
Bob Shryock: Woody Platt honored as Wenonah 'Legend'



Carl Hausman and Woody Platt (Photo by Catherine Bartch)



By **Bob Shryock** | For NJ.com

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on July 18, 2014 at 7:00 AM, updated July 18, 2014 at 7:21 AM

Landscape painter extraordinaire Woody Platt, a **West Deptford** resident who lived in Wenonah 42 years, was honored as Wenonah's 11th "Legend" at the Fourth of July park ceremony, prompting several in town to observe, "It's about time."

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Master Sgt. Richard Platt, one of Woody's four children, accepted on behalf of his father, whose voice is limited by a stroke.

"It was a great honor for him and the crowd was so supportive," says Richard, who completes 30 years in the Army National Guard next month and has had a deployment in Afghanistan. "He broke a hip in a fall last year, but you can't keep him down. He's still gangbusters."

Dr. Steven Squyres, a Gateway graduate and Cornell University professor, was the first "Wenonah Legend" honoree in 2004. Among voluminous credits, he was NASA's principal investigator on the Mars Rover expedition. Paul Stankard, world-renown glass paperweight artist, was the second honoree in 2005. Other winners include Bradley Caraker, who died of leukemia and was honored in 2006, and Jack Sheppard Sr., former long-time mayor, in 2007.

The 2013 recipient was peerless musician Winston Byrd.

Former Princeton basketball star Kevin Mullin retired after 10 years as Legends chairman. He has been replaced by Carl Hausman. Now perhaps he'll qualify as a "Legend."

Woody had revealed a talent for art at age 9, but prior to graduating from Woodbury High in 1945 gave up his passion because, he recalls, guys who drew were targets of ridicule.

"It wasn't macho for a boy to be in art class at the end of World War II," Woody recalls.

But now, with more than 55 years of experience, the RiverWinds resident is firmly established as one of the region's most skilled landscape and portrait artists.

"I think you're always learning," said Woody in a 2008 *Times* story. "Through the learning process, you're going to get better. I'm a better artist now than I guess I ever was, but I find you never reach a goal. And I had no idea I could do this." Drafted during the Korean War, Woody returned to his civilian job at Texaco after discharge in 1952 and spent 36 years there.

While visiting friends one day, he admired their paintings and learned they'd taken lessons from Fred Reiniger in Pitman. With impetus to try a long-abandoned craft, he studied with Reiniger for 26 years.

"Fred taught me how to paint and was a wonderful friend," Woody says.

Woody then became a teacher in adult school in Washington Township, where he was encouraged by another teacher, Vivian Ashburn, who became his second wife. Later he taught classes at RiverWinds, where he and Vivian reside.

Said Woody, "I realized the only qualification I needed was to say yes."

Woody's membership in the Gloucester County Art League spans a half-century, including 10 years as president.

Working mostly in oils, Woody's favorites include a painting of Wenonah's historic train station. An avid golfer, he has painted many scenes at Pitman Golf Course and has sold his share of reprints. He insists he isn't that great a portrait painter, but many will disagree.

Platt is as humble as he is talented.

"I've always liked to stay in the background," he said. "I can't say there was a turning point for me as an artist. My work just evolved over the years."

The late Marge Platt and Woody had four children, all of whom attended the ceremony, and nine grandchildren.

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