

'The Leading Gen!' highlights older Americans

Mike Perrault • The Desert Sun • March 7, 2010

In 13 half-hour episodes, the Leading Gen documentary gives viewers a glimpse into the lives of nearly 100 people.

Hosts Gino LaMont and Carolyn Ausman interview 40- to 100-year-olds to understand how they dealt with difficult challenges.

The series airs on more than 115 PBS stations, including locally on PBS KCET-TV Desert Cities at 7 p.m. Mondays and 3:30 p.m. Sundays. Here's a sampling of what viewers can expect:

- Joan Busick, 57, explains how, after getting a divorce, she achieves her life goal of independence by going back to school, entering a new profession and helping other women pursue college educations and find careers.
- Roy Daniels, 80, is on a softball team whose players range from age 50 to 88. Daniels and three teammates in their 70s discuss the importance of camaraderie and having friends in their lives.
- Bill Marx, 71, adopted son of "Harpo" and Susan Marx, talks about living with famous parents and what he will do with the rest of his life.
- Jane Curnutt, 60, a recent widow and former postal employee, tells how she went back to school, earned several degrees and now works on NASA projects.
- Frank Gorzny, 89, former U.S. Forest Service worker, climbs trees and travels on his motorcycle across the country. He tells how he is raising his great-granddaughter, 11-year-old Melissa.
- Luther Symons, 46, and 59-year-old Van Wyatt, HIV-positive and HIV-negative, respectively, talk about devoting their lives to one another and finding new ways to deal with the challenges of homosexual partners.
- Bob Parish, 68, recipient of the Peace Corps' highest honor, tells about his life before and after his 29 cancer surgeries.
- Jane Stonehill, 65, was widowed twice and had four children die before they were a year old. She explains how opening an animal rescue service has changed her life.
- Mary and Doug Austin, 60 and 61, talk about financial planning and his survival of three strokes. Mary discusses her battle with pancreatic cancer, and Doug discusses her work in the community and developing theater classes for stutterers. They founded a scholarship fund for children.
- Shirley and Merle Harris, ages 75 and 80, talk about her life as a college student in her 60s, his multiple and successful business ventures, and learning to be charitable. Both spend time working to help others and share their wisdom on retirement and future generations.
- Ines Allen, 49, a former poor immigrant from Ecuador, discusses creating a charity that provides medical care and medicine to people in her native land and other countries.
- Lawrence Goodman, 70, a cancer survivor and retired clothing manufacturer, talks about conducting bridge and cooking classes for people who are blind. He was named Volunteer of the Year by the Braille Institute.
- Brigitte and Mac Lopez, ages 48 and 53, explain how he felt "expendable" in the corporate world. They talk about their new challenges and finding happiness as artists in their own Native American gallery.
- Michael Thomas, 54, explains how planning helped him realize a lifelong dream to become a cowboy.