

# Citizens of the Year are a couple of Stahrs

Philanthropist husband and wife honored with annual award at a ceremony at the Balboa Bay Resort on Friday.

BY HANNAH FRY

**F**or John and Elizabeth Stahr, who on Friday were honored as Newport Beach's 2016 Citizens of the Year, the philanthropic efforts that have defined much of their lives have been a labor of love.

More than 200 city officials, friends and former honorees of the Newport Beach Citizen of the Year Award attended a gala at the Balboa Bay Resort Friday night to honor the Stahrs' long dedication to various community groups and charities across Orange County.

The Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce's Citizen of the Year award is presented annually to an individual or couple who has served the Newport Beach community for many years. The award is "for the one who says, 'Sure, I'll help — what do we need to do?' And then does it," Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rosansky said.

"I can't think of a couple more deserving than John and Elizabeth," he said. "They have spent so many years serving this community. The Stahrs truly embody the meaning of this award."

When the couple, who moved to Corona del Mar from Arcadia in 1972, found out in August that they had been nominated for the award, the news took them by surprise.

But, many attendees at the dinner said they knew it was only a matter of time before the Stahrs

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received one of Newport Beach's highest honors. A group of former Citizens of the Year recipients voted this year to select the Stahrs for the 2016 honor, noting their record of philanthropy in the city and county.

"It's been a special night and a special honor for us," Elizabeth Stahr, 82, said. "We've always done what we needed to do for our people."

Over the decades, the couple has taken on leadership roles and raised money to support more than 30 local arts, cultural, civic and educational nonprofit organizations, including the Newport Beach Public Library, Girl Scouts of Orange County, UC Irvine, Pacific Symphony, South Coast Repertory, Philharmonic Society of Orange County, Arts Orange County, Orange County Museum of Art and Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

In Newport Beach, the couple is known for their efforts to raise funds to help build the Main Library at 1000 Avocado Ave.

In the late 1980s, when the building was in its design phase, city leaders wanted to gauge public interest in the project be-

fore spending millions on a new library.

The Newport Beach Public Library Foundation was formed to seek donations, and the Stahrs were chosen to lead the committee.

They set a goal of raising \$1 million and instead raised \$2 million from more than 3,000 donors.

The couple has said the library project was especially important to their family, given that their four now-grown children were influenced heavily by the books they read as youngsters.

"It's been a labor of love and joy," John Stahr, 83, said. "We've received so much more than we've given and I hope that we can continue on this path as long as we are able."

The couple also has remained active as members of the Pacific Symphony board of directors. A group of students from the Pacific Symphony Youth Ensemble gave a surprise performance at the dinner and presented Elizabeth with a bouquet of flowers.

Several students said everyone sits up a little straighter and plays their instrument a little bit better when the Stahrs are around during practices.

Helen Chin, who also sits on the board of the Pacific Symphony, said Elizabeth helps coordinate scholarships for symphony students and always encourages them to pursue their educational goals.

"She's the fairy godmother for all the kids in the orchestra," Chin said.

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