



• **Neighborhood Organization** •

NOMINATION OF JEANIE CUNNINGHAM FOR MEMBER RECOGNITION

AT NOVEMBER 14, 2015 GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Submitted to Advisory Board November 3, 2015 by Eric Chiel

I nominate Navajo Circle resident Jeanie Cunningham as the next honoree in the Twin Palms Neighborhood Organization's member recognition program. I do so acknowledging her professional accomplishments, as well as her long-standing commitment to humanitarian causes.

Early Life

Born in Los Angeles in September 1956 as "Susan Swift," Jeanie's mother was unable to care for her and immediately put up her daughter for adoption. At the age of three weeks, Susan was adopted into a military family and was renamed "Jean Akin Cunningham."

In 1973, Jeanie's adoptive mother passed away and her adoptive father soon remarried. Her stepmother made it clear that Jeanie was unwelcome in her home, and at age 17, feeling alone and homeless, Jeanie began her independent life.

Here's what she made of herself...

Professional Accomplishments

Though she took no music lessons and never learned to read or write music, Jeanie taught herself to play the ukulele, then guitar, then piano, as well as other instruments. She composed her first song at age 8, strumming a homemade guitar made of cardboard and rubber-bands. When she got older, she joined an all-girl band called "The Cherries" that eventually toured internationally.

While still in school, Jeanie skipped classes one day in favor of seeing Tina Turner in concert. Entranced by Tina's style, Jeanie not only talked her way into meeting her, but presented Ms. Turner with a song she had written. Tina performed *I Can Take a Little Bit of Pain* on *The Tonight Show*—earning Jeanie professional songwriting credentials.

Jeanie went on to establish her own recording studio in Los Angeles—becoming the first woman to build her own such facility and produce the work of others from it.

Her reputation growing, in the 1980s and 90s, Jeanie was anonymously commissioned by NASA to write a number of musical wake-up broadcasts to Space Shuttle astronauts from Mission Control. She wrote so many, she was dubbed "The Most Flown Unknown."

Between road tours as a guitarist with Lionel Richie's band, and as an opening act for David Crosby, Jeanie continued to hone her skills as a songwriter, including pieces for high-profile international corporations including Mitsubishi, Epson, Toshiba, Microsoft, Chevron, Yamaha, and Tupperware.

In all, Jeanie has released seven albums and her songs have topped the charts in Europe and US.

In 2002, Jeanie was commissioned to write, record, and perform a tribute to the United States in commemoration of 9/11 for the country of Aruba. The song, entitled *We Will Remember*, has since been used to commemorate Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Pearl Harbor Day as well as 9/11, having become a 21st-century anthem.

Jeanie also produced and starred in *The Composers' Corner*, a television series that explored the world of music creation through interviews with its most important contributors.

In 2007, and after a six-year effort, Jeanie completed 24 compositions for her first musical, *Dula*, which is a detailed and dramatic history of the folk legend, Tom Dooley, and how an innocent man was hung for a crime he did not commit in the years immediately following the Civil War. *Dula* received a workshop reading at Northwestern University in July 2012, and saw its first full production just last month in Dallas/Fort Worth.

In 2010, Jeanie was selected to teach music and English workshops to the students of Hallingstad School in Norway. That same year, The California Writers Coalition presented the professional tribute, *Jeanie Cunningham, Poet & Chanteuse: A Cabaret in Lyrical Writing*.

Jeanie has performed at the John Anson Ford Theatre for Los Angeles *WomensFest*, as well as festival venues in Italy and Spain.

Known for her leadership in the struggle for gay rights Jeanie released the album, *Come As You Are ... To The Father* for free on the internet in 2000, making her the first recording artist to ever release an entire album—including graphics and karaoke versions—at no cost to the entire internet.

To help shuttle herself between clients, gigs and honors, Jeanie is licensed pilot who flies a Piper Cherokee, and has logged time at the controls of two- and three-blade military helicopters.

Humanitarian Accomplishments and Recognition

Jeanie life is not all about work. Her humanitarian efforts have also received note.

A lifelong animal lover, Jeanie has been rescuing dogs since she was a child. So, it was only natural that this passion would combine with her writing, composing, and performing talents to create a parable about friendship and life's lessons called *Los Diggities*. It's a story told in print and music of three rescued dogs who become best friends and share life lessons with each other and young readers. *Los Diggities* is currently available on Amazon and through iTunes and iBooks.

Jeanie was featured in a solo acoustic performance in Los Angeles benefiting AIDS research and AIDS patients, and performed for "Iraq Veterans Against The War" in Hollywood. She's been a guest speaker at a songwriting conference in North Hollywood, performed for the "Women In Theatre Red Carpet Awards Show" in Burbank, and was a panel member for the "Women in Music" conference at the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles.

In 2010, Jeanie was selected to teach music at her *alma matter*, The American School in Lugarno, Switzerland—where she was honored as a "Distinguished Alumna." Jeanie was also invited to participate in Østlandske Lærerstevne—a teaching conference designed to identify best practices, held annually in Oslo, Norway.

In 2013, Jeanie affiliated with The Steinway Society and created a class for underserved fourth- and fifth-graders in Indio to learn to play ukuleles and present their skills at a year-end concert.

In recognition of Jeanie's personal and professional accomplishments, and her sustained commitment to humanitarian efforts, I'm please to submit her name for consideration in the TPNO member recognition program.