

THE SUNDANCER_{MINI}

Interesting articles about our neighborhood and our neighbors

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A Wonderful Life: Small world, after all

Ana Pacheco | For The New Mexican
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If you've ever wondered why there seems to be less litter near "Adopt a County Road" signs throughout Santa Fe, look to Sheila Millendorf.

When she moved to Santa Fe in 1991, Millendorf took it upon herself to contact the New Mexico Department of Transportation and offer to write a program to clean up the county.

If anyone was qualified for the job, it was Millendorf. In the 1980s, she was the director of the recycling program for the Council on the Environment of New York under the administration of Mayor Ed Koch, who died Friday.

"When I started [in New York], I was given a \$25,000 grant and one part-time assistant. Ten years later, I had a staff of eight and contracts with virtually every corporation in the city," Millendorf said.

In 1986, she was given the Big Apple Award from the city of New York for her efforts in creating recycling awareness and was featured in *Forbes* magazine.

"Back then, no one was aware of the green movement, but I managed to convince companies that they could make money by recycling," she said.

After leaving that job, Millendorf started her own consulting firm related to waste management. She retired in 1991.

Today, the 75-year-old continues to provide her expertise to Santa Fe organizations. In addition to cleaning up county roads, she served on the board of The Santa Fe Opera Guild from 1990-95 and in 1994 was elected president. During that time, she also volunteered at the Museum of International Folk Art.



Sheila Millendorf is shown with a couple of the more than 40 miniature houses she has created in the last 20 years. Courtesy Ana Pacheco -

One of her latest projects is raising money for the Cancer Foundation for New Mexico. For this Saturday's eighth annual Sweetheart Auction at the Santa Fe Community Convention Center, Millendorf created an interactive dollhouse which, along with more than 300 other items, will be auctioned off at the event. The fundraiser will also include a "Dream Vacation Raffle." The lucky winner will win a trip for two to Paris, Machu Picchu, Australia/New Zealand or Maui. Information on the Feb. 9 event is available at www.cffnm.org or by calling 505-955-7931, ext. 1.

Sheila Millendorf, born in Brooklyn in 1937, is one of two daughters of Harry Lowe and Rae Eskenazi. Her grandmother's family members were Sephardic Jews who settled in Turkey.

"My grandmother lived on Essex Street in lower Manhattan, where she made a living as a scribe. Since she spoke Hebrew, Ladino and Turkish, she helped other immigrants read and write letters from and to people back home," Millendorf said.

When Millendorf was 7, her mother entered her in the annual "Most Beautiful Child" contest sponsored by the *Brooklyn Mirror*. She won, and her photo appeared on the front page of the newspaper in 1944.

According to Millendorf, that was one of the high points in an otherwise dismal childhood.

"I grew up in Williamsburg and we were poor. My mother was a homemaker and my father drove a cab. When I graduated from Washington Irving High School, I won a two-year scholarship to attend Cooper Union School of Art, but I never went because I had to go to work to help my parents," she said.

Her first job was as a showroom model in Manhattan's fashion district, followed by secretarial work.

Although she never had the opportunity to attend Cooper Union, she got a job drawing apparel in the garment district. Later, she became fashion coordinator for Gimbels department store and also organized their special events.

In 1975, she married Stuart Millendorf. It was a second marriage for both, and they have two children, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

When Millendorf retired, she decided to take up the art of creating miniature houses.

"I made my first dollhouse from a kit for my daughter when she was little. She wanted the windows to open and close, but that's not how the kit was made, so I created new windows that worked.

"When I moved to Santa Fe, I went to Furrow Building Materials and saw a dollhouse kit on sale. So, I bought it. After that, I was hooked. I love translating architectural design into miniature fantasy themes and places around the world," Millendorf said.

In the past 20 years, Millendorf has created more than 40 miniature houses — many with electricity — from scratch, including the furniture. Her work has been featured three times in *Miniature Collector* magazine.

With no formal training in the field, Millendorf said, "I've always had the ability but not the training. I don't take credit for my art. I was given a gift."

Ana Pacheco's weekly tribute to our community elders appears every Sunday. She can be reached at 474-2800.