

Obituary: Eva Holberg, a Consummate, Decades-Long Volunteer in Pacific Palisades



Eva Holberg with husband Dieter at the Pacific Palisades Woman's Club's 90th Birthday luncheon in June 2019.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

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Former Citizen of the Year Eva Holberg, who served for decades as a creative and dauntless leader at Theatre Palisades and Palisades Symphony, died on August 13. She was 91.

Eva was born April 22, 1931, in Stralsund, East Germany, to Hans Herbert and Helene Wilhelmine Thieshen. Decades later, she recalled how she first became involved in volunteer activities, after the end of World War II.

"It started while I was in high school in Stralsund (on the Baltic Coast)," she shared. "The Russians had shot out the windows of the local church, and water had damaged the organ. The choir director organized the organ-building club. We asked our parents, relatives, teachers to contribute a mark a month or some such amount for the repairs, and we went around the countryside concertizing on trains, on boats, in churches, everywhere we could."

Eva studied at the Free University in West Berlin from 1952 to 1955, the year she married Diet-

er Holberg, who had an engineer's degree in telecommunications from Ingenieurshule Gauss, Berlin. Two years later they emigrated to New Mexico, where Dieter began working as a civilian at the White Sands Missile Range.

"The U.S. government recruited my father and paid for my parents to move to the U.S. with the promise that they would pay for them to move back to Germany in a year if they didn't want to stay," the Holbergs' daughter, Astrid, said. "They thought that at a minimum it would be a grand adventure. My father was recruited to work at Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico. The government also later paid for him to get his master's degree and PhD in electrical engineering at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces."

Eva gave birth to a daughter, Marion (known to all as "Meessy"), in 1959 and Astrid in 1960. Both eventually graduated from Palisades High School.

Eva, a soprano, loved to sing, and when asked to take over the role of Jenny in "The Threepenny Opera" in Las Cruces, she jumped

at the opportunity.

"I had two babies at the time who were tucked into bed by 6 p.m., so I did the role," she later explained.

Eva continued to act in theater productions, while also joining concert choirs in Las Cruces and El Paso.

When the Holbergs moved to Pacific Palisades in 1966, Dieter began his career at Hughes Aircraft Company, and Eva joined the Brentwood-Palisades Chorale. She joined the board of directors of the Westside Committee of the LA Philharmonic in 1972, and in 1974 became president and manager of Palisades Symphony, serving in this capacity until her passing.

"I've witnessed weekly Eva's nurturing guidance of that organization on every level: assembling an active Board of Directors; researching and securing grants; identifying highly talented guest artists willing to perform with the orchestra essentially pro bono; organizing the Young Artist Competitions, where many successful musicians, including several world-class concert artists, have gotten their start; even helping set

up chairs and stands for concerts," one orchestra member wrote about Eva. "And, perhaps most appreciated by the orchestra members, Eva graciously serves coffee and cookies at the break of every rehearsal."

Eva would bring the coffee pot from home, and it was a symbol that went beyond the camaraderie it fostered. During the 1978 brushfire that swept through several neighborhoods in the upper Palisades, the Holbergs were in Europe and lost their house. But the coffee pot—safely ensconced in the garage—escaped unscathed.

Eva served as a Girl Scout leader for six years.

"We went on camping trips at Leo Carrillo, put on plays, created our own marionettes, sang lots of songs and enjoyed many other wonderful activities," her daughter Astrid recalled.

As an LA Philharmonic volunteer for decades, Eva organized charter buses from the Palisades to the Hollywood Bowl two or three times per year and helped with fundraising. One year, as a reward for her own personal season ticket

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Eva Holberg

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sales, she accompanied the Philharmonic on its tour to Washington, D.C., New York and Boston, enjoying a performance by the orchestra every night.

In 1976, Eva was named the cultural representative on the Palisades Community Council. Several years later she tried to create a Community Cultural Center inside the new 881 Alma Real building. When that effort failed, she joined Theatre Palisades and became its president in 1979.

After Lejah and Townley Pierson donated land between Haverford Avenue and Temescal Canyon Road for a community theater, Eva teamed up with businessman Bob McMillin to lead a tenacious campaign that raised over \$1 million to build Pierson Playhouse. The theater finally opened in 1988, and Eva later recalled: "I worked round-the-clock for over 10 years of my life and wrote over 2,000 thank-you notes."

When Eva subsequently received Citizen of the Year honors at the Riviera Country Club, members of Palisades Symphony, led by Joel Lish, played Grieg's "Holberg Suite." Eva's friends in the Brentwood-Palisades Chorale also honored her by singing a special song, "Holberg Liebeslieder."

In 2005, Eva and husband Dieter received a 2005 Community Service Award from the Community Council because they are "two very special individuals who have for so many years donated so much of their creative energies to our community."

In addition to Dieter, Eva is survived by her daughter Astrid, a pediatrician who is married and lives in Monterey with her husband David Awerbuck; and three grandchildren: Mara, Daniel and Talia. She was predeceased by daughter Meessy, who was a graduate student in landscape architecture in Pomona when she died in a car accident in 1987.

At the Theatre Palisades awards show on August 14, it was announced that there would be no services. In lieu of flowers, people can make donations to Palisades Symphony or Theatre Palisades.