

Derfner hosts 'Essential Workers' exhibit from RiverWalk resident

■ Leonard Nones, a former fashion and pop-culture photographer, has recreated a famous photo series

By ANYA MARKOVITZ

Intern

A new art installation featuring photographer and RiverWalk resident Leonard Nones' portraits of essential workers on the greater RiverSpring campus made its debut last week.

The exhibit is on display at the Derfner Judaica Museum at the Hebrew Home in Riverdale, another senior living community on the RiverSpring campus, and can be visited from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Sunday through Thursday.

The display features portraits of RiverSpring Living's essential workers, from nurses to secretaries to physical therapists. Inspired by Vogue photographer Irving Penn's series "Small Trades," the portraits depict staff members posed with their respective tools and gadgets – an oxygen tank, a doctor's chart, even a therapy dog.

"I thought it would be good for me and good for them," Nones, 94, said. "It's a tribute to them, and something for me to keep busy."

RiverSpring's staff expressed its gratitude for Nones' contribution.

"You've taken your heart and soul and shared it with us," RiverSpring chief executive David Pomeranz said at the exhibit opening. "We really want

EXHIBIT, page A4



ANYA MARKOVITZ

Leonard Nones, 94, had a career in photography spanning more than 40 years. He now lives in RiverWalk, RiverSpring Living's independent living community.

Photo from RiverWalk resident creates new exhibit

EXHIBIT from page A1
thank you for it."

Susan Chevlowe, RiverSpring's chief curator and museum director, worked with Nones to put the exhibition together. Over the course of several days in March, Nones set up a makeshift studio in which he photographed staff across different departments.

"It's been fun to see people's reactions to their portraits," Chevlowe said. "I know that a lot of people felt very seen, and saw how essential they are to healthcare here."

Though Nones loves all his portraits equally — "They're my children," he said — one stands out to him in particular: assistant engineer Nelson Altreche posed with an oxygen tank.

"He didn't really want to be part of this...but he was so happy with the picture," Nones said. "So I felt happy, it made me feel good."

According to Chevlowe, Nones' "Essential Workers" exhibit is the first resident art show she knows of at RiverSpring. She said seeing residents like Nones continue to follow their artistic passions has been a fulfilling experience for her.

"What's really wonderful is people come here in their retirement, but they have done amazing things in the world, in their professional lives," Chevlowe said. "To be able to come here and continue that creativity and expression, that's what's been very gratifying for me to see."

Nones' career has been formidable.

With his photos appearing in magazines such as GQ, Life, and Time, Nones worked in everything from advertising, to fashion, to sports photography. He's shot famous personalities such as tennis champion Jimmy Connors, golf legend Arnold Palmer, and former president Lyndon Johnson.

Nones' daughters, Karen London and Margot Nones, were both in attendance at the installation. They visit often, and love to walk the grounds with their father.

"[The installation] was more emotional than I thought it was going to be," Margot Nones said. "He was so involved with what he was doing when he was working. He hasn't lost any of it, and it's just remarkable. It makes him proud, it makes us all really proud."

Nones worked as a photographer



ANYA MARKOVITZ

Leonard Nones' favorite piece in the exhibit is a photo of RiverSpring employee Nelson Altreche, an assistant engineer who sits posed with an oxygen tank.

for 40 years. He was born in Philadelphia and got his start in working as an apprentice in a commercial studio, where he worked for two years before moving to New York in 1951 to pursue freelance photography.

Within one weekend, he had a job in a photography studio – sweeping up. He was later hired by several

fashion photographers over the years, during which he met his future wife, Sondra.

"Why she married me, I don't know," Nones recalled. "I didn't have any money, and the second fashion photographer [I worked for] fired me, and so I was without a job. She said yes."

Sondra eventually joined Nones working as a stylist in his studio after a career in fashion illustration and, later, art therapy. The pair was married for 65 years until Sondra's death in 2020.

Nones said he was first drawn to photography when he would go with his aunt's husband, who took baby

photos, to photoshoots. As a teen, he built his own darkroom in his parent's basement. Though he regrets not pursuing any formal education in photography, Nones was able to break into the photo world through his hands-on experience.

His career has had no shortage of exciting experiences.

"When you talk to him you realize he's like James Bond," Pomeranz said.

Nones did, in fact, learn to fly a plane after an advertising campaign that had him photographing Canadian Club whiskey out of a plane over Mount Kilimanjaro.

"That was the single most exciting experience in my life, to stand in the doorway of a DC-3 at 20,000 feet with Africa at 6 o'clock," Nones said. "It was simply crazy, because it was such a far-fetched idea, but we got it done."

From adrenaline-filled adventures in Tanzania to portrait photoshoots in Riverdale, Nones is grateful for the role the camera has played in his creative endeavors.

"My whole career gave me an opportunity to express the creativity I felt I had to," Nones said. "I felt a drive to do it. And I was lucky. I did for a living what people do for a hobby."

Today's photography scene is quite different to the world Nones entered in the 1950s, with the first digital cameras emerging in the 1990s. On his trip to Kilimanjaro, Nones shot 18 rolls of film, not knowing which, if any, would come out. He welcomes the change of advancing technology.

"I couldn't have done (Essential Workers) if it hadn't been digital," he said. "I do the editing on my computer, and can mostly sit during the whole thing. If I had to do this all in a darkroom, it would never happen. So, I love digital photography."

Nones stopped working in his 60s after an accident during a shoot in which he broke his neck. Though he's long retired, he loves to pick up the camera when he can, and hopes to produce more projects at RiverSpring in the future.

"Even when he was in the hospital last time, he said 'The TV is crooked. Can you fix it?'," Margot Nones said. "That's the way his eye is. He sees every little detail."

For Leonard Nones, the saying rings true that if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life.

"It was a great 40 years," he said.