

N. Nevada woman retiring as Dodgers organist

By Beth Harris, AP

Nancy Bea Hefley, whose organ has provided the musical backdrop to the action on the field for the Los Angeles Dodgers for 28 years, said Friday she will retire at season's end.

Hefley announced her decision before the three-time NL West champions hosted San Diego in their final regular-season series. The 79-year-old organist has been playing at Dodger Stadium since taking over from Helen Dell in 1988. She has become as much a fan favorite as Hall of Fame broadcaster Vin Scully and retired manager Tom Lasorda, who was at the helm when the Dodgers won their last World Series title in 1988, her first season.

She was honored on the field, receiving a Dodgers jersey and a bouquet of flowers from retired Dodgers pitching great Orel Hershiser, who starred on the '88 team. Manager Don Mattingly chatted with Hefley, who was surrounded by 15 family members.

"I told Mattingly, 'I came in with a World Series and I want to go out with one,'" she said, smiling.

She commutes to each homestand from her home in Silver Springs, near Dayton, while renting a second home locally. She is accompanied by her husband, Bill, whom she met while playing the organ at church.

"I have had a wonderful time playing for the Dodgers and their fans," she said. "My husband and I felt that this was the right time to settle down in our home in Silver Springs and eliminate all the travel. The Dodgers have told me I can come back and make guest appearances and I greatly appreciate this

gesture. I hope to get back to Dodger Stadium on occasion.”

Hefley doesn't plan her songs, instead taking cues from what's happening on the field during games. During Hershisier's stellar 1988 season, which included the NL Cy Young Award and World Series MVP honors, Hefley played “Master of the House” from “Les Miserables” for him.

While playing mostly traditional songs, she has stayed current with her own Twitter and Facebook accounts. However, Hefley's playing time has been diminished in recent years in favor of hip hop and rock music curated by an in-house DJ and stadium hosts. In June she posted on her Facebook page that she no longer “fit in” and would not return next year. That created a buzz on social media and the team suddenly offered her a lifetime contract.

Hefley said Friday that this was the first season she finally felt it was time to leave her organ which is located in the stadium press box. She said she's happy with her decision and looking forward to spending time at home.

Hefley, who grew up in Los Angeles, began playing the piano at age 4, and at 13 she talked her teacher into showing her the basics of the organ. She has played at county fairs and shows in Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe.

In the mid-'80s, Hefley filled in for a friend as the organist at a California Angels game. When Dell retired as Dodgers organist after the 1987 season, Hefley auditioned at an exhibition game and got the job.

In August, Scully said he expects 2016 to be his last season calling games for the team that he's been with for a record 66 years. He turns 88 in November. Lasorda, who is 88, serves as special adviser to team chairman Mark Walter.