AN EDITION OF THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

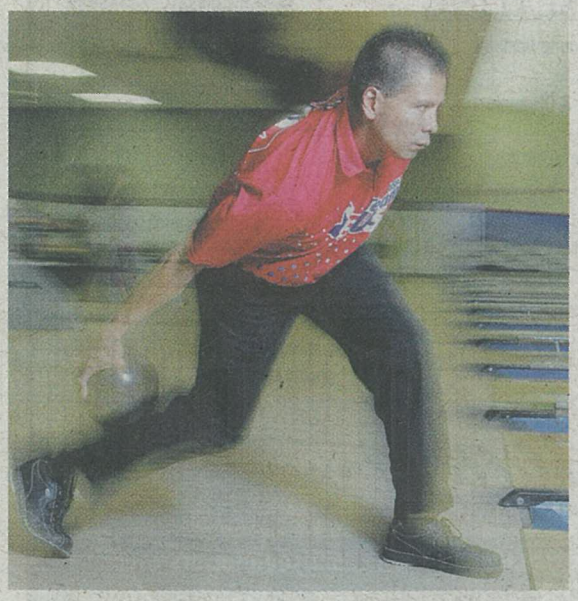
NI North Inland

SUNDAY • JULY 10, 2011

LOGAN JENKINS: GOOD AND BAD FOR THE WEEK

Bouquet for Caltrans and its I-5 plan; bricks for C'bad and O'side councils

PG. 3



Former county prep hoops star Steve Smith now bowls for U.S. national team

PG. 11

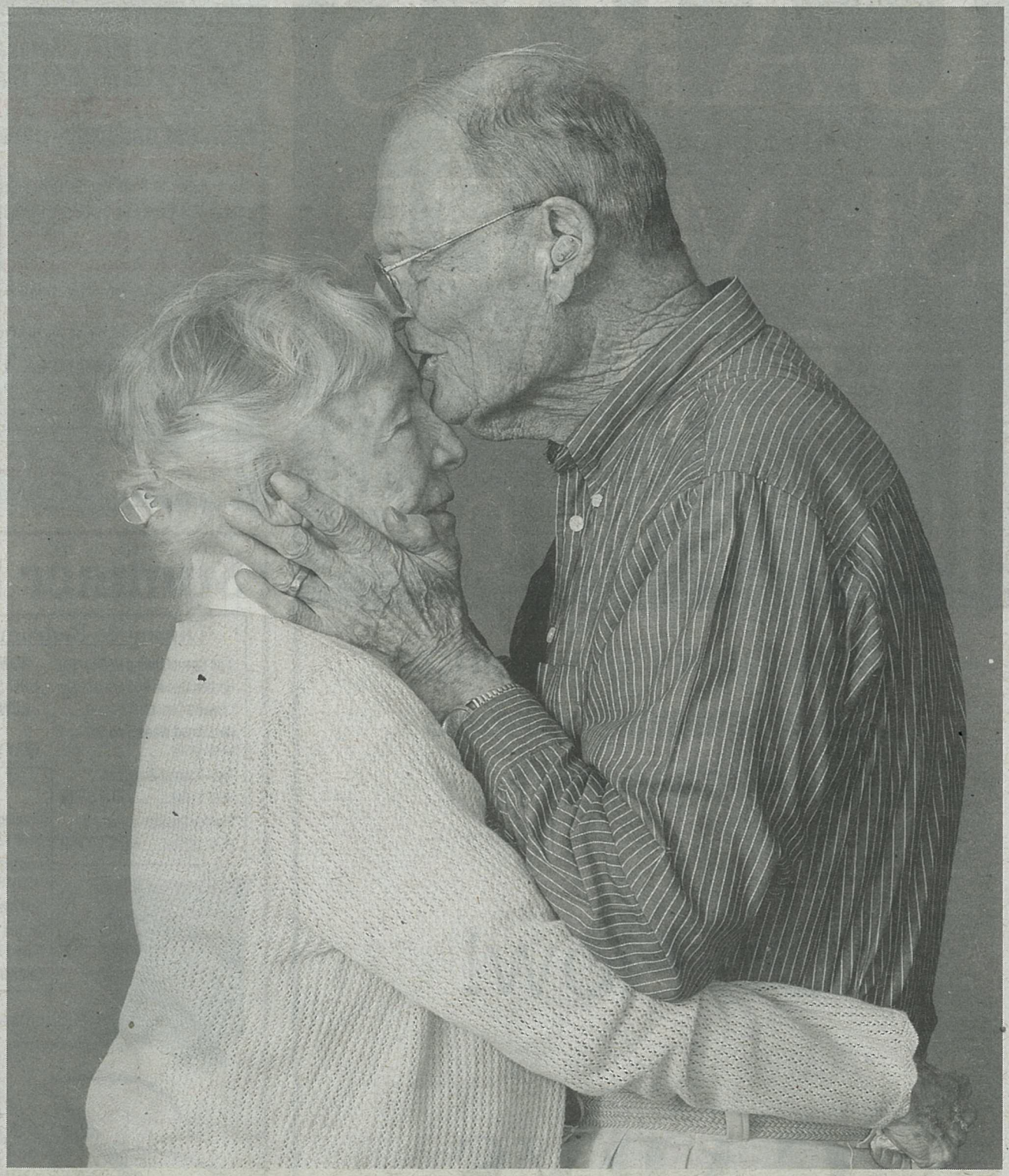


PHOTO BY THOMAS SANDERS

Lasting embrace

Photo exhibit shows the love of long-married couples

PG. 4

THESE COUPLES' 'LASTING LOVE' IS HERE TO STAY

Portraits capture a combined 974 years of marriage

MICHAEL TREADWAY • U-T

ENCINITAS

Al and Anne Cocumelli cuddled together on a bench.

"Kiss him," a photographer shouted to Anne, snapping a shot as she kissed the man she married 62 years ago.

"You should take our picture every day," Al joked.

After 62 years of marriage, the couple's spark is still there.

The Cocumellis' love and commitment to one another is featured in an exhibit at Belmont Village Senior Living of Cardiff. The exhibit is fittingly titled "Lasting Love." When the Cocumellis' 62 years of marriage are added to the 16 other couples' in the exhibit, it totals a whopping 974 combined years of marriage.

To celebrate these lasting loves, Belmont Village hired Thomas Sanders to photograph their still-married residents. Sanders, 27, was chosen because he previously worked with many of the assisted living facility's veterans for his award-winning book, "The Last Good War."

Sanders avoids traditional portraiture in favor of capturing the "emotion and raw nostalgia" of his subjects.

"There is just so much character in their faces," Sanders said about Belmont Village residents. "It's really just about setting up my lighting and getting them to be as comfortable as possible and just hitting the shutter."

After their photo shoot, the Cocumellis reminisced about the first time they saw each other. As Al was leaving a high school gymnasium in Steubenville, Ohio, Anne was entering.

Photos on exhibit

"Lasting Love" became a permanent part this month of Belmont Village at 3535 Manchester Ave. in Cardiff. The exhibit is open to the public, but reservations are requested. Reservations can be made at (760) 436-8900.

"I went home that night and told my mother that I met the man I was going to marry," said Anne, 87.

"Her mother wanted to have her committed," Al, 89, said with a laugh.

They were going steady shortly after.

With college and World War II separating them, they dated 10 years before marrying in 1948. They were kept apart for another three years when Al was called in 1950 to serve in the Army Special Services in the Korean War.

"The fact that we were separated for so many years taught us how fortunate we were to have each other," Al said about the key to their 62 years together. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

It was a different story for another resident and subject in "Lasting Love."

Remembering his wife, Bill Rendleman, 92, said, "There was solidarity. We were always together."

Rendleman and his late wife, Pauline, had the fortune of not being separated during World War II. After being drafted, he worked as a mess sergeant in a military hospital in Brigham City, Utah. Pauline took a job there as a secretary for a military officer.

Two days after the Rendlemans' photograph was taken for "Lasting Love," on Friday, May 13, Pauline suffered a stroke. She died 11 days later.

"Our remains will be interred together, so in time we will be together again. (Our love) started that way, and it's going end that way," Rendleman said.

They were married almost 70 years.

Steven Harris, a licensed marriage and family therapist and professor at the University of Minnesota, said he believes the key to a lasting marriage like the Rendlemans' or the Cocumellis' is the willingness for the couples to work at it.

"Too many people throw the towel in on their marriages before they give it their best shot," he said.

Harris has recently conducted research on programs intended to strengthen marriage and committed relationships.

In their marriage, the Cocumellis have had problems with "the little things," but they have learned to move past them. "Everyone has faults," said Anne. "You chose that person, so you can choose to look past them."

As they enjoy their retirement, they remain positive of their future, in sickness and in health.

"When you get to this age, you have to have done something right," Al said, smiling at Anne.

Marian and Dean Miller have been married for 58 years. On the cover: Dawn and Tom Bussjaeger, 66 years.

Anne and Al Cocumelli (far left) on their wedding day. Al, 89, and Anne, 87, today (left). The two have been married for 62 years. THOMAS SANDERS PHOTOS