

2022 AGELESS AWARD HONOREE



WALTER COLE DARCELLE XV

The first time he put on a dress was when he was 37 years old. It was for a Halloween costume ball at the historic Hoyt Hotel. At the event, he caught a glimpse of himself across the room in a mirrored wall, stopped dead in his tracks, and said, "Walter, what the hell have you done?"

That was the beginning of a journey that would take him from working at Fred Meyer to becoming Portland icon, Darcelle XV, who, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, is the oldest working drag queen in the world!

Walter W. Cole was born in 1930 in Linnton, a small mill town just outside of Portland, Oregon. An only child, his mother died when he was young and he was raised by his mostly absent father and beloved Aunt Lil, his father's sister. After a childhood of being called a "four-eyed sissy boy," he realized that if he wanted to be somebody, he would have to get over his shy ways and go for it. And go for it he did. Starting at the Multnomah County Main Library and then as a page at the Multnomah Club, he would make himself talk to people. After a very painful beginning, he became quite the bon vivant!

Walter married his high school sweetheart, Jean, and soon after entered the Army. He was stationed for two years in Livorno, Italy, keeping the Italian Riviera safe (well, someone had to do it!).

After the service, Walter worked at Fred Meyer to support his wife and two children, and quickly made his way up to manager. He soon realized that if he was going to be the "somebody" he dreamed about, it was not going to happen at Fred Meyer. So, with the \$5,000 he earned in the Army, he boldly bought a coffee house in southwest Portland called Caffé Espresso. The clientele consisted of beatniks and intellectuals, and the café hosted poetry readings, folk music and even some jazz. Having the only steam-operated espresso machine north of San Francisco, the café became very popular, serving pizza and sandwiches, and selling small cups of rich, dark coffee for an exorbitant fifty cents a cup. When Urban Renewal came to Portland and required him to move the café to another location, he added a jazz club in the basement and named it Studio A. He later opened an ice cream parlor, but Urban Renewal sent him another letter and a check, and he found himself looking at the business opportunity section of the Oregonian—where he spotted an ad for the Demas Tavern in what was then called "Skid Row." He bought the tavern and it would eventually become, with the help of his life partner, Roc "Roxy" Neuhardt, the Darcelle XV Showplace as it is known today.

For 53 years, Darcelle has performed 6 shows a week, sewn all the costumes, built the sets and strung the lights as he oversees the daily business of the busy club. And at the age of 91, he shows no sign of slowing down.

Over the years, Darcelle has graciously lent his club and time for a long list of fundraisers, performed dozens of wedding ceremonies, fed the homeless, hosted countless events, performed on many stages, and mingled with the rich and famous. His list of awards and accolades is a long and well-deserved one.

He has performed a one-man show about his life, titled, *Just Call me Darcelle*, co-written and directed by Sharon Knorr along with a book of the same name. He is the subject of the book *Looking from the Mirror – My Life as Walter & Darcelle* as well as the sold-out musical *Darcelle: That's No Lady*, both penned by author and theatrical producer Donnie "Don" Horn of Triangle Productions. He is the subject of two documentary films, the second, *Oregon Experience: Darcelle XV* received two Emmy Awards. He did a TED Talk and sang with the Oregon Symphony and the Gay Men's Choir. His schedule puts younger people to shame!

Darcelle's philosophy for life is to be who you really are and to make love and laughter the top priorities every day. He is blessed with many, many friends, thousands of fans and a loving family which includes his wife, Jean; two children, Walter Jr. and Maridee; their spouses, Julie and Dennis; two granddaughters, Sarah and Amanda; two great-grandchildren, Lainie Rose and Lawrence. And of course, last but not least, the love of his life for 48 years, Roc Neuhardt, who passed away in October 2017.

Each night since then, Darcelle closes the show by singing the Bette Midler classic, *The Rose*, and then sweetly whispers "Goodnight Roxy."

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**SHO
DOZONO**

Born in post-war Japan, Sho Dozono arrived in Portland by boat at the age of 10. He worked hard to fit in, proudly becoming an Eagle Scout, rising to junior class president in high school, and then becoming the first minority member of his undergraduate college fraternity. "I had to learn how to make friends because of my immigrant background," Dozono recalled. "I wasn't trying to break barriers along the way, I just wanted to be part of the community."

Dozono taught history and Japanese language at Grant High School. Married with three kids to support, he joined Azumano Travel and eventually became the company president and CEO. In 1979, Dozono joined the Mayor's Human Relations Commission as its education committee chair, a position he held for 10 years. When Portland Public Schools was going to release 400 teachers in 1996 due to lack of funds, Dozono founded the Portland School Foundation. He organized a 30,000-person march and solicited money from major companies. The money raised, gathered from kids' piggy bank contents to corporate donations, provided \$11 million to save the teachers' jobs. "I believe public education is so important because it's the great equalizer in society. Anyone can advance themselves regardless of color, religion or background," he said.

In 2001, Dozono became the first minority person to chair the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce in its 110-year history. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, he organized the "Flight for Freedom" where 1,000 business people donated money and flew to New York to support the tourist economy. Dozono also used his business influence to ensure that the Olympic torch came to Portland in 2002. "I have a lot of pride in Portland," he said. "This city made me who I am today."

The Oregon League of Minority Voters, Spirit Mountain Community Fund, US-Japan Council, Portland Oregon Visitors Association and many others have benefited from Dozono's volunteer service. Today, he serves on the boards of Boy Scouts of America, Providence Health & Services, Japanese Ancestral Society of Portland, and New Portland Foundation, where he advocates for immigrants and refugees. He is also on PSU's Board of Trustees.

"I want to make sure the cost of education doesn't get out of hand," Dozono said. "Money is always a barrier to communities of color, immigrants and refugees. Everyone should have access to education."

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**LOUISE
MUIR**

Louise Muir moved to the Madras area in 1992, where she began her career as a receptionist in the emergency department of Mountain View Hospital. The following year, she was asked to be a part of the team for Relay for Life—and a love of volunteering was born.

Louise spent several more years working in medical offices before she changed course to become a teacher's aide with the Jefferson County School District. There, she found great joy and fulfillment in helping children believe in themselves and pursue their dreams. During this time, she continued to volunteer with organizations like Habitat Restore, where she served for many years as their treasurer. After that position, she went on to join a wellness team at the Jefferson County Senior Center, where she had opportunities to work in the greater community and connect with her neighbors. She eventually joined the board for the senior center, as well as an advisory board for the Council on Aging of Central Oregon, where she is currently serving as a representative for Madras, Oregon.

Louise has held many roles with the senior center over the years, including acting as building and kitchen manager. In her role as kitchen manager, when the quality of food received for onsite meals and delivery began to diminish, she and her team found a way to use funds to purchase hot meals from the kitchen at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution. Jefferson County Seniors continues to purchase their meals from Deer Ridge to this day.

Louise's volunteer work doesn't stop there. In addition to her committee work with the Council on Aging, she has also served on various other committees such as: Jefferson County Ambulance Area District, The EMS Budget Committee and the EMS Board, and the Steering Committee for Relay for Life.

Louise continues to serve her community in various capacities. She volunteers for the City of Madras Public Works and Urban Forestry, City of Madras Housing and Downtown Parking, Lutheran Church/St. Marks Episcopal Church as Outreach Chairman, the campaign for the Veteran's Healing Memorial that was erected to address high rates of suicide among veterans, Hope for Heroes, the Bomba sock company's giving program, and is a lifelong member of Alpha Omicron philanthropic sorority. Louise also participates in community discussions about the needs of older adults in Jefferson County.

When she's not busy serving her community, Louise enjoys Saturday morning meetings with friends at Eagle Bakery and spending time walking with family at Bandon Beach.

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SUSAN SOKOL BLOSSER

Susan Sokol Blosser, wine industry pioneer, community leader, environmental champion, women's advocate and author, is a contemporary Oregon icon. When women were rarely decision makers in business or agriculture, Susan distinguished herself in both.

Over three decades, she managed every aspect of Sokol Blosser's vineyard and winery operation. As president, she saw Sokol Blosser grow to become one of the largest and most innovative Oregon wineries, with national and international distribution; and the Oregon wine industry started to receive international acclaim. Susan was a forerunner in instituting environmentally friendly business practices at the Sokol Blosser Winery, practicing the triple bottom line concept of people, planet, profit. With its certified organic vineyard, the first LEED certified winery building in the US, and business practices based on the Natural Step model of sustainability, the winery made social responsibility and an environmental ethic its priorities, while still pursuing its vision of producing fabulous wine. Sokol Blosser Winery has been honored by Oregon Business Magazine as one of Oregon's "100 Best Companies to Work For" and by the Portland Business Journal as one of the "Most Admired Companies in Oregon."

After turning over the winery in 2008 to two of her children, Alex and Alison, who serve as Co-Presidents, Susan stepped back, retaining the title of Founder. She started the Yamhill Enrichment Society (YES) a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to transform the lives of Yamhill County children with literacy and music enrichment.

Susan holds a B.A. from Stanford University, an M.A.T. from Reed College, and an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service from the University of Portland, citing her entrepreneurship within the context of environmental and social responsibility. She holds a Lifetime Achievement award from the Oregon Wine Board, was the first non-California woman inducted into the national Women for WineSense Hall of Fame, and the second American woman to be given the prestigious Diploma of Honor by the Paris-based International Fédération Internationale des Confréries Bachiques.

She and her husband, Russ Rosner, Sokol Blosser's Winemaker Emeritus, live at the vineyard with 2 cats, 11 hens, 1 rooster and 2 Tibetan Terriers.