Sue Blue Named Hero of History at Annual Meeting

At the HSOSC annual meeting in May, Sue Blue was named recipient of the Hero of History award for 2016.

Most of us associate Sue Blue with the Saturday morning historic trolley tours that she’s been doing for our historical society since about 2004. It’s a volunteer passion and all the proceeds come directly to this organization. But, Sue’s devotion to history and education as an author, researcher, and actress goes back a lot farther than that. In many ways Sue holds the institutional memory for this historical society and it’s her we often turn to when we need clarification on some aspect of these two buildings or events that are important to the evolution of this membership organization.

Sue attended Southside Elementary and is a graduate of Sarasota High School, class of 1946. Her name is actually Suzette and it’s what her classmate Pete Esthus always called her. While a senior Suzette portrayed the role of Sara de Soto in The Legend of Sara de Soto at the Municipal Auditorium. After college and a career as an actress and theater teacher, Sue returned to her hometown, Sarasota, in 1994. She restored the childhood home built by her grandfather, Aaron E. Scarborough, in 1925.

Sue became a member of the historical society in 1996 and a year later was on the board serving as program chairman. She later served as Vice-President of the Board. Today she is a member of the Advisory Board and was a subject for an Ordinary Historian video interview. We have copies here if you want to view it and you should because she’s had quite a life.

During her years on the HSOSC board, Sue worked on preservation projects such as the Lido Pool, Sarasota High School, the Van Wezel home, the Municipal Auditorium, the Bidwell-Wood House and Crocker Church. She wrote our brochures and was editor of monthly newsletter. And she authored a series of 20 articles on Sarasota history that appeared in Scene magazine. Additionally, Sue wrote and directed a staged reading of “Mr. Bidwell,” and we’re hoping for a revival of that next year. Sue served on Sarasota County Historical Commission from 2008 – 2012.

Sue still lives in her childhood home built by her grandfather. Her work on behalf of the Historical Society would be enough to quality her as a Hero of History, but her preservation activism in the wider community has been so outstanding for so many years, that it is time indeed for our Historical Society to declare with great pride and admiration that Suzette Jennings Blue is the 2016 recipient of the Hero of History award.

Norma Kwenski Receives Distinguished Service Award

At the May annual meeting, Norma Kwenski received this organizations Distinguished Service Award.

Norma Kwenski is the volunteer that every organization wants to call their own. She’s the one who arrives early, stays late and will do anything that needs attention from weeding the garden, to taking ticket money at Conversations, ironing tablecloths, washing dishes, to hosting at the Holiday Party and bringing homemade deserts with her. Shy about any kind of praise or acknowledgment, Norma always says she’d rather be a worker than a committee chair so don’t even ask her.

Norma and Brad Kwenski moved to Sarasota from Illinois in 1969 when their children were young. Kay was 9 and sons Brent was 7 and Kendell just 5. They moved into a 1927 Mediterranean Revival home in beautiful Sapphire Shores that had no air conditioning or heat,
but plenty of vintage charm. Brad got involved with the Ringling Museum, volunteering for the Medieval Fair. And he worked with Veronica Morgan when these two buildings were in the Rosemary District. They lived in their Sapphire Shores dream neighborhood until Brad became ill and encouraged Norma to make the move to a no-maintenance condominium in Longwood Run. Brad passed away in 2007.

Norma says Jane Kirschner, who had already pulled son Brent into her community service orb, was responsible for Norma becoming a member of the Historical Society. Later Jane made sure Norma got actively involved.

“I never thought I had any special talent,” says Norma, “I just thought I’d be quiet and help where help was needed.” And that’s what she did. But, volunteering so widely and so often, has given Norma a unique perspective on our organization. She always observes and reports on the successes of an event and tactfully points out where we could improve things. For instance, when she was collecting money on the Crocker porch for Conversations at the Crocker a couple years ago, Norma noticed that the lack of handrails was inconvenient and downright dangerous for many people coming up and down the steps. So, she talked it over with her children and the Historical Society board and the Kwenski Krew decided to donate money in Brad Kwenski’s name for handrails. People coming to the Crocker Church bless her every day for being so vigilant and so generous.

Designer Tag Sale and Jewelry Sale Coming Up

Two events that are sure to draw a crowd are on the HSOSC schedule and both could use volunteer help. On Saturday, November 12, the Crocker Church will be transformed into a giant gallery of luxuries for the home, garden and your outdoor entertainment area. It’s the Designer Tag Sale and it only happens every other year. Shop from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Expect to find bargain prices on art, home accessories, occasional furniture, designer fabrics, even wallpaper. Area design professionals donate custom items from their showrooms that could be destined for your home. No clothing, books, tools or fashion accessories.

This event is produced by the Events Committee at HSOSC. Taking the lead in getting donations and styling them for sale on the day of the big event are Jerry Chesley and Terrance Leaser. We need volunteers to pick up items, store items at their homes until Tag Sale day, work setting up and cleaning up. And, if you have a beautiful thing or two that you’d like to donate to the sale, now is the time. If you’re willing to work or donate, call Marsha Fottler at 371-8593 or contact Linda García at 364-9076. This event earns money for our Historical Society but it is labor intensive and requires a lot of volunteers. Please be one of them.

Another special retail event takes place on Saturday, November 26 and is called Sparkly Saturday. It’s a jewelry sale from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. at the Crocker Church. Organized by Linnea Appleby of Jewelry to The Rescue, this is a fundraiser for HSOSC.
Ms. Appleby takes none of the proceeds of what promises to be a gorgeous event. Recycling jewelry is her volunteer passion. She collects costume jewelry from donors that’s in pristine condition but also pieces that need a little love and repair. She does the work and the staging. Then she puts on a great sale of glamorous costume jewelry.

If you have any jewelry you want to donate for the sale, bring pieces to Linda Garcia at the Historical Society. If you love to shop for jewelry for yourself or for holiday gifts, then please mark your calendar and get ready to have a wonderful time at Sparkly Saturday.

This year the Bidwell-Wood House & Crocker Memorial Church were treated to a termite treatment and the Bidwell-Wood House has a new coat of paint done by Smith’s Painting.

Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation awards grant to HSOSC

Over the summer, we received notification that a grant in the amount of $5,000 has been awarded to the Historical Society of Sarasota County to help fund an improvement project to the interior of the historic Crocker Memorial Church. The grant comes from the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation, an organization formed in 1985 that makes grants to help other organizations preserve historic places and make them available to the public as a way of learning more about our history.

Each year the Alliance conducts a hugely successful historic homes tour and the proceeds from that project make grants possible. President of the Alliance is Joyce Hart. Big thanks HSOSC Finance Committee Chair Deborah Bowers for doing the grant application.

“A few months ago preservation architects Greg Hall and Linda Stevenson did an analysis of the Crocker interior and suggested ways that we could improve and stabilize the building and we are following those recommendations with the Alliance grant.” said Howard Rosenthal, President of HSOSC.

Both buildings at Pioneer Park are used for civic meetings, book clubs, theatrical performances, monthly history-oriented programs organized by HSOSC, art shows and much more. Over the past few years the Crocker Memorial Church has become a destination for small country weddings with the reception on the front and back porches of the Bidwell-Wood House. With the structural improvements made possible by the Alliance grant of $5,000, the Crocker Church building (which was decommissioned as a church in 2006) will become even more accessible to the community.

The Crocker is a preservation success story of adaptive use. The little white church building has been in continuous since it was built as a place of worship in 1901 by Peter Crocker and his friends. The Crocker has been moved three times and came to rest at Pioneer Park in 2006 when it was deconsecrated. Its usefulness to the community has saved it many times from the wrecking ball. Today, the Crocker is a living piece of history and serves the needs of the community just as it did more than a century ago.
Let The Conversations Continue

Now in its fifth successful year, Conversations at The Crocker is a production of the Events Committee at HSOSC and is chaired by Lynn Harding and Marsha Fottler. This community series of interactive presentations highlights specific aspects of Sarasota’s past and examines pivotal events and people who have influenced today’s Sarasota County and Florida. All of the presenters volunteer their time and talents to participate in the series. Proceeds help to maintain the Historical Society’s two heritage properties at Pioneer Park – the Bidwell-Wood House (1882, Sarasota’s oldest private residence) and the Crocker Memorial Church (1901). Docent-led tours of both buildings are available an hour before each of the Conversations at The Crocker events.

All Conversations start at 7 p.m. in the Crocker Church.

Historical Society members and students are admitted free. Guests, $10. Below is the schedule.

- **Tuesday, October 11, 2016**: Newtown Alive – An Illustrated History of Sarasota’s African-American Heritage. Vickie Oldham, Project Manager of Newtown Conservation District research and historian John McCarthy. Reception for members 5:30-6:30 p.m.

- **Tuesday, November 15**: Sarasota History 101, From the Whitakers to 1990. A basic and lively illustrated history of the area presented by Kate Holmes. A must for newcomers or those who are a little foggy about local history.

- **Tuesday, December 13, 2016**: Enjoy conversation and a buffet supper as well as music, libations and tree trimming at the festive annual Members Holiday Party. 6 p.m. until 8 p.m.

- **Tuesday, January 10, 2017**: How Did We Get So Tall? Sarasota Herald-Tribune Real Estate Editor Harold Bubil and award-winning historian and author Jeff LaHurd examine our town’s love/hate relationship with the skyscraper from the beginning of our rise to the sky to present day controversies about height.

- **Tuesday, February 14, 2017**: Urbexing Abandoned History in Old Florida. An illustrated presentation and conversation between photographer Virginia Hoffman and novelist Bob Plunket about their urban-exploration day trips to places near Sarasota that are truly an experience in time travel and cultural discovery.

- **Tuesday, March 14, 2017**: A Big Life in a Small World. Sculptor, circus benefactor and philanthropist Howard Tibbals is joined by Circus Museum Curator Deborah Walk for an illustrated talk about how and why the amazing miniature Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus of the 1920s came to Sarasota.

- **Tuesday, April 11, 2017**: How Small Museums are Vital. Representatives from top-ranking small museums in Sarasota and surrounding cities, talk about their challenges and successes in bringing history to the people in an enjoyable and meaningful way. The role of small museums in preserving the culture of a region is indeed a big one.

Rolland King, Pat Neal, Kevin Daves, Harold Bubil (moderated), Jay Tallman participated in a Conversation at the Crocker on Development in Sarasota.
An Illustrated History of Sarasota’s African-American Heritage. Vickie Oldham, Project Manager of Newtown Conservation District research will present at the Tuesday, October 11, 2016 conversation.

Sarasota Plenair painters love to paint our historical buildings.

**Historical Society Le Barge Cruise and Sue Blue Trolley Tours – Two Ways to Appreciate History and Have a Great Time**

Learning about local history while literally moving through past times is what our famous HSOSC tours are all about. Take your choice and float on a boat to where Sarasota history began or climb aboard a city trolley and ride through neighborhoods that shaped our present-day culture.

The Le Barge Historical Cruise takes place on Sunday, November 6 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Meet at Marina Jack and board Le Barge. Your host and organizer is Brenda Lee Hickman, an HSOSC member who has run this tour for nearly two decades. Your guide and narrator is historian and incomparable raconteur John McCarthy. While you enjoy refreshments and the autumn sunshine on the water, you’ll be participating in a history lesson like no other. Reservations essential. $50 per
Sue Blue’s Historic Trolley Tours are so famous they sell out fast. Board an old fashioned trolley at the Crocker Memorial Church and ride through urban neighborhoods while Sue Blue explains how and why Sarasota developed the way it did. Find out about the people who shaped the city a long time ago and the architecture that housed them. The trolley leaves at 10 a.m. and returns to the Crocker at noon. $30 per person and reservations are necessary. Call Linda at 364-9076. Below is the schedule of trolley tours this season.

September 17, 2016 (SOLD OUT)
October 8, 2016
October 29, 2016
November 19, 2016
December 10, 2016
January 7, 2017
January 28, 2017
February 18, 2017
March 11, 2017 (SOLD OUT)
April 1, 2017
April 22, 2017

A Ringing Endorsement for the Crocker Memorial Church

This was a nice surprise for HSOSC! In July, Jack Helm, owner of Helm Vault Service in Bradenton, presented a restored steeple to the Historical Society of Sarasota County. The refurbished 14-inch antique bell is for the historic Crocker Memorial Church built in 1901 by Peter Crock-er and brings back a tradition of ringing a church bell in this building in past times. Today the steeple in the Crocker Church is not suitable to hold a church bell, so a cradle will be constructed for the bell and the cradle will be wheeled out and the bell rung on special occasions, such as for a wedding or perhaps at the start of an HSOSC event.

The steeple and a bell were added to the Crocker when it was Bay Haven Baptist Church from 1927 until 1985 and congregation members like Marian Cox remember ringing the bell for church services. The congregation also added front porch and steps in addition to a baptistry.

Helm Vault Service supports the Historical Society year round by doing the engraving on the memorial bricks that are placed in the path in front of the Bidwell-Wood House (1882) each November. These antique bricks were rescued from the Seaboard Air Line Railroad by Pete Esthus and they are stored at the Historical Society ready for anyone who buys a memorial brick for $100 and chooses the wording that goes on the brick.

Special thanks for Finance Committee member Jon Moore who helped to secure this gift of a bell for the Historical Society and worked with Jack Helm to bring the bell project to such a joyous conclusion.
Events and Happenings at HSOSC in recent months.

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