

SUMMER 2013
Volume 9 Issue 3

LivingWell

Seniors Shine in First Talent Show

page 4

Dine Out 4 Senior Centers

page 14

Celebrate Active Aging Week

page 30

Leta Powell Drake – The Next Chapter

page 20



*Leta Powell Drake displays awards won by both herself and son Aaron Drake.
Photo by Zoe Olson.*

Leta Powell Drake – The Next Chapter

by Zoe Olson

Broadcast television host, producer, writer, announcer and program director; radio director; featured speaker; emcee; licensed private pilot; champion in horseshoe pitching, golf and bowling; member of the Screen Actors Guild; film and stage actor; board member; director

of development and community relations; member of the Nebraska Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame; Nebraska celebrity.

What in the world is Leta Powell Drake doing now? She remains the epitome of an active and involved retired citizen.

“When I finally decided to retire, I was way over the usual retirement

age,” Drake said. “I was afraid to retire, because I’ve been so active my entire life. The fact of not having to do something was, in many ways, terrifying to me. So I just kept going to work. Fortunately, I had my health so I just kept working. Until I got to the point where I said to myself, ‘we’re all going to die.’ And who knows when. How much time do I have left? So let me now do the things I really love to do. And of course, that’s education.

“I’m a big reader. I read all the time. I love books. And there was OLLI — Osher Lifelong Living Institute — which was a natural fit me.”

Drake started taking OLLI classes. The first was an art class at the Sheldon Museum with instructor Norman Geske.

“It was so interesting. I began to get more involved and take more classes. And what happens when you really love something? You get more committed. Now I’m overcommitted. Some people say I should be committed,” Drake said with a deep laugh. “It’s given me another opportunity to explore, to continue to learn.”

As a result, Drake has been involved with OLLI for several years, helping create classes while using her degree in theatre.

“Let’s get seniors back on stage,” she said.

Drake realized many seniors who had been on the stage were hesitant because they were concerned with memory issues and afraid they would forget lines. Putting a script in a senior actor’s hands gives them one less thing to be concerned about, and she decided to create a class where seniors could return to the stage.

With the help of Dee Aguilar from OLLI and Morrie Enders from the Lincoln Community Playhouse,



The Radio Active Players.

the OLLI class known as the “Radio Active Players” was born. The Radio Active Players class has been a tremendous success and Drake is currently preparing for the group’s fifth production.

“That is a very creative process and it’s what I like,” she said. “My creative juices start to flow and the energy just comes.”

Drake realized a story on the history of 10/11, KOLN/KGIN TV has never been written and she had been a part of it almost since the beginning. So many of the people have passed on, and if she didn’t tell the story, who would? She began to chronicle the history, but with a passion to write an interesting story. Drake began by selecting the best stories from her memory and then the truly hard work began.

It’s much more difficult to write than it is to talk,” Drake explained. The book is not a novel, it is history so verifying everything — dates, times, places, the correct spelling of people’s names — is critical, and Drake is committed to accuracy. There are legal considerations; research can be a difficult and time-consuming process; and correctly attributing information to a specific person is critical.

Drake is learning all the nuances of writing a book. She hopes the process of will be completed within the next year resulting in the book’s publication.

Without having to go to work every day, Drake sees a world of endless possibilities. Her advice to seniors who don’t know what to do with their time in retirement: “Open your eyes! Get out there! You’d be amazed at wherever your passion lies — there’s something for you.”

“There’s an interesting irony that my claim to fame would be a children’s television program,” Drake said. She was asked to take over the Cartoon Corral from Sheriff Bill — the first host of the show was moving to the Arizona territory — and she was happy to do it by becoming “the West’s only lady sheriff.”

“I had no idea the program would be so successful,” she said.

At the time, Drake hosted the

hour-long Morning Show. She began her workday at 5 a.m., booking and following up with guests and researching various topics.

“There was no email — we made phone calls,” she laughed.

By 3 p.m. she would take a deep breath, put on the costume, get her energy back up and appear on Cartoon Corral for the live 3:30 p.m. kids show. Her workday ended at 5 p.m.

It was always a learning experience. “Live television, interesting people, things go wrong, problems to be fixed — I loved it,” she said with a smile.

Today, Drake is one of the hosts of Live & Learn, Aging Partners’ show for seniors on 5 City TV on Time Warner Cable. The program also is available online and on YouTube.

“I’m glad to be back on television. I’ve done it all my life,” she said.

“There are similarities — we try to do it like live television — trying to get a segment done in one take. I’m continuing to learn. As I go through the aging process, these things that were predicted to happen are

Continued on page 22.



Kristen Stohs and Leta Powell Drake step up as new hosts for Live & Learn in 2012.

Continued from page 21.

happening to me — the hearing fades, the eyesight dims, the memory starts to go. It's fascinating to watch. And that's what Live & Learn is all about — I've been through this and now I understand."

Drake began her career in broadcasting in 1956 in Duluth, Minn., almost by accident. As a high school student, she entered the American Legion-sponsored "I Speak for Democracy" essay contest for high school students in grades 10–12 and won it not once, but three consecutive years. This program continues today. Oddly enough the station was CBS affiliate KDAL, channel 10.

"The trophy I won went to my high school and my prize was a portable plastic radio," she said.

When she won the third time, they recorded her voice and they offered her a job. Drake turned them down as she had plans to attend college, and she admitted with a laugh that she thought television was never going to last.

"Programming in the beginning was just awful," she said.

However, she needed money for school and she began as the night receptionist — one of the jobs in television available to women.

"The news room wasn't just locked to women, it was bolted and there was rebar in the glass ceiling," Drake said with a laugh.

However, everything on television was live and as the only woman there at night, she was asked to do the commercials — "I was learning how to do live television without even realizing it," she said.

She was studying at the University of Minnesota, performing in theatre, and working at the television station.

"I've always been out there doing way too much," she admitted.

Dr. William Morgan, Drake's professor at the University of Minnesota, accepted a job at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Theatre department and recruited her to come to UNL as a graduate assistant.

"Where is Lincoln, Nebraska? All I had read about Lincoln were the Charlie Starkweather murders and that Carl Shapiro, a Pulitzer Prize winner, was an English professor there," she said. "I

got a graduate assistantship and said, 'I'm going to Nebraska!'"

Living on graduate assistant pay required Drake to look for other jobs to pay the bills.

"LT&T was having auditions for a commercial — I was seasoned with four years experience so I began doing all kinds of live commercials for Channels 10/11. I ran to classes, acted in the theatre, ran to the station to do commercials — I was always running. I'm still running. What makes Leta run? I don't know," she said, laughing.

"I did not plan to stay in Lincoln. I was going to Broadway. Once I got to 10/11, I hosted the Morning Show and Cartoon Corral. One day I looked at my watch and I said, 'Whoops!' Twenty years have gone by! I love Lincoln. It's my home."

An added benefit was that Lincoln was the perfect place to raise her son, Aaron Drake.

"When you have a small child and you are raising that child by yourself, the vagaries of the theatre district in



Leta Powell Drake has come a long way since her time as Kalamity Kate, the West's only lady sheriff, on Cartoon Corral. Photo by Zoe Olson.

the big city are not good for a precious little boy," she said. "My primary responsibility was to him and make sure his life was as good and stress-free as possible. I loved my job. I could be on the stage here and encourage Aaron in his swimming. He made it to the Olympic Time Trials in the 100-meter breaststroke. Lincoln was the perfect home for us. Nebraska is home."

When her book, "The Calamities of Kalamity Kate," is published, where will Drake use her boundless energy in the future?

"I would like to travel in the Kalamity Kate costume — but it's tight — it cuts off my breathing and restricts the digestion," she laughed. "I'd like to speak to groups and answer questions; talk to the people who were kiddies on the show, who are now grown adults and get their perspective. I think it would be fascinating."

And so Nebraska, Kalamity Kate returns! Ready or not. 