

AUGUST 15, 2012
VOLUME 19
NUMBER 33

www.explorernews.com

EXPLORER

The Voice of Marana, Oro Valley and Northwest Tucson

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Water-drop art



Randy Metcalf/The Explorer

One of the subjects Irving Olson likes to photograph is water droplets, which he does in the kitchen of his home.

CHRIS FLORA
The Explorer

For Splendido resident Irving Olson, work was just never that much fun. He'd rather have been indulging in his hobbies, which in the passing years have become increasingly diverse and admittedly odd.

The young-hearted, energetic, comedic, and very mobile 98-year-old said he knew from an early age work just wasn't his thing.

"When I was 10 years old, I

used to be stupid like other 10-year-old kids," he joked. "I figured, what I'm going to do is work until I'm 50, and I'll retire, and not work until 100."

Oddly enough, Olson's prediction has been accurate so far. On his 50th birthday, he walked out on his self-owned radio parts/repair company after having sold it to Teledyne Technologies for a handsome price.

Now in his 49th year of retirement, Olson has had ample time to

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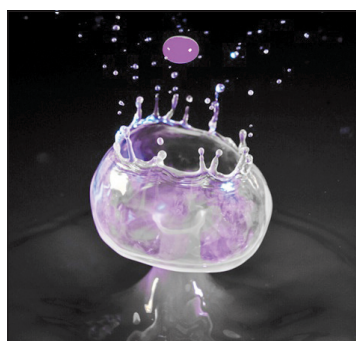


Photo courtesy of Irving Olson

Irving Olson's photo "Goblet" was created with two drops of water.



Randy Metcalf/The Explorer

Irving Olson makes the required preparations in his kitchen to photograph water droplets.

Irving: Keeping busy in retirement

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master his hobbies, the most recent of which includes photographing water droplets.

Sound odd? Even Olson thinks so his new hobby is a bit tedious.

"I wish I could stop, but I'm in too deep now," he said as he set up a demonstration.

Olson's kitchen appears to be a miniature laboratory setup, with all the equipment necessary to photograph dyed water droplets colliding to the thousandth of a second. The end result is a collage of color that appears to be a form of abstract art. Olson said only one in 500 photos taken is worth keeping.

"Most of them look like nothing," he admitted.

Still, of the thousands of photographs taken, Olson has printed a number of 24x30 prints with his own commercial Epson printer—that he considers worthy. Those photos are ones that appear to have recognizable shape, often of a human or object.

When asked why he chose the size print he did, Olson stated the obvious.

"You can see them better," he said. "Someone once told me if you can't make them good, make them big."

Regardless of his good-humored and modest answer, the prints are quite impressive, particularly considering Olson has only been in the practice of photographing water droplets since January. His experience in photography since he was nine-years-old has no doubt aided his efforts. Olson said

he plans to sell the photos at a later date for an undisclosed price.

The hobby is one of many that keep him busy, and for Olson, keeping busy is therapeutic. Last October, Ruth, Olson's wife of 71 years, passed away.

"It was the biggest catastrophe of my whole life," he said.

The two met during a Bingo game, in which Olson was in charge of drawing the numbers. Unbeknownst to her at the time, Olson gave his wife-to-be the winning numbers quite often, and quite intentionally.

"I won her in a Bingo game," he said. "She was the smartest and greatest person in the world. She was good looking and smart, and that's a hell of a combination. She had red hair. She was also ambidextrous. She could watch television, read a book, and knit at the same time. I think she had three brains. I wish I would've had one good one. The reason for my success: she told me what to do, and I listened. She was smarter than I was. The trouble is, there are a lot of dummies that try to tell you what to do, and that's what you ought to be afraid of."

The two traveled to 150 countries in retirement, and like Olson, Ruth was an avid photographer and shared much of Olson's humor, which regardless of his age, he has yet to lose.

In keeping his mind off the negatives, no pun intended, Olson also frequents some other strange, yet humorous hobbies, like photographing unsuspecting people eating.

"The hobby developed when you go to a restaurant, and you sit like an idiot twiddling your thumbs while you're waiting for food," he explained. "So, you have your camera on your table, and you shoot all the other idiots in the room."

He gave a synopsis of each of the photographs as he held the large-scale prints up.

"This one is a demonstration that you can put a big piece of something in your mouth," he said. "This guy is showing you how to eat a potato- you suck it in. This girl thinks if you eat spaghetti one strand at a time, you'll get thin."

Amidst his laughter, Olson disclaimed, "It's not my fault, I'm just the messenger."

When he isn't taking odd photographs, Olson sometimes plays the card game Gin Rummy with other Splendido residents, though after a confession, he might find his game a bit lonelier.

"I'm not a good player, but I cheat a little bit sometimes," he said. "And if my friends don't play with me anymore, I'll find another sucker."

The 12-year Tucson resident, and six-year Splendido resident certainly seems to be enjoying retirement to the fullest.

As the interview drew to a close, Olson offered to show staff a picture of his "pride and joy," an offer which was readily accepted.

Of course, initial expectations were quickly dismissed as the photograph was quite literally of Pride and Joy- the laundry detergents.