Nonprofit honors 9 who exemplify the meaning of being selfless

By Palo Alto Weekly staff

This year's Avenidas Life Times of Achievement honorees have gone beyond the call of duty to create positive changes in their communities by donating countless hours of hands-on service to local organizations and programs aimed at improving education, health care, the environment and services for seniors, among other areas.

The recipients of the annual award are Fran Codispoti, Besty Gifford, Bill and Gay Krause, Armand and Eliane Neukermans, Alma and Jim Phillips and Steve Player.

The honorees were announced at an evening reception on Thursday at Avenidas@450 Bryant in Palo Alto. They will be formally celebrated at an afternoon garden party on May 17, the main annual fundraiser for Avenidas, a Palo Alto-based nonprofit organization that offers tools for positive aging to seniors and their families on the Midpeninsula.

"The treasure trove of outstanding seniors who have made so many contributions to our community makes our honor selection process very challenging, and this year was no exception," Avenidas President and CEO Amy Andonian stated in a press release. "Each individual's story is so interesting and rich and their accomplishments give us all quite a high standard to shoot for in our own lives."

Armand and Eliane Neukermans actively support social entrepreneurial and environmental efforts. The Portola Valley couple initiated the Jai-purKnee project at Stanford University to encourage students to design a low-cost prosthetic knee for the Jaipur-Foot Organization. The project resulted in the creation of a $20 knee prosthesis that has been manufactured for more than 18,000 amputees in clinics across India.

Armand, a trained engineer and scientist, was active in the tech industry for more than 50 years and was nominated "Silicon Valley Inventor of the Year" in 2006. Since his retirement, he has served on the boards of several local organizations.

Bill has spent the past 25 years mentoring business entrepreneurs since retiring from a long tech career during which he co-founded networking pioneer company 3Com, which introduced Ethernet to the world. He has served on numerous public and private boards, including Communication, Network and Smartcard. He also is a senior advisor to investment firm Carlyle Group and a board partner at venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz. The Citadel, a military college in South Carolina, named him "Alumnus of the Year" in 2013 for his support of the college's leadership development curriculum; Junior Achievement-Silicon Valley inducted him into its Business Hall of Fame; and he was elected as chairman of the American Electronics Association (now known as AeA).

Gay has served as the executive director of the Krause Center since its opening in 1999 after the president of Foothill College asked her to work on a startup project aimed at providing professional development for K-12 educators. Before launching the center, Gay worked in the Mountain View Whisman School District as a teacher, counselor and principal of Graham Middle and Landels Elementary schools. Currently, she serves on six nonprofit boards for the YMCA of Silicon Valley; the Foothill-De Anza Foundation; Children Now; Challenge Team of Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills; the Palo Alto Medical Foundation; and the Los Altos Chamber of Commerce.

Alma and Jim Phillips are active community volunteers. Collectively, the Palo Alto couple has volunteered for more than a dozen local organizations aimed at improving everything from the environment to social inequality.

Alma grew up on a farm in rural Texas and worked as a teacher before moving to California. Once on the west coast, she shifted her passion for working with children in the classroom to volunteering with nonprofits aimed at educating children. She has worked with Environmental Volunteers and Deer Hollow Farm, as well as the League of Women Voters and Midpeninsula Citizens for Fair Housing (which has since merged with the Eden Council for Hope and Opportunity).

Jim took his volunteer work after a long career in technology in which he worked in systems development with General Electric, the Ling-Temco-Vought Corporation and Lockheed Martin.

He has served as chair of the boards of the Palo Alto Family YMCA board and Habitat for Humanity's local chapter, and has sat on the boards of the YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula, Palo Alto Community Child Care, Foundation for a College Education, YWCA of the Mid-Peninsula Donor Advised Fund, One Dollar for Life and the Kiwanis Club of Palo Alto.

Steve Player, a resident of Palo Alto, spent much of his time assisting startup nonprofits while he was a young lawyer after graduating from Stanford University and University of California, Hastings College of the Law. Player was among those who helped form the Senior Coordinating Council of Palo Alto, which later became Avenidas. After practicing law, he joined Stanford University as a planned giving officer. He has maintained a close association with Stanford as a volunteer where he has served on various boards over the years, including the Buck/Cardinal Club and the Stanford Historical Society.

Player has been the recipient of several community awards, including the Stanford Associates Award, the Tall Tree Award from the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce and Red Triangle Award from the YMCA.

Tickets for the May 17 Garden Party are $85 and available online at avenidas.org or by calling 650-289-5445.