

Pacifica Tribune



Attorney Patrick Talbot Hall (r) presents Pacifica Senior Services recreation manager Jim Lange (l) with the first of two checks from the estate of Sirkka Niukkanen, at a remembrance held for Sirkka on March 6, 2019 at Olivet Memorial Park in Colma.

Pacifican leaves \$2 million to senior services

By Jean Bartlett
Tribune Writer

Senior Sirkka Niukkanen enjoyed taking classes at the Senior Center located in Pacifica's Community Center.

"I met Sirkka a few years ago at the Center," said Jim Lange, Pacifica Senior Services recreation manager. "She praised me about our work and what we do for the seniors in our community. She mentioned she was getting her affairs in order and wanted to know how she could leave Pacifica Senior Services a gift—whereby it would not go in the City General Fund, but strictly for Senior Services programs. I shared with her information about our 'Giving Tree' Program and how those funds are utilized to improve or start new programs without putting any additional financial burden back to the City."

The "leaves" for the Giving Tree start with \$200 donations. Jim told Sirkka this and thanked her in advance for anything she might do down the road.

"In February of 2016, Sirkka came into my office," said local attorney Patrick Talbot Hall. "She told me she wanted a simple will. She said she wanted to leave everything to Senior Services on Crespi Drive. She told me she had never married, had no children and her parents were deceased. She also told me she got great service from Senior Services. She asked me if I would serve as her executor. Since she had no immediate family and a local agency was the sole beneficiary, I agreed to serve. She never mentioned her assets."

On September 10, 2018, Sirkka Niukkanen died following a lengthy battle with lung cancer. Not long after, her attorney and Jim Lange learned the extent of her thoughtfulness.

"She had inherited a townhome in San Mateo worth \$850,000," Hall said, "a country home in Lake County worth \$150,000, and she had her own condominium on Fassler Avenue. As a result, Senior Services will inherit approximately \$2 million dollars when the estate is closed later this year."

Sirkka was very clear as to the specifics of her legacy's distribution. The following is taken directly from her Last Will and Testament.

"I give, devise and bequeath all of my real and personal property, of whatever description and wherever located, to the Parks, Beaches & Recreation Department of the City of Pacifica, for the sole purpose of supporting SENIOR SERVICES at 540 Crespi Drive. I specifically prohibit the City of Pacifica to use my estate for any purpose other than Senior Services in the City of Pacifica. I specifically prohibit the City of Pacifica from using my estate to fund any existing wages or salaries of City employees. ONLY in the case where expanded services have been provided for Senior Services shall any funds be used for compensation."

Who was Sirkka Niukkanen?

Sirkka was born in Sarnia, Ontario on March 19, 1944. Her father, Johannes, was born in Sakkola, Finland and her mother, Helmi, was born in Säkkijärvi, Finland. Both of her parents were from the former Viipuri Province of Finland, which became a Russian town during WWII. Sirkka's parents moved to Canada prior to the War.

When Sirkka was two, she and her parents traveled from Bluewater, Ontario into the U.S., arriving at Port Huron, Michigan – with a destination of Petaluma, California – on August 21, 1946.

The daughter of a farmer, Sirkka grew up in Petaluma and was a very active member of Petaluma's Liberty 4-H Club where she raised and showed numerous animals. She also served as its president in 1960. She attended the University of the Pacific in Stockton and, along with heading towards her degree in education, Sirkka was a member of the UOP Marching Band.

A member of Mensa as well as the California Academy of Sciences, the longtime educator retired following a decades-long career with the San Francisco Unified School District. She dedicated many vacations to traveling abroad, including to her parents' native Finland. She loved calling Pacifica "home."

"Based on my earlier conversation with Sirkka," Lange said, "I was shocked when I heard about the generous gift we are receiving. I will be doing my best to ensure I use good financial stewardship in identifying a program that Sirkka would be proud of and have her legacy serve our senior community for a long time. Helen Keller said, 'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.' It is very humbling to think what we can do together through Sirkka's generosity."

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Jean Bartlett photo

Sirkka Niukkanen answered a Tribune "Bartlett's Bullet" question-on-the-street in November of 2013. The question, asked at Pacific Manor Safeway, was: "What are you thankful for this Thanksgiving?" Sirkka answered: "I have a small family, but I am very grateful to each and every one of them. I am also thankful for my friends."



Pacifica Senior Services – which offers classes, bingo, lunch, transportation, Meals on Wheels, a chance to socialize and so much more – is located in the Pacifica Community Center, 540 Crespi Drive. Phone: 650-738-7384. Online: https://www.cityofpacifica.org/depts/senior_services/.

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