

ARARAT HIGHLIGHTS

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ARARAT HOME OF LOS ANGELES, INC.®

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Summer 2010

SONA PALOULIAN

By Debbie Avedian

It was a beautiful, clear, sunny day as I entered the charming well-kept room of Sona Paloulian at the Ararat Home. Assisted Living Administrator, Rita Noravian, introduced me to Sona who presented herself wearing a lovely black and white suit adorned with a simple gold necklace. Sona enthusiastically greeted us with her beaming smile.

Sona, born in Musa Dagh in 1911 to Musalerts parents, came from a very talented family who along with her two brothers and two sisters, were recognized for their beautiful voices.

Her family survived the massacres by escaping to the mountains, Musa Ler (Moses Mountain), the site of resistance during the Armenian Genocide. For 53 days the Armenians thwarted assaults until the French allied ships in the Mediterranean responded to their distress signals and came to their rescue. When her grandfather, Dr. Movses Kherekhian spotted the French warship, he swam to them to give the location of the survivors who were anxiously awaiting help. The weary survivors were taken to Port Said, Egypt.

When Dickran Paloulian heard Sona singing at a wedding in Syria, he immediately fell in love and asked her brother's approval to marry Sona. Due to her enchanting voice, she was referred to as the "Zart of the Yegegghetsi" (the adornment of the church). Dickran, with Sona's assistance, worked as a tailor sewing military clothes for the French who occupied Syria at the time. Sona, happily married to Dickran for 60 years until his death in 1998, described him as a big-hearted man who loved the poor, respected the elderly, and had a wonderful sense of humor. Dickran's final request to Sona was that in lieu of a memorial luncheon a donation be given to the poor. He requested that she remain

cheerful, sing, and spend time with family and friends. With enthusiasm she exclaimed, "Dickran was unneeman" (one of a kind) and followed by stating, "God should give all women a husband like Dickran."

Blessed with two sons, a daughter, four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, Sona spoke with great pride of her daughter Seta Kuciukyuan, an accomplished singer, who has performed in the famous La Scala Opera House in Milan and in the Paris Opera House. Seta traveled and performed throughout Europe and is presently living with her husband, Andon, in Brussels. Her eldest son, Sarko and his lifetime partner, Christi Tieman, live in Kent, Washington, while her youngest son Raffi along with his wife Maral live in the family home in Los Angeles.

Sona became a member of the Armenian Relief Society in 1933, and later served on its board in Beirut, Lebanon, where she gave aid to many young orphans. Sona belongs to the apostolic faith and attended Holy Cross Church.

During my interview, she spontaneously sang songs that demonstrated the pride she felt being an Armenian. She sang Haygagan Hogher (Lands of Armenia) without omitting a word and declared, "being Armenian is the most significant and precious thing in my life." Recalling the homeland that she was forced to leave, she instantaneously began to sing the song about Musa Dagh.

Sona has been living in the Ararat Home since May, 2010 and actively participates in the Thursday afternoon singing session. At the age of 99 she is still alert, speaks seven languages, politically aware of current events, and the life of the party at the home. In June, she entertained over 450 guests attending the Ladies Auxiliary Luncheon leaving all astonished with her charisma. Sona's love of Armenian songs, along with her delightful enthusiastic nature and passion with which she sings, brings joy, pleasure, and life to those who are fortunate enough to come into contact with her.



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BOARD MEMBER DR. GARY LULEJIAN LOSES LONG BATTLE WITH CANCER

| By Phyllis Hamo



The Ararat Home has lost one of its own, Board of Trustees member Gary Ara Lulejian, M.D. at age 72. He was a medical doctor specializing in pediatrics, who carried the torch of professionalism and the spirit of service throughout his life, even as he fought the disease that ultimately took his precious life.

After leaving medical school at Temple University in Philadelphia and residency at Northwestern in Chicago, he served

two years in the U.S. Air Force as Captain and medical officer. He furthered his medical studies at Stanford and Johns Hopkins and studied Business at Stanford and Harvard.

He practiced pediatrics at Kaiser Permanente and was on the pediatric clinical staff at UCLA for 20 years. He was selected to supervise the construction and development of the Kaiser Permanente medical center in Baldwin Park and served as both Medical Director and Chief of Staff, retiring in 2001 after 33 years.

Recipients of his non-medical volunteerism were the St. Peter Armenian Church of Van Nuys, the Western Diocese

of the Armenian Church of North America, the St. Nersess Armenian Seminary in New Rochelle, New York, the Knights of Vartan, and of course, the Ararat Home. He became an Ararat Home board member in 1993 and held the positions of vice chairman, chairman of the endowment fund and long range facility planning, and the finance and medical committees. In 2007 he was honored by the St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church as their "Father of the Year."

Our sympathies are with his wife, Margaret, son John, daughter Laura (Andrew) Klein, grandson Jonathan Klein, mother Arpine Lulejian, brother Don (Gail) Lulejian, and extended family.

DONATIONS COME IN MANY WELCOME WAYS

By Cindy Kaloostian

One of Ararat Home's many strengths is its core of dedicated, loyal donors. Hundreds of women show their support by belonging to the Ararat Guild in their area, and from those hundreds of women, hundreds of thousands of dollars are raised each year. At the 2010 Ararat Membership meeting in February, the Ladies Auxiliary (sponsors of the monthly luncheons), the six Guilds, and the Gift Shop Ladies presented Chairman Armen Hampar with checks and pledges valued at a total of \$252,000. Included in that total was a bequest of \$10,000 from the estate of **Mrs. Rose Kalajian** (through the Valley Guild) and **Mrs. Louise Arklin's** underwriting of the Beverly Hills Hotel bill (over \$22,000) for Westside Guild's annual Christmas Luncheon.

Generous individuals have made notable donations this year as well. A donation of over \$125,000 was given by the M. Tarakjian Trust. **Mrs. Nevart Vartanian** presented the Home with \$50,000 in hopes that her gift might encourage others to give what they could, and **Mrs. Jeannette Ayzajian**, a resident of the Residential Care Facility donated \$25,000 in memory of her husband, parents, and uncle. Additionally, **Mr. Chant Yedalian** recently donated \$20,000 to the Ararat Nursing Facility.

What, you may ask, prompts people to give so selflessly? Perhaps the answer varies with each gift, but overwhelmingly, donors agree that Ararat Home is a place where our elders can live with great peace and safety, secure in the knowledge they are loved and respected. The professional staff and volunteers are committed, without doubt, to the well being of the residents. With all of this in mind, one feels confident in giving of one's treasure. If you wish to be part of this wonderful organization, please consider joining in and sponsoring activities at the Home, or if you are materially blessed and able, it would be greatly appreciated if you include Ararat Home in your giving.

STEVE SURMEIAN RETIRES - DEBBIE AVEDIAN ASSUMES EDITORSHIP

| By Phyllis Hamo

After ten years as editor of this publication, Steve Surmeian has found it necessary to resign. He joined the *Ararat Highlights* staff in 2000 as co-editor with Rosemary Shahabian Saatjian. When she resigned he assumed the full responsibility as editor, doing an exemplary job of selecting topics, writing, and editing this official publication of the Ararat Home. Steve has also served as secretary of the Ararat Home Board of Trustees.

Steve attended the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey, where he was born and raised, and was an engineer by profession for many years. Although he never took a journalism or creative writing class, he is nonetheless a gifted writer and editor. He is also a man of character who shows great integrity, intellect, and common sense. He has not only served the Ararat Home, but has been a faithful member of the United Armenian Congregational Church, Knights of Vartan, and the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America where, for several years, he served as editor of the *AEUNA Forum*.

Steve Surmeian, a man of courage, has relinquished his editorship because of illness. Our prayers are with him, his supportive wife of nearly 50 years, Asien, and his children Jim, Michael (also a member of the Board of Trustees) and Julie.

Debbie Avedian, who has been an active member of the Ararat Westside Guild, Valley Guild, and more recently the Ladies Auxiliary, has agreed to take on the duties of editor beginning with this issue. Debbie, whose Armenian name is Arpie, lives in Tarzana with her husband Hagop Avedian. They have two adult children, Armen and Soseh. Debbie was born in Syria, emigrated to the U.S. at age 8, and received a BA from UCLA where she studied bacteriology. She worked for seven years in dermatology and 23 years in gastroenterology and co-authored many scientific papers and abstracts.

INTRODUCING NAZAR H. ASHJIAN, JR., NEW CHAIRMAN OF ARARAT BOARD

| By Phyllis Hamo

Nazar H. Ashjian, Jr., the new Chairman of the Ararat Home Board of Trustees, is proud of Ararat's accomplishments and outstanding record. His three major goals as Chairman are seeking out dynamic, capable, and ethical young Board members, commencing construction (with State approval) on the new 58-bed two-story long term care addition in Mission Hills, and establishing a fund-raising program to finance this new addition.

The gavel was graciously passed on to him by Armen Hampar in April 2010. Mr. Hampar had just completed his second non-consecutive term, serving tirelessly to maintain Ararat's reputation for superior care for the elderly while preserving its economic stability. During Armen's tenure the Mission Hills Board and Care/Assisted Living Facility, the Mission Hills Skilled Nursing Facility, and the Eagle Rock Skilled Nursing Facility all earned five-star ratings (for health inspections and quality care) by the State of California and by U.S. federal inspectors.

Nazar Ashjian was formally introduced to the Ararat Home back in the mid-1990's when his own mother was admitted to the skilled nursing facility. He recalls that the care she received by Mrs. Margo Babikian and her wonderful staff gave him a deep appreciation for



*New Chairman Nazir Ashjian, left,
receives gavel from Armen Hampar*

the facility. He was asked to join the Board of Trustees, became a Board member in 2001, and has now served for nine years, holding the positions of assistant treasurer and treasurer. He is also a member of its real estate committee.

Nazar moved to California from Chicago at age 14 with his parents Margaret and Nazir Ashjian, whom he describes as "two absolutely wonderful people." He attended public schools and graduated from California State University Northridge in 1963 with a degree in accounting, was then drafted into the U.S. Army and served in the First Cavalry Division in Korea. He loves being an American and feels privileged to live in the U.S. He is a full time Certified Public

Accountant and real estate broker and is proud to be the father of his daughter Sabrina, a practicing attorney.

Nazar feels privileged to follow in the footsteps of many devoted former Ararat Board Chairmen and Trustees who have dedicated themselves to helping others while representing the highest ideals of our Armenian heritage.

For further information about the Ararat Home of Los Angeles, please visit www.ararathome.org.

MISSION HILLS EXPANSION

| Armen Hampar,
Building Committee Chairman, Trustee

The Ararat Board of Trustees, as one of its goals, felt compelled to replace the Eagle Rock Convalescent Hospital about ten years ago. That facility served the Ararat Home well during its earlier years; however, the small size of the lot with little room for the residents to enjoy the outdoors, cramped quarters inside for both staff and residents, and the inability to obtain permits to remodel no longer provided a satisfactory environment in which to live and work. At the time, the recently completed Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility on the Mission Hills campus with its state of the art amenities motivated the Board to move elsewhere.

After investigating several possibilities, the Board learned that the Rockhaven Sanatorium in the Montrose section of Glendale was available for purchase. This old established facility operating as a home for Alzheimer patients on a pastoral 3.5-acre wooded property seemed like the perfect place to expand. After operating the sanatorium for several years at near break even, the building became too old and

dangerous a place for the residents to continue to reside. In addition, the Ararat Home had encountered difficult financial times. It became increasingly clear that the

City of Glendale considered Rockhaven as an historic site, wanted the property and made it virtually impossible for anyone to obtain entitlements to develop the property. After considerable negotiations, the property was ultimately sold to the City of Glendale at a very fair price.

Rather than use the proceeds of that sale to purchase replacement land, the Board decided to use the money to expand on the Mission Hills campus and to add sufficient beds to replace the Eagle Rock facility. Accordingly, Sobin-Harte Architects, the same architects that designed our existing beautiful campus, were engaged last year to design an extension to the area north of the existing nursing facility. As property on the campus is somewhat constrained, adding a second



story was selected as the best alternative. This structure will contain 58 additional beds with up to date amenities consistent with the existing facility to replace the 42 beds of the Eagle Rock facility.

Fund raising will be necessary to close the gap between cost of construction and funds already in the Building Fund so that the Home's debt will not be increased. New donations will be added to previous ones retained in the Ararat Building Fund and all donors will be appropriately recognized upon completion of the expansion. We hope to commence construction after midyear 2011 so that the building will be ready for occupancy by the end of 2011 or early 2012. We will communicate our progress through the Ararat Home website www.ararathome.org.

ARARAT CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY

| *By Cindy Kaloostian*

EAGLE ROCK CA – Celebrating 30 years of service to the “hayrigs” and “mayrigs” of the San Gabriel Valley, Ararat Home Convalescent Hospital in Eagle Rock was host to honored guests and valued staff on May 13, 2010. Administrator Robert Taylor introduced long-time supporters and former administrators who expressed their fond memories of the hospital’s humble beginnings and stellar reputation. In an atmosphere which felt like a family reunion, a delicious meal was shared and an anniversary cake was cut and enjoyed. To cap off the afternoon, certificates of appreciation for specific years of service were presented by Mr. Taylor, Director of Nurses Mrs. Aida Yeghiayan and Chairman of the Ararat Board of Trustees, Mr. Nazar Ashjian, Jr. Special recognition was given to the two longest serving staff members, Mr. Ovanes Bakalian, Cook, and his wife, Janet, Certified Nurse Assistant who have provided loving care for approximately 1800 residents over



these 30 years. Chairman Ashjian, speaking for the whole Armenian community, said to the staff members who care for Ararat’s residents, “Your services and hard work are much appreciated by us all.”



Employees present at Pinning Ceremony



Adiss Harmandian performing

NURSING HOME MOTHER’S DAY/ AWARD WINNING STAFF

| *By Margo Y. Babikian*

It is spring, and spring is a very flirtatious. Multicolored hues of various flowers and the ticklish texture of the greenery on our campus are captivating as are the therapeutic activities for our elderly at Ararat Nursing Home in Mission Hills. The renowned Mr. Adiss Harmandian, who entertained our residents and staff with his charming voice, presented one such activity on Mother’s Day. Florist Gayane, hand delivered a beautiful rose to every resident.

Following this happy occasion was the celebration of five, ten, fifteen years anniversaries of our multiple awards winning staff. Margo Y. Babikian, RN, MS, Executive director, praised her team publicly and pinned 98 employees with distinguished longevity: 39 employees received 5-year pins, 38 employees 10-year pins, and 21 employees 15-year pins. It was a joyful day of abundant food, carefree dancing and sheer exuberance.

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Save the Date

58th Annual Ararat Home Picnic
Sunday, Sept. 26 | 11:30a - 6:00p

Casino Night
Saturday, Nov. 20 | 5:30pm