

Diablo Honors.....

Jerry & Margi Slavonia

By Maryann Cella

“Go west, young man!” advised Joseph Gerald “Jerry” Slavonia’s father to the recent college graduate. That advice led Jerry to Chicago and four years later to the Bay Area with his wife, Marguerite “Margi” Fiori Slavonia and their young son. This year marks their 50th year in their beautiful Diablo home!

Jerry had a happy childhood in the Pittsburgh, PA, area with his parents, both first-generation Americans of Slovakian heritage, and two brothers. Jerry excelled at sports and pitched a perfect game in high school, assisted by teammate, Ed Dolinar, who became a lifelong friend and Diablo neighbor. Following in his father’s footsteps, he attended St. Vincent College, Latrobe, Pa, where he majored in Business and captained the golf team.

Margi enjoyed an idyllic childhood in a neighboring county, in the small town of Leechburg, PA. She recalls long summer days roaming the hills with her older brother and younger sister. Margi’s father was an Italian immigrant who attended the University of Pittsburgh, graduating with a pharmacy degree and eventually owning a successful pharmacy. Margi followed in the tradition of her mother, a first generation American also of Italian heritage, and graduated from Seton Hill College, majoring in Music Education.

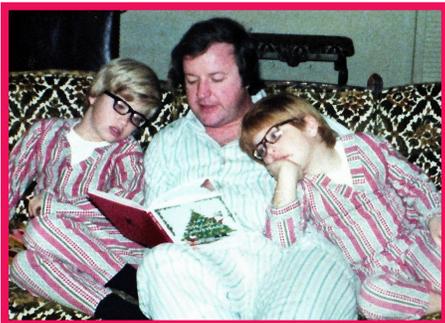
While Jerry and Margi were at their respective colleges, a mere 11 miles apart, a friend of Jerry’s showed him a photo of the Seton Hill Homecoming Court. Jerry pointed to Margi’s photo and famously said, “She’s the one for me!” He went to a Seton Hill/St. Vincent dance in hopes of meeting Margi---which he did. Eventually he secured a first date, and then “pursued me until I was caught”, Margi says with a smile. Following Margi’s 1964 graduation, she and Jerry married and moved to Chicago. They celebrate their 62nd wedding anniversary in June!

After graduation, Jerry briefly served in the Navy Air Corps. His first private sector job was with Connecticut General Insurance, developing insurance and pension benefit plans for small employers. Margi taught kindergarten for two years, then taught elementary music education and directed the school band. In 1967, Margi and Jerry were blessed with their first child, Gerald Anthony, and Margi became a full-time mom.

The following winter, two events convinced the growing family to move farther west. A severe snowstorm pelted Gary, Indiana, where Jerry was on a sales trip. Travel became impossible and he was forced to shelter in the Gary American Legion Hall for two nights. It was an ordeal Jerry didn’t want to repeat, knowing that Margi and baby Jerry were home anxiously awaiting his return.

Soon after, during another snowstorm, they watched the Pebble Beach Golf Tournament on TV. The weather was glorious: sunny and warm. “That’s the place for us!” exclaimed Jerry. Margi agreed, and Jerry went to work for Mutual Benefit Insurance in San Francisco. They initially rented in Walnut Creek, and following second son Joel’s birth in 1969, the family bought a home there.

The Boundary Oaks Golf Course was a real draw for choosing Walnut Creek for their first home. Golf has always been important in Jerry’s and Margi’s lives. Jerry and his boys are excellent golfers, and Margi has played a bit herself. One day, while waiting in line for a tee-time, Jerry struck up a conversation with Ron Johnson, longtime Diablo Club member. Ron told him about Diablo’s golf course, noting that membership was a great deal and that tee times were readily available.



Margi and Jerry visited the Club and were impressed not only with it but with the beauty of the Diablo community. The lovely older homes and the leafy ambiance reminded Margi of her hometown. They were about to buy a newly built home on El Cerro when their realtor called to say a home steps from the Club had just listed. They fell in love with it and bought it. They christened their home "Mille Fiori", Italian for "a thousand flowers." It is a nod to Margi's maiden name and their beautiful gardens.

For the next eight years, Margi focused on the boys' education at St. Isidore's School, their soccer and golf practices and tournaments and music lessons. She sang in the church choir and picked up tennis and golf. In 1982, the St. Isidore's Principal and Pastor asked Margi if she would establish the first kindergarten program for the school. Margi took up the challenge and soon she and her assistant were teaching her newly developed curriculum. She was so highly regarded that the Northern California Education Association honored her with its 1995 Distinguished Teacher Award. The following year, Margi became Vice-Principal of St. Isidore's, a position she held until retiring in 2003.



Meanwhile, the boys continued their studies at De La Salle High School where they golfed and Jerry coached. Jerry arranged for Diablo to serve as the De La Salle home course. Young Jerry graduated from San Francisco State University and now has his own business and lives in Santa Monica with his three children. Joel graduated from UC Berkeley and University of Oregon law school and went on to receive his LLM at NYU. He has two children and lives in San Francisco.

After a successful career in insurance and pension benefits, Jerry embarked on a second career as a business development consultant with Fremont Bank. He enjoyed the change and meeting new people. Friends often said, "Jer never met a person he didn't know."

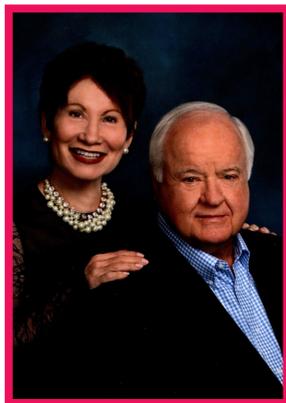
Jerry is proud of his 50 consecutive Diablo Country Club Gold Putter golf tournaments. He also has recorded EIGHT holes in one! He has had a big impact on the Club, serving two three-year terms on the Board, including as President, and is now a Diablo Community Services District Board Director.



The entire family: Joel, Susy, Margi, Jerry, Elizabeth, Jerry, Nico, Sofia, Nina, Gigi, Susan

Margi and Jerry have treasured their years in Diablo. They affectionately remember the "clip-clop" sound of horses ridden by Diablo kids trotting past their house on Saturday mornings. Kids played in the creeks and on Mt. Diablo, golfed, swam, and played tennis at the Club. Margi and Jerry continue to enjoy long summer days and evenings on their front porch and back patio, and the waves and casual conversations with friendly passersby. They especially enjoy Christmas at their home with Jerry, Joel, and their families, and the amazing celebration of Halloween in Diablo. He is proud of his unique train room in their home with trains traveling around a scale-model town that includes his and Margi's childhood homes.

Jerry and Margi have made many close friends during their five decades in Diablo. Our community is blessed to call the Slavonias our friends and neighbors, and we wish them many more happy years here!



Sponsored by the Diablo Property Owners' Association