



# Gold Circle Profile: Jack & Elaine LaLanne

By Kevin Wing



One could say that it wasn't necessarily serendipity the moment **Jack LaLanne** met his future wife, the former **Elaine Doyle**, on that fateful day in San Francisco 57 years ago, when both were beginning their television careers at an even-then pioneering KGO-TV.

The year was 1951. Elaine produced, and appeared on *The Les Malloy Show*, a variety show produced at the Channel 7 studios at a time when television in the San Francisco Bay area was still very much in its infant stages. She was already a Bay Area television pioneer, beginning as a model and doing commercials as early as 1948.

Jack, who, at that time, had already been making waves in the Bay Area as a premier expert on physical fitness, was about to launch a television career that would take his physical fitness programs into millions and millions of homes over the course of the next four decades in the form of *The Jack LaLanne Show*. But first, he would appear on Malloy's popular variety program.

The day Jack and Elaine saw each other for the first time was auspicious at best. He entered the Channel 7 studios to appear as one of Malloy's guests. Elaine was there as well, with a doughnut in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Jack told her that she should be eating fruit instead of smoking cigarettes, eating doughnuts and drinking coffee. Elaine scoffed. Jack liked Elaine's spunk. She later enrolled in his exercise classes. The planets seemed aligned, serendipitously or not, and so began a lifetime together. True "love bugs" in every sense of the word, Jack and Elaine have been married to each other for more than 50 years, and they have been business and television partners for just as long.

One recent Saturday afternoon, I had a wonderful opportunity to visit with the LaLannes at their sprawling Central Coast home in the hills overlooking Morro Bay. According to the sign posted outside the main house, they call it "Health Acres," a three-acre spread of land they have called home for nearly a quarter of a century. Their property is located down a lonely stretch of dusty road, about two miles inland from Morro Bay.

As the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences prepares for its Gold and Silver Circle inductions at the Hilton San Francisco/Financial

District on October 4<sup>th</sup>, it seemed appropriate for *Off Camera* to feature two inspiring individuals who have indelibly left their mark on Bay Area television. Add the fact that Jack and Elaine LaLanne are also members of the Silver Circle and Gold Circle, both inducted at the same time in 1991 and 2002, respectively.

The original production of *The Jack LaLanne Show* has been off the air for some time now, and Jack will be the first to give a visitor a lesson in longevity. Elaine runs BeFit Enterprises out of their home office. The dynamic duo continue to be popular on the lecture circuit. Through the years, they have collaborated on books about health and fitness; they have produced several DVDs, one of which is called *Forever Young: Exercise At Any Age*.

Then, of course, there was the launch in recent years of the Jack LaLanne "Power Juicer," which was introduced into living rooms around the country through a regularly-seen infomercial. The juicer spawned a book, *50-Plus Years of Healthy Living*, which features more than 100 juicing recipes.

"Age, age, age," Jack says. "What's the difference? I take one day at a time and do the best I can with the equipment I have." Jack will be 94 on Sept. 26.

Jack says he's lived by one credo all of his life: "I have one thing on my mind: helping people to help themselves, lectures, seminars, personal appearances."

"And helping people with infomercials, such as for the juicer," Elaine adds.

"It's the most successful thing that's ever been sold in the history of television. Nobody on television has ever sold as many juicers as we have. Every country in the world with television has my juicer," Jack says proudly.

"It's all about helping people," Jack says. "Doctors want you to have three, four, five raw vegetables every day. People can't do that. They put it in my juicer. 45 seconds later, it's done. It's incredible. You should see the letters we get from people. You've saved my life, some say. It's all about helping people."

Jack didn't start out the way we know him today. A confirmed "junk food junkie" at age 15, he

*continued on page 6*



*continued from page 6*

couldn't get away from sweets. He was a sickly kid. "One night, I prayed to God to help me stop putting these things in my body," he recalled. "The next day, I joined the Berkeley YMCA, went strict vegetarian, and the rest is history." Years later, he would become the godfather of American fitness.

In 1933, Jack opened up his first gym in his East Bay backyard. He had heard that area police officers and firefighters couldn't pass their physical exams. "They were passing out," he says. Less than two months later, every officer and firefighter passed their physical. It was the inspiration that helped him to open up his own gym. He wanted to help everyone.

In 1936, by then a fitness expert in the Bay Area, he opened up his first fitness spa in downtown Oakland. His idea to open a gym was widely criticized. He later invented exercise equipment, including wrist roll machines, the first leg extension machine, the first pulley machines using cables and the first weight selectors.

"People left me like the plague," he recalls. "That Jack LaLanne. That nut, that crackpot. He's a liar, he's a cheat. He's got women working out with the weights, he's got athletes working out with him, he's got old people working out with weights, the old people dying of heart attacks and women look like the men and the athletes, and all muscle bound. You can't believe what I went through with the papers. The *Oakland Tribune*. The *San Francisco Examiner* and *Chronicle*. They all picked it up. They said Jack LaLanne is a liar, he's a cheat, he doesn't know what he's doing."

But, Jack says, if he believed in something, nothing could stop him. Once, he said, he recruited several neighborhood children with weight issues. He also found several skinny kids. Jack went to the parents of all the children, and said that he would, with their permission, help the larger kids to lose some weight. He also promised to work with the skinny kids, too, to put muscle on them. Weeks later, he succeeded. Finally, people were starting to see the benefits of exercise.

Jack continued to run his Oakland gym for many years, eventually closing it when he and Elaine took the TV show from the Bay Area to Los Angeles.

For seven years, from 1951 to 1958, *The Jack LaLanne Show* grew in popularity with each passing year. Originally airing on KGO-TV, it switched briefly to KTVU, then returned to KGO-TV. In 1959, Hollywood came calling, and the show and the LaLannes moved south. The show was syndicated nationally until 1985. During that time, KGO-TV and KTVU took turns airing it, both usually doing so during the morning hours.

"That show took off, boy," Jack recalls, "when celebrities started taking notice and became advocates of exercise and my program. I made believers out of everyone."

But Jack and Elaine agree that Jack was hardly the star of the show.

"'Happy' was the star of the show," Jack says. 'Happy' was the first of four beautiful white German Shepherds, all of whom would grace the show's set, trotting on and off the during tapings, sometimes getting in the way of Jack's exercise routines. Following 'Happy' came 'Smiley', 'Waldo' and 'Chuck'. Once, 'Happy' had puppies, and one of them became destined to appear on the show. Jack held a naming contest, with the entrant with the best name winning an all-expenses paid vacation to Las Vegas. The winning name came from a UCLA student, who submitted 'WALTER' — an acronym for "We All Love To Exercise Regularly."

"Having the dogs on the show was a big part of the show's success as well," Elaine says. "People loved exercising with Jack, but it was also fun to have the dogs running around in the background, too."

But, why the dogs? How did Jack get the idea to put a dog on the show?

"To attract kids," he recalls. "The kids had control of the TV in the morning. And I'd say, "Boys and girls, if you go get mommy and daddy and bring them over to the TV, I'll have Happy do a special trick for you. And I would have him sit up, roll over and do all kinds of stuff. I had to do that to get an audience, boy."

Jack is also best-known for his many "feats of strength" events, which always attracted widespread media coverage and thousands of curious onlookers. Beginning in 1954 at the age of 40, when

*continued on page 11*

# Jack LaLanne - The Godfather of Fitness

*continued from page 7*

he swam the length of the Golden Gate Bridge underwater with 140 pounds of equipment and apparatus, including two oxygen tanks (still a world record), Jack has seemingly done it all. The following year, he swam handcuffed from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman's Wharf. At 42, he set another world record of 1,033 push-ups in 23 minutes on the old *You Asked For It* television show. That was 1956.

"Every event, I'd make more difficult for myself," he says. "It was a challenge for me. I'm not a quitter. But, you gotta work at it. I had to practice for months and months. You gotta believe, boy. You've gotta work your butt off."

Ever the showman but always a gentleman, Jack continued his many feats. In 1974, he swam from Alcatraz to Fisherman's Wharf again, this time handcuffed and shackled while towing a 1,000-pound boat. Still not impressed? How about his 1979 feat near Tokyo, for instance? Matching his age at the time, Jack towed 65 boats filled with 6,500 pounds of wood pulp while handcuffed and shackled. Five years later, at 70 — once again shackled and handcuffed — he towed 70 boats with 70 people in Long Beach Harbor, swimming one and a half miles from a bridge to the Queen Mary.

"You gotta get your name out there," he says. "People forget you."

Humor and a quick quip are never far from Jack's vocabulary, and sometimes, Elaine is his easy foil.

"On my next birthday, I'm going to tow my wife across our bathtub."

Years before **Arnold Schwarzenegger** became a Hollywood superstar and governor of California, he was well-known as a world-class bodybuilder along with a turn as Mr. Olympia. Then Jack and Arnold challenged each other to a contest at Muscle Beach in Santa Monica. "I've known him since he was 19 years old," says Jack. He'd just come over from Austria. I had a little reputation, he had a little reputation. I beat him at chin-ups, push-ups, weights, I beat him at everything. Arnold says, "that Jack LaLanne. I don't know. I was sore for five days, I couldn't lift my arms."

These days, Jack and Elaine have an exercise routine; Jack works out every day. He gets up between 6 and 7 a.m. "I never miss a workout", he says, even when he's traveling. First, he works out in his gym, then he swims in his pool.

Jack and Elaine are very popular on the lecture circuit, and travel extensively throughout the country. Elaine has also been busy as the author of several books about exercise and nutrition.

In their comfortable, spacious home, every inch of wall is adorned with countless awards,



Jack working out with writer **Kevin Wing**

recognitions and honors, for both of them. He was a founding member of the President's Council on Physical Fitness in the early 1960s, under President **John F. Kennedy**. Jack has also received his own "star" on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Jack and Elaine will likely receive additional honors between now and December, when they will travel to Sacramento for Jack's induction into the California Hall of Fame. Actor **Jack Nicholson** will also be among the inductees, by invitation from Gov. Schwarzenegger.

The happy couple says the Bay Area will always have a special place in their hearts. "That's where it all started for us," Jack says.

"We will never forget the Bay Area," Elaine adds.

Any words of advice from the so-called Godfather of Fitness?

"Exercise is king, nutrition's queen. Put them together and you've got a kingdom. I take it a day at a time, and do the best that I can. Life is wonderful. Life is great. Work at it, boy," Jack says. "It all comes down to you. Anything that happens to you, good or bad, you made it happen."

A promotional poster for the BABA 5th Annual Young Journalists Scholarship Luncheon. The poster is dark blue with white and gold text and decorative swirls. At the top, it says "BABA" in large white letters. Below that, it reads "Bay Area Black Journalist Association" and "5TH ANNUAL YOUNG JOURNALISTS SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON". Underneath, it says "Honoring" and lists three names with their photos: Pam Moore, George Harris, and Renel Brooks Moon. At the bottom, it provides the date and time: "October 10, 2008 • 11:30am - 1:30pm" and the location: "Hilton Towers San Francisco • 333 O'Farrell Street". It also includes contact information: "For Information and Tix Contact: Glass House Communications info@glasshousepr.com" and a large "SAVE THE DATE" graphic at the bottom right.