

Neighbors



Scottsdale.org | @ScottsdaleProgress | /ScottsdaleProgress

Scottsdale woman's book honors her Filipino actress mom

BY SUMMER AGUIRRE
Progress Staff Writer

Not many people can say that they had the privilege of penning their famous parent's biography, but Scottsdale resident Mylene Agana Jao Richardson is one of the few.

In "The Legend of Tessie Agana: Beloved Child Star of the Philippines: An Intimate Portrait of My Mother," Richardson shares the inside story of her mother Tessie Agana, a Cave Creek resident who was a Filipino child actress in the 1950s known as the "Shirley Temple of the Philippines" and "The Nation's Little Sweetheart."

Richardson's debut book hit shelves

Sept. 20 – just in time for Filipino American History Month in October.

"It's pretty exciting, it's been a long road for me to get to this point," Richardson said, adding that the book took her 15 years to write. "So I think it for me, it's very surreal to even get here. It was definitely the best journey to get to this destination. Even at this destination, I still feel like there's so much more to do and to say."

Richardson penned "The Legend of Tessie Agana" for her family — her mother in particular, now aged 81, is thrilled for its release.

"I wanted this physical thing for my mom ... she has been a part of my

SEE **ACTRESS** PAGE 28



Scottsdale's Mylene Agana Jao Richardson, left, wrote a biography about her mother, Tessie Agana, a Cave Creek resident and former child star who was known as the "Shirley Temple of the Philippines." (Special to the Progress)

100+ Women of Scottsdale helps nonprofit for deaf kids

BY ANGIE SIMS
Progress Contributor

Every year, approximately 300 children in Arizona test deaf at birth and 90 percent of them are born to hearing parents.

Nearly all these parents want their child to learn to speak without the use of sign, cuing or lip reading. Learning to speak can be challenging for a person born deaf at birth or who becomes deaf at a very young age.

It can be a long process and require lots of practice, even with the use of hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Early intervention is the critical first step for these young children. The earlier a child begins speaking programs the more likely they will be successful in learning to speak.

In the early 1990s, a group of Arizona families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing traveled to a

well-known program in St. Louis to give their children the opportunity to attend a Listening and Spoken Language program.

In 1997, these parents founded Desert Voices, Arizona's only private nonprofit that teaches Listening and Spoken Language to children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The founders believed that spoken language instruction provided their children with the greatest educational and social opportunities.

They also believed that parents of children born with hearing loss deserve a choice of communication modalities.

Desert Voices' mission is to teach each child how to listen, talk, and read as they progress through their continuum of programs.

To fulfill their mission, and to provide the early intervention these children need to best succeed, Desert



Celebrating the donation made by 100+ Women Who Care of Scottsdale to nonprofit Desert Voices are, from left: **Back row:** Kristen Levi, Jacqueline Destremps, Kim Tarnopolski, Amy Coblenz, Libby Murphy, Nancy Stern, Tracie LeBlanc. **Front:** Desert Voices students and Holly Plunkett. (Special to the Progress)

Voices offers a series of programs for parents and their children. They accept any child who would be successful in the program.

SEE **WOMEN** PAGE 30

Programs start for infants as young as 6 weeks old with Parent Coaching, a weekly individual session with the child and parent.

The parent receives counseling on their child's journey and the child becomes aware of sound and learns to babble.

The next step is Jump Start at 18 months, a weekly 2-hour class with a few other children to practice listening and spoken language.

Toddler is next at age 2 and is in a small class setting led by a listening and spoken language professional. In a class that meets twice a week for 3.5 hours a day, the children learn 250 words and how to combine two to three words at a time.

Around age 3, the child enters Pre-school at Desert Voices, a full-day, five-day-a-week program focused on

communication skills in a classroom and small groups for individualized language skills.

The children learn school readiness skills in reading, writing, and simple arithmetic. They leave speaking about 3,000 words and ready to excel in traditional schools at age 5 or 6.

Thanks to Desert Voices, for the past 25 years Arizona families have been able to get this valuable education and training right here in the Phoenix area.

Though most of the families of children at Desert Voices reside in Maricopa County, they also serve families outside its boundaries by tele-services.

Over 350 children have passed through their doors and are now in traditional elementary, middle, high school, or college settings.

Their programs continue to be a blessing for many Valley children and families, with 26 students currently

enrolled for the 2023 year.

In August, Desert Voices was chosen to receive a quarterly donation from the Scottsdale members of 100+ Women Who Care Valley of the Sun.

The group donated \$18,750 to support the children and families who rely on this school.

"To be able to serve these families who have chosen listening and spoken language for their child is a gift," said Desert Voices Executive Director Kristen Levi. "But a gift that takes a lot of hard work, expertise and dedication from our professionals and the family.

"Providing them with scholarship dollars is one thing we proudly do for every family that enrolls in our school.

"Early Intervention is so crucial to the development of any child no less children who are deaf or hard of hearing," Levi continued. "Receiving these services can change the path of a child and a path that would not be possible

without the generosity of donors like the 100+ Women Who Care.

"Your donation will support the 9 children in Parent Coaching...the first and critical step in the journey to learn to speak. "

100+ Women Who Care is a group of women that meets quarterly to learn about local nonprofit organizations, then votes on which organization will receive their quarterly donation.

Each member of the group donates \$100 to the chosen charity. 100+ WWC has donated over \$1,100,000 to charities since their inception.

100+ Women Who Care of Scottsdale meets at HomeSmart at 8388 E Hartford Drive, Suite 100, Scottsdale, each quarter. Their fourth quarter giving circle will be held at 6: 30 p.m. Oct. 25.

Visit 100wwcvalleyofthesun.org to register or for more information. For information on Desert Voices: desert-voices.org. 