

Lesia John - 2020

A longtime community volunteer and advocate for the local cattle industry, Lesia John first became a SLO County Cattlewomen's member in 1976, having been a member in Monterey County since the early 1970s.

"I am incredibly honored, humbled and grateful to be recognized by women who so deeply respect and believe in the generations of ranching and farming in San Luis Obispo County," John said.

Lesia John was born in Yakima, Washington to World War II U.S. Navy veteran Gyle Halverson and music teacher Harriet (Lee) Halverson in 1949. Her father helped start the Culligan Soft Water Service company, so much of Lesia and her three brothers' childhood was spent moving around the western United States with her father's work. She first fell in love with the ranching way of life in 1967 hanging out with her best friend Jackie Carr Hoover at the Carr Ranch in Contra Costa County, California. After graduating from Campolindo High School, she attended Diablo Valley Junior College and was a receptionist part time at the Sun Valley Mall. In 1969, she attended Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo majoring in Child Development. She met her first husband, Kim Wood, who is from a longtime ranching family in the Bryson-Hesperia area of Monterey County.

Lesia John passed along her passion for ranching to her three children, Tania Leanne, Tyler Joshua, and Misty Dawn. Both her daughter Tania and son Tyler Joshua graduated with agriculture degrees from Cal Poly and went on to have careers in horse training, and welding and cattle ranching, respectively. Misty, a Registered Nurse, and her husband Derrick Tartaglia operate their cow-calf operation in Harmony, California, while Derrick also helps manage the cattle operation for Hearst Ranch in San Simeon. Lesia said she is "so proud of her grandchildren Chance Whitman and Reese and Tanna Tartaglia who are all ranch-raised."

Her decades of volunteer service to the San Luis Obispo County Cattlewomen first began in 1988 when she moved to Atascadero. She and Kim started and ran Agri-Wood Feed & Ranch Supply and Longhorn Beef Jerky businesses. After selling Agri-Wood, she worked at Atascadero News, Atascadero Chamber of Commerce with Maggie (Rice) Vandergon, and the Atascadero School District.

In 1992, Lesia was hired by Maynard Potter and Vivian (Saylor) Robertson at the California Mid-State Fair. Lesia was a fixture at the Fair, having assisted Beverley Wood with the Horse Show for many years and managing commercial concession operations for 22 years.

In 1994, she married Derryal John at the Chapel on the Hill in Shandon. Derryal and Lesia were married for 25 years until his passing in January of 2020. Derryal planted and managed several San Luis Obispo County vineyards and was a nominee for Grower of the Year. Lesia is the proud stepmom of Will John, a vineyard owner and manager, and Bridgette John, who is in the food service industry in Las Vegas, and her grandchildren Quinn, Delaney, and Lilli John, who "all have buckles for showing sheep at the California Mid-State Fair!"

Today, Lesia remains active in the local community. She serves as treasurer of the Honor Flight Central Coast California. Her distinguished service to the San Luis Obispo County Cattlewomen has included a number of committee positions and leadership roles, including Special Olympics representative, Pioneer Day Roping Committee, Cowbelle Trailriders, Valentine's Dance, and the Casino Night fundraiser. She has conducted countless beef cooking demonstrations for students at Cal Poly and Atascadero High School. In her spare time, Lesia said she enjoys being "Grammy" and visiting her family in Washington, Oregon, South Dakota and Oklahoma. Lesia has embraced her role advocating for agriculture. "My initial reaction to being named Cattlewoman of the Year was, I don't deserve it, I don't even own a cow," she said. "But the truth is, our SLO County Cattlewomen, the largest organization of its kind in the country, has evolved to encompass so much more than owning a cow. Our membership of diverse, powerful women is committed to protecting and honoring our ranching heritage, while educating the public about the benefits of the beef industry and providing scholarships for our future generations in agriculture."

Since 2003, Lesia has held the distinct role at SLO County Cattlewomen as "Chairman for Sunshine." The position is especially fitting for Lesia. Her fellow members describe her as caring and thoughtful, a person who always looks after the well-being of members. During times of celebration and moments of grief, Lesia John is always there with a comforting phone call or an expression of sympathy. She embodies the best of us, and is a large part of what makes SLO County's ranching community a family