italy, she will make a quick visit to Los Angeles, where, on March 31, GLA will present her with a Lifetime Achievement Award. ■

36 years before moving to San Francisco Towers. Both commuted across the Golden Gate Bridge to pursue their respective careers in the City.

John was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, and came to California with his mother when he was three years old. He entered Stanford University at the age of 17 and earned his bachelor's degree in 1950. John's college education was interrupted when he was drafted into the Army just before the end of World War II. He became a naturalized citizen in 1945 and would serve his adopted country again during the Korean Conflict.

In 1953, John became the first Rotary fellow in audiology at the San Francisco Hearing Center at Mt. Zion Hospital. After three years as a clinical

audiologist, he was named Executive Director of the Hearing Society for the Bay Area, a position he would hold for 36 years. Ironically, John was not hearing impaired until 1972, when he suffered an ototoxic reaction to medication he was given for an infection. Today, he wears two inconspicuous hearing aids and remains a tireless advocate for the hard of hearing. "My goal has always been education," he says, "and my main interests are in the

social aspects of hearing impairment, as well as the rehabilitation and readjustment of those affected, especially young people." Today, he continues to serve as a founding member of the Board of Directors of the California Communications Foundation which holds the contract to administer the state's Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program.

Jack, an Iowa native who grew up with his grandparents on a small farm outside of Des Moines, enlisted in the Army in June 1945 and was an

accountant on the Post Exchange train that served military outposts throughout Japan. After the war, he attended Drake University before moving to San Francisco in 1952.

Jack attended Golden Gate College at night to hone his skills as an accountant. He would go on to accounting positions of increasing responsibility at various steamship companies in San Francisco before joining Matson Navigation in 1964 as Chief Accountant. He became Tax Manager for 14 years and was named Controller in 1978, a position he held until retiring in 1993. Also, he served as volunteer accountant for the Hearing Society for over 20 years.

Jack and John share many interests, including collecting Asian porcelains and tending to their

many beautiful Bonsais. Both have been elected to the Residents' Council at the Towers; John has served twice, once as President. Jack has served as Treasurer and has been on the Finance Committee since its inception. He has put his green thumb to good use for seven years on the Flower Committee, six as Chair. Jack also coordinates the very successful annual Employee Appreciation Fund Drive.

"Life in a retirement community may not be perfect for everybody but living at San Francisco Towers is

perfect for us," says John. "We couldn't imagine living anywhere else. We have a beautiful home, delicious meals every day, all the services we could ask for, and any medical care we will ever need."

As an accountant, Jack says that he couldn't agree more. "Life Care is the gold standard," he says. "It's like an annuity that continually pays you back for the rest of your life. Besides, we have so many friends here ... people who are kind, caring and happy like we are." ■



Jack and John tend to the flowers growing just outside their apartment.

IN THE KITCHEN WITH CHEF ALMIR DA FONSECA

The word is spreading, bite by bite. By all accounts, the buzz about San Francisco Towers Executive Chef Almir Da Fonseca is giving new meaning to the phrase “word of mouth.”

“We have one of the most beautiful dining rooms in San Francisco, and my job is to provide a fine dining experience that is worthy of the surroundings,” says Almir. “That means using the freshest, most flavorful, seasonal ingredients to prepare and present the type of appetizers, entrées and desserts you would expect to find in the City’s best restaurants.”

Born and raised in Brazil, Almir studied marine biology for three years before entering culinary school in Rio de Janeiro. He learned classic French cuisine during a six-year apprenticeship under Chef Jacques Arpi in Choron, France. Later, Almir studied Italian cuisine in Siena and Orvieto, where he worked under Chef Enzo Barbetti.

Almir has long been affiliated with the California Culinary Academy, where he was named Culinary Educator of the Year in 2004, and where he still teaches classes in the Careme Room. Previously, Almir has been Executive Chef at Lucas

Wharf Restaurant in Bodega Bay, Jack London’s Creekside Restaurant in Glen Ellen, the Marconi Conference Center in Marshall, and Café 450 at the Philip Burton Federal Building in San Francisco.

Breakfast service at San Francisco Towers starts at 7 a.m., six days a week. On Sundays, Almir is in charge of a lavish brunch between 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. that has become a favorite of residents and guests alike. Lunch is buffet style and the attentive wait staff serves beautifully plated dinners each night that are ordered from Almir’s varied and creative menus.



“This is home for hundreds of people who enjoy and appreciate fine food,” says Almir. “It is a huge responsibility for me to meet their expectations every day. But this is what I do, and I love it.” ■



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