

Senior profile: Active Morgan Hill senior loves to play the ukulele with her friends

Linda Tarvin also loves to read, garden and travel

Published in the May 13-26, 2015 issue of Morgan Hill Life

By Robert Airoidi

When she's not involved with Morgan Hill's Centennial Senior Center, Linda Tarvin, loves to travel, garden, read and take photographs. But perhaps her greatest love is playing one of her seven ukuleles.

"I love music," said Tarvin, who played the piano for years as a child. "I never enjoyed practicing the piano like I do fiddling on the ukulele."

After she told her mother she didn't want any more dolls — "I was more of a cowgirl" — her mother presented her with her first ukulele when she was a young girl and taught her some songs. Her mother played the piano and was very musical. Tarvin still has that first Silvertone ukulele, probably purchased by her mother at Sears, she said.

Tarvin is a member of the Morgan Hill branch of the American Association of University Women. In January of 2013 another member sent the AAUW group an email asking if anyone would be interested in forming a ukulele band. There were four women at the first meeting. Now there are about eight or nine members who meet every Monday at a member's home and practice and play together. They have dubbed themselves the "Uku-ladies."

They've played at Westmont Living Center, at the library for the Friends of the Morgan Hill Library, and retirement homes in Gilroy and San Martin.

"You improve so much when you're practicing for a performance," she said of the group made up mostly women in their 60s, 70s and 80s.

Born in Lubbock, Texas, Tarvin, now 71, grew up in Plainview, Texas. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from Texas Tech University and later a Masters in education at the University of Georgia.



Photo by Robert Airoidi

Linda Tarvin with some of her seven ukuleles in her southwest Morgan Hill home

She met her husband John Tarvin in a freshman English class at Texas Tech and the couple married in 1965. They will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary with their two children and three grandchildren this month.

After Linda graduated, they moved to the Dallas area and later to Georgia when John was transferred by the defense electronics company he worked for. She taught 5th grade for seven years, then worked as a substitute while her two children Jay, 42, and Jennifer, 40, were growing up, attending Morgan Hill schools.

They arrived in Morgan Hill in 1979 after John got a position with a Silicon Valley firm.

“He called and asked how I’d like to move to California,” she said. “We landed in San Jose in February and it was beautiful. What’s not to love?”

While in the Bay Area, the Tarvins searched for a family-friendly community to live. One day they decided to drive to Morgan Hill for a day trip.

“We were lucky we found this place,” she said. “We were thinking we’d have to live in San Jose. We just drove down here by ourselves and loved it right away.” Her kids were 6 and 4 at the time and she said it was a great place to raise children, especially on a cul-de-sac where they purchased their home.

While living in Morgan Hill for the past three-plus decades, Linda has taught aerobics and wrote a gardening column for a local publication for seven years. Then in 1986 she and John opened Hot Spot Printing, which they owned until they sold it 2008.

“We were lucky to sell,” she said. “It’s hard to sell a business. It was right before the recession hit and I thought I’d die there one day by the copy machines.”

She is also a member of the Red Hat Ladies Society and she has performed for them. Last Christmas she dressed up as Mrs. Claus and sang a parody of “The 12 Days of Christmas” called “The 12 Daze of Christmas,” which she rewrote the comical lyrics for.

Linda’s other interests include gardening, reading and taking road trips with her husband and dog. In February they visited Death Valley and before that it was Glacier National Park. This year they plan a nostalgic road trip exploring Route 66 all the way to Chicago,

“We’re having fun planning that trip,” she said. They also enjoy taking photos on their trips and posting them to their travel blog www.buzzardbait.com. Both are avid members of the Morgan Hill Photography Club.

But among her many activities, she really enjoys the fun of strumming on one of her ukuleles and sharing the joy of musically entertaining others with her “Uku-ladies” friends.

“It’s good for the brain as we age,” she said.