

BETTY LOVEGREN • 1944-2015

SEAPORT VILLAGE PERSONALITY, WATERFRONT TOURIST GREETER

MICHELLE BREIER • U-T

Betty Lovegren literally brightened the faces of countless visitors over nearly 20 years as the resident body artist at Seaport Village.

She was sought out by locals and tourists of all ages, many of whom made a point of visiting Mrs. Lovegren for colorful face paintings, glittery tattoos and henna designs.

"She was so beloved, such a force, her personality," said Seaport Village marketing director Megan Madrigal, who worked with Mrs. Lovegren for more than a decade. "It wasn't even about the face painting. It was about how she made people feel."

"She truly embodied the warmth and personal touch that Seaport Village is known for. Her special way with every person she encountered was undeniable."

Mrs. Lovegren died of multiple myeloma Jan. 9 at home in San Diego. She was 70.

For thousands of San Diego cruise-ship passengers, Mrs. Lovegren was the "Lady in Red," a waterfront greeter chatting with tourists waiting for shuttle buses to shopping destinations like Seaport Village.

"She had a lot of wacky costumes ... but she kind of settled into this all-red outfit — red derby, red tails," said John Savage, operations manager for Old Town Trol-



Betty Lovegren was an entertainer at Seaport Village for nearly 20 years. • I.D.E.A. / SEAPORT VILLAGE

ley and SEAL Tours. "She'd have a line of people (off cruise ships). She'd entertain, answer questions. She was outgoing, high-energy. She was just a very bright light. After people left the boat, that was their first impression — this happy, effervescent woman greeting them."

Mrs. Lovegren's colleagues noted her ability to

handle any question and to charm everyone — children, adults, locals, and visitors, even those who were frustrated or tired.

"Her adept approach brought out the wonderful side of everyone," Jim Lennox of Pacific Events said. "And by everyone, I mean from the very young to the very old to people from all over the world visiting San

Diego. Betty was a fixture to our San Diego hospitality."

Mrs. Lovegren also was known for her role as Mrs. Claus in Seaport Village's annual parade for the arrival of Santa Claus and at the center's Christmas breakfasts.

Elizabeth Ann Mary Lovegren was born Aug. 12, 1944, in Edinburgh, Scotland, to Olive Armitage Planke and Joseph Planke. Her father was a corporal in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the family returned to Canada after World War II, settling in the Toronto area.

Mrs. Lovegren left home at 18, embarking on her colorful adult life. In her early 20s, she traveled around Europe. Upon her return to Toronto, she worked in jazz clubs as a waitress and bartender, friends said. Armed with club experience, Mrs.

Lovegren and her sister, Catherine "Cat" Conner, opened "Betty's Booze Can" — aka the BBC — an after-hours speak-easy in an apartment next to theirs. The club drew jazz musicians, comedians, actors, and even police officers, Conner said.

The sisters went on to form a singing telegram company, which, Conner said, fit Mrs. Lovegren's personality.

"She had more ability to be able to walk into a room ... and just take it over and get everybody to look," Conner said. "She would walk into a room as a gorilla, a nun, a clown and start singing at the top of her lungs."

Mrs. Lovegren later followed her sister to California, joining Conner's clowning and balloon business, which included working at Seaport Village.

Mrs. Lovegren was proud of her involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous, and she sponsored numerous women in recovery over the years.

Mrs. Lovegren's survivors include her husband of more than 12 years, Jon Lovegren; sons, Kevin Strooband of St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, and Bud Thompson of El Cajon; stepsons, Ethan Martin of Cleburne, Texas, and Keegan Lovegren-King of San Diego; sister, Catherine "Cat" Conner of North Hollywood; brother, Roy Eckert of San Marcos; two granddaughters; and a step-grandson.

A celebration of life and interment were held at Greenwood Memorial Park. Memorial donations are suggested to the International Myeloma Foundation.

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