

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL OF WESTCHESTER / PLAYA

Working together to improve our communities!

Neighborhood Councils exist to:

- give neighborhoods greater influence on decisions made by local government
 - make government more responsive to local communities
- unite the local community to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods



Honoring Steve & Dave Cressman – the Neighborhood Council of Westchester / Playa’s 2019 Stars of the Neighborhood

Congratulations to Playa del Rey brothers Steve and Dave Cressman for being selected as the 2019 Stars of the Neighborhood. The award is designed to honor those in our community who give back to their neighbors without fanfare and may otherwise go unnoticed.

The Cressmans will be recognized in the annual Fourth of July Parade and again at an upcoming Neighborhood Council board meeting.

The Stars of the Neighborhood often are those who make a difference in our community but who do it quietly and without being asked. They are our unsung heroes. Their great efforts do not make the papers, are not talked about at the local coffee shops, but are known so well by those that have been on the receiving end of their efforts. Many recipients have seen the enormous difference these individuals make not only in their lives, but in the lives of so many in Westchester/Playa.

Steve and Dave Cressman are being honored for creating and sustaining one of our communities most defining events –The Gillis, a beach volleyball tournament like no other. The Cressmans founded the tournament and, along with Denny Smith and Alan Vallarine, have attended all 48 events.

The 49th Gillis Volleyball Tournament will be held from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on July 27 and 28 at Toes Beach, but the Cressmans will stop running The Gillis following the event’s 50th anniversary in 2020.

“It’s been a great run but the time is right to go out on top,” Dave said.

When the Cressmans started the two-day event in 1971, it was designed as a

tournament for people who attended St. Bernard’s High School or Westchester High School and lived in the Westchester, Playa del Rey area, but now, many of the people who play in the tournament are from Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach.

“The Gillis is unusual in that we want everybody who comes to play,” Dave told The Beach Reporter. “It’s not an AVP type situation where the majority are just watching. Our goal is for all to play at any age and at any skill level.”

Seventeen two-man teams played that first year, and the tournament now has grown to 800 participants.

“It was such a hit that people kept asking us to do it again,” Dave said. “We started adding courts to accommodate all of the teams, and it has not stopped growing since.”

While the volleyball is why they get together, the focus on fun and family has created traditions that people don’t see anywhere else. “The real personality of The Gillis is in the family-fun atmosphere with costumes, camps, skits, kings and queens, music and so much more,” Dave said.

In 1980, it was taken to another level when Dr. Pat Turley of Manhattan Beach and his partner Dik Johnson of Palos Verdes showed up at the courts exiting a 1930s Cadillac dressed as Laurel and Hardy. They did a short skit and then proceeded to disrobe down to one-piece old style bathing suits. In the following years, the pair came as the Lone Ranger and Tonto on horses, as Arab oil sheiks on a real camel and their biggest success might have been arriving in an actual LAPD car (that was rented) as



From left, Denny Smith, Dave Cressman and Steve Cressman at The Gillis.

they busted the tournament, pulling off the tarp of a makeshift jail with a band inside that played “Jailhouse Rock.”

There are teams that have four generations playing on the same court. There are hundreds of children of Gillis participants who have been to a tournament each year of their lives.

“My brother and I have seen The Gillis turn into a very special tradition that people keep coming back to each year,” he said. “We have kept it a local event for locals.”

“Showtime” is a time-out on Sunday where the best skits perform in front of the crowd and are judged for their creativity and entertainment value. Venice is the best local band in the area and they perform the National Anthem to kick off Showtime. Then, the previous year’s winners give a toast/roast, and the Kings and Queens are crowned along with awards for best costumes, camps and skit.

Starting preparations for the event in April, the Cressman brothers put in immense effort to maintain the quality and liveliness of the competition. Every year the tournament has a new color theme and logo design, which participants proudly sport around the community on T-shirts and visors. The founders don’t work completely alone, however. They receive a lot of support from local businesses, many which benefit from the bustling crowds that swarm Playa del Rey during the tournament.

For nearly half a century the Cressmans have supported the community and defined what it means to live in a true beach neighborhood where people are treated like family and fun and togetherness reign.

Congratulations to the Cressmans for being named this year’s Stars of the Neighborhood.

Next Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa Monthly Board Meeting:

6:30 p.m., Tuesday, August 6

in the Community Room at 7166 W. Manchester Ave. (at Lincoln Blvd.), in Westchester



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