

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

Dot Svetts: Much More Than a Recreation Supervisor

Dorothy "Dot" Johnstone was born in Sebastopol in 1922 and from age two grew up in San Francisco, where as a child she watched the construction of the Bay Bridge. Her father, Joseph Johnstone, played for a pro basketball team sponsored by the San Francisco Olympic Club, and he encouraged her in her love for sports. "I was called a tomboy. And I was a tomboy," Dot recalled. "My mother would say I should be playing with dolls, but I preferred rollerskating with boys and playing basketball and tennis with them."

She graduated from George Washington High and attended San Francisco State. During World War II, she worked for a ship repair company in the daytime and at night served as a WAVE in the Coast Guard Reserve patrolling the San Francisco docks. She met her husband, Andrew Svets, while working at the San Francisco shipyard; they married in 1945. She started working as a playground recreation leader in San Leandro about 1950 and came to Livermore in 1960 as a recreation supervisor for LARPD. She and Andrew moved here in 1961. Dorothy described her husband as a "rock" who supported her as she ran a recreation department and played tournament tennis while raising a family.

During her 20 years with LARPD, she established the Tiny Tots program, supervised the Children's Theater Workshop, created summer camps that taught horsemanship, sailing, and crafts, and helped organize after-school activities. She enlarged the Teen Canteen, a drop-in program on Friday and Saturday nights. Jacquie Williams-Cartwright of Alden Lane Nursery remembered her well: "I first met Dot as a teenager when she headed up the youth programs at the recreation center. I best remember Teen Canteen. It was a wonderful program that provided kids with a safe place to spend time together and have fun. Dot was simply an amazing, wonderful person who enriched our community. Her recipe for success: a passion for people of all ages and their need and well-being, hard work, and determination."

Seniors also became a special interest, and Dot established a club and two programs especially for them, Meals-on-Wheels and Dial-a-Ride. She became involved with the Livermore Cultural Arts Council. For many years she was a volunteer with the Valley Memorial Hospital auxiliary, helping to supervise the Candy Striper program.

In 1981 she changed jobs and became the recreation and leisure services manager and later the community relations officer at LLNL. During her time at the Lab, new playing fields were built, a Lab store opened, and new activities and exercise programs established for employees. She also was a leader in the founding of the Lab's day care program. She helped to organize the Valley Study Group, a lively forum for discussions, lectures and activities that formed a bridge between the Lab and the community.

Dot began playing tennis at age seven and played all her life. She helped to establish the San Leandro and Livermore tennis clubs. In 1993 she and her partner had a national ranking of 12 in women's doubles in the over-70 age group. After her retirement from LLNL in 1997, for two years she helped to keep the Granada High School boys' tennis program alive. She cajoled friends into being interim coaches, coached herself, provided refreshments, and drove the players to matches. "The players must have laughed when they saw that old woman there," said Sandy MacCracken, one of her daughters, "but when they saw her forehand, they realized she meant business." Cyndee Carvalho, a mother of one of those high school players, said, "Everyone on that team appreciated the work and love Dot 'served' up."

In 2000 she moved to Brentwood, where she often played golf on the course near her new home. In an interview for the *Valley Times*, Gib Marguth, who worked with her in the Valley Study Group, said that her departure from Livermore had "left a vacuum that may never really be filled." Marguth thought that Dot possessed a combination of confidence and caring that made her able to interact effectively with many people, from the cooks for senior meals to national security leaders.

Her husband, Andrew, died in 1991; when Dot died of a stroke at age 80 in 2002, she was survived by their three daughters and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The *Independent's* editorial celebrated her contribution to the community: "Dot Svets was active in so many projects and organizations in the community that it would take pages to list them all. However, if there were a local hall of fame, she would be in it because of her leadership with the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District. During her 20 years as a recreation supervisor and administrator, she established programs for all age groups, from tiny tots to seniors. She built LARPD into a living force in the community." LARPD named the new city tennis headquarters at 991 Loyola Way for her: Dorothy Svets Tennis Center.

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