

*Harvey & Iris Hollingsworth*



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*Iris Hollingsworth*

A-2142 - 2001

## Tribute to darling of Inland Valley theater

By H.S. Wilson  
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If there was ever a queen of community theater in the Inland Valley, it was Iris Irene Hollingsworth.

She was one of only a few who could instantly provoke a response from a local audience just by stepping upon the stage. Whenever Iris made her first entrance, the audience would always react with applause, giggles and murmurs of recognition. They knew that no matter how good the show had been to that point, it was about to get better. When she would make her exit, a round of grateful applause was all but guaranteed.

Last Thursday, this darling of local theater left the world's stage. She was just six days shy of her 89th birthday.

According to Paul Larson, founder of Chino Community Theatre, Hollingsworth was a local legend whose presence lighted up more than just the stage.

"She pulled so much energy from everybody on that stage," Larson said. "When she went on, everyone else got so much better."

Hollingsworth helped christen CCT in 1984 through its maiden production of



IRIS  
HOLLINGSWORTH  
(1912-2001)

"Harvey." She would return to CCT 15 years later to reprise her role as the ditzzy Mrs. Chauvinet.

Along with CCT and the old Gallery Theatre in Ontario, Hollingsworth was a familiar face to audiences of the late Inland Valley Repertory Theatre, The Place and the Grove Theatre.

She never minded dressing up in the gawdiest of outfits or even in a turn-of-the-century swimsuit. If it would get a laugh, Iris would do it.

Her natural comedic and musical talents (she was more than proficient with a piano) were honed throughout the 1930s and '40s when she and her husband, A.J. "Hollie" Hollingsworth, operated a touring tent show in her home state of Oklahoma and throughout the Midwest.

Iris and Hollie were married for 58 years. He passed in 1990, just three months shy of his 100th birthday.

Although the Hollingsworths had lived in Pomona since 1962, Iris had only started acting on the local theater scene in the 1970s when she first appeared at the Gallery Theatre. It was there she would build her reputation as everyone's favorite silly aunt or grandmother in such classic

comedies as "Arsenic and Old Lace" and "Barefoot in the Park."

She received her greatest personal and critical acclaim when she starred in the dramatic title role of "Driving Miss Daisy" at both the Grove and Gallery theatres. She once remarked that Daisy was "the most complete part I've ever done."

Her last roles included Henry Higgins' mother in "My Fair Lady" at the Grove in Upland, opposite Dale Kristien.

When she knew she no longer could handle lead roles, Hollingsworth would eagerly accept any part just to be on the stage again. She also supported community theater by attending any show she wasn't already acting in.

She earned the love and respect of her fellow actors because she knew when to give a scene and when to steal it. When she did decide to steal, however, anyone else on stage was at her total mercy.

There will be other actresses who will fill those roles that Iris used to command, but there will be none to fill her shoes. She was that rare one-of-a-kind. Maybe few theatergoers west of Kellogg Hill ever were aware of Iris Hollingsworth, but in the Inland Valley, no other star has ever shined, or will shine, so bright.

*Feb 27 - 2001*