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OMAR ORNELAS THE DESERT SUN

Dr. James Ausman and his wife, Carolyn, have created a 13-part series featured on 120-plus PBS stations. They used their home as part of the setting.

## PBS show inspires a generation

BY MIKE PERRAULT  
The Desert Sun

When neurosurgeon Dr. James Ausman, and his wife, Carolyn, both 72, began working more than five years ago to create a 13-episode TV series, they weren't sure how it would resonate with viewers.

Any fears the Rancho Mirage couple may have harbored have been allayed in recent months.

In its first season, the show has been picked up and is airing on more than 115 PBS stations, said Kenn Couch, KVCR-DT station manager.

"We've had very good response," Couch said, noting that it took three years for another popular show, "Curiosity Quest," to reach 148 stations.

The Ausmans' TV series, "The Leading Gen! — What will you do with the rest of your life?" depicts how aging Americans have tackled a range of life-changing issues.

PBS affiliate KVCR-DT in San Bernardino, which worked with the Ausmans to produce the series, is touting it as "the ultimate reality show."

The series has won two Telly Awards for education and culture, and Couch said KVCR hopes it will garner an Emmy Award.

Each half-hour program includes candid interviews with people ages 40 to 100. Interviewees share personal stories about retirement, financial issues, personal loss, loneliness and countless other issues.

The Ausmans emphasize that stories often address weighty issues. But the half-hour episodes tend to be generally uplifting and positive, and they nearly all have one central theme.

"If they can do it, you can too," said Carolyn Ausman, who served as co-executive producer, writer and co-host on the series.

James Ausman said "on the surface," a show often appears simple.

"But it comes at you at multiple levels, with very meaningful life stories. There are very profound social issues being discussed," James Ausman said.

Gino LaMont, a broadcast anchor for "KMIR6 Today," co-hosted the series with Carolyn Ausman. He attributes the success of the series to the Ausmans' hard work.

"It's 100 percent because of them. Carolyn Ausman did an amazing job of researching and finding people with stories to tell that were unusual in their own right," LaMont said. "At the same time, they are very commonplace and something people could relate to."

### Stories teach resilience

They are people such as 60-year-old Jane Curnutt, a widow and formal postal employee who went back to school, earned several degrees and now works on NASA projects.

Helen Snider, 85, a former World War II decoding expert, tells of the loss of a spouse, dealing with loneliness and finding new joy at the Children's Discovery Museum.

Roy Daniels, 80, on a softball team with 50- to 88-year-old players, explains the importance of camaraderie and having friends in his life.

Despite many compelling interviews and stories, the Ausmans faced formidable hurdles getting the series made, Brian Lowry, chief TV critic at Variety, noted in his column last month.

The couple shopped the project to a Hollywood talent agency, where they were told it couldn't be sold.

"They wanted us to have two (movie) stars as hosts," James Ausman said. "We said, 'No, we're not doing it. This show is not about the hosts. It's about the people.'"

The Ausmans hope PBS viewers come away with the message that aging Americans can continue to lead active, productive lives — no matter what hurdles they face.

Please see PBS, D3

## Business

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### SHOW: Rancho Mirage couple produce award-winning series

Continued from D1

Who can claim a more difficult life than 85-year-old interviewee Blanka Rothschild, James Ausman asked.

She is a Holocaust survivor who, despite the loss of her entire family, struggled to survive and managed to rebuild her life.

"She was resolute; she was refined; she was not bitter. She pushed on with her life and persisted and made a success out of it," James Ausman said.

Couch said a hallmark of the series is the "true and genuine," totally unscripted answers that interviewees gave.

"It was so honest and real,"

Couch said. "It was absolutely amazing to see some of these interviews."

"The stories that I find most amazing are all the ones about people who volunteer," LaMont said. "And to a person, they all say the same thing: 'I get more out of this than the people I'm helping.'"

Ben Holland, KVCR program director, said response from PBS viewers has been highly favorable.

One big response came after a segment featuring Michael Thomas, 54, who described how planning helped him realize a lifelong dream to become a real cowboy.

"A lot of people loved the cowboy," Holland said.

### Show highlights older Americans

BY MIKE PERRAULT  
The Desert Sun

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 "expandable" 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.