



PRESOTT
ARIZONA
2001
NATIONAL
VETERANS
CREATIVE ARTS
FESTIVAL

OCTOBER 15-22

HOSTED BY

THE NORTHERN ARIZONA
VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

arts • gram

A Daily
Production of the
National Veterans
Creative Arts
Festival

Celebration Special Edition

2001 Shirley Jefferies Award Recipient

Jessie Herndon, Music Therapist

Chicago (Lakeside/Westside) VA Medical Center

by Susan Fishbein, Los Angeles, CA

The recipient of the 2001 Shirley Jefferies Award is Jessica Herndon—better known as Jessie to most of us.

Music has always been an important part of Jessie's life. As a young girl, Jessie sang along with records and especially enjoyed hitting all the high notes. In 1940 she was diagnosed with polio. Finding her rehabilitation exercise sessions to be monotonous, Jessie decided to add music to liven them up and she eventually learned to walk with crutches and braces. Music made her feel a part of the world that was taken away from her. After her own personal triumph over her disability with music, she wanted to give veterans what music has given her. "Art and music bring out the best in all of us," she said.

During her childhood, Jessie listened to the Metropolitan Opera broadcast from her bed on Saturdays and developed a keen interest in opera and singing. Her father suggested she take piano lessons, voice lessons and get involved in the high school chorus. After graduation from high school, she went on to study at the Chicago Music College and

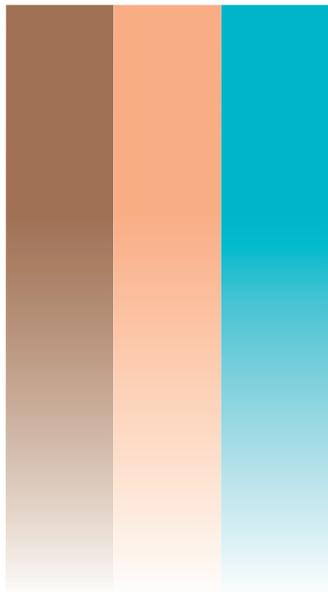


at Roosevelt University in Chicago where she graduated in 1953. Jessie spent the next two years studying music therapy and psychology while working part-time for the Chicago Park District as an accompanist for exercise classes.

In 1956 Jessie applied for a position with the Hospitalized Veterans Services of the Musicians Emergency Fund out of New York City. The company sponsored Jessie's position as a music therapist at three VA Medical Centers in Chicago. The VA hired Jessie in 1976 as a Creative Arts Therapist for music, and she currently works full-time between Lakeside and Westside VA Medical Centers.

Jessie has participated with veterans from the Chicago area in the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival since 1981. Combining veteran talent from both the Westside and Lakeside VA facilities, Jessie developed the chorus called "The Westations."

Jessie will be the first to tell you her work is her family. "Some of them (the veterans
Continued on back page ...



Show Notes from the Director's Chair

Bravo! Brava! Bravi!

You richly deserve the time-honored opera house cheers that were given for a magnificent performance! The standing ovation, shouts and long applause from our audience tells us how much our hard work was appreciated, and how great they thought our show was. Now I want to add my own congratulations to those of the audience with Bravo! Brava! Bravi! to say what a splendid job you did. I'm truly proud of you!

What's Next for You?

I hope you will take these experiences home, and become an even finer performer as you work at further enhancing your artistic talents. Why don't you start now to think about what you might do for next year's show? Hopefully some ideas and techniques you've learned at this year's Festival will make you an even stronger competitor. We would love to have you back again!

On to Minneapolis

A Message from Next Year's Festival Coordinator:

All of us at the VA in Minneapolis are looking forward to hosting the 2002 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival next year. We are preparing to WOW next year's participants with all the 'City of Lakes' has to offer. Minneapolis is known for great culture and art and we can't wait to share it with you. On behalf of all of us on the 2002 Festival Host Team, good luck in your competitions. We look forward to seeing you in Minneapolis!

Katy Ryan
2002 National Veterans
Creative Arts Festival,
Host Site Coordinator

What's Next for Me?

I will return to my private studio teaching voice and doing a lot of performance coaching. I also have a number of projects coming up, including staging and conducting fund-raiser concerts for the Des Moines Metro opera. It's a \$100 ticket, so I've got to be sure it's good! There may be another festival in my future, and if so, I hope to see you all there again.

My Sincere Thanks

I want you to know that I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with you. I deeply appreciate your devoted efforts which gave us a wonderful experience and a memory to treasure! Heartfelt thanks!

Farewell from the Arts•Gram

Another Festival has come and gone. And aside from carpal-tunneled hands, paper cut riddled fingers, and numerous puncture wounds from the evil staplers, we walk away with an even deeper respect and admiration for everyone associated with the Festival.

It's been rewarding learning about each and everyone of you. We've learned things from each of you that will stay with us for the rest of our lives. We thank you for sharing your personal stories, and allowing us to be a part of your amazing lives.

In light of recent events, it is heartening to know NOT ONE participant decided not to come. You're an example of what being an American is truly about. America isn't in our buildings or our economy, it's in our hearts. And yours are the biggest hearts of all.

From the staff of the Arts•gram, thank you for being you.

Jefferies Award

...Continued from front page

in her group) call me 'Mother Hen'," she said. Her face reflects the joy and love she has for her VA family. "This has been my life's work."

The veterans whom she embraces with her heart and music consider her their family too. "Meeting Jessie was a 360 degree turnaround for me," explained Donna Pierce, a member of the Westations. "From the time I met her, she found what was important to me and used it as a building block to restore what was lost or missing in my life. Needless to say, Jessica is the REAL winner."

Thaddies Holloway mentioned that when he was hospitalized for PTSD, he wasn't expecting music. "Then here comes this lady in a wheelchair, and she's breaking out the music!" he said.

"We used to run from her," recalls Michael Slatten. "She was so persistent that she finally caught me. And I thought, 'If she is willing to give her time like this, we need to support her.' Then the whole ward got into it."

Lee Hopkins even credits Jessie for saving his life. "She brought me back from my isolation. If that had continued, I don't think I would be here."

Even some veterans who completed the program have kept up with her and tell her how much her program meant to them.

One of Jessie's goals for the group is not just music, but bonding. "There's strength in a group," she explains. "People can work out their differences in a group with music."

For 26 years, Jessie has given her love, her music and herself to VA and America's veterans. This year, it's our turn to give back to her.