

# A heartfelt mission:

## THE INTERNATIONAL SOUNDEX REUNION REGISTRY

by Vicky Hinshaw

Tony Vilardi is a man with a mission. As the head of the *International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR)*, the largest and oldest registry for matching persons separated — by adoption or any other reason — Vilardi personally savors his successes. “Everyone’s heritage is part of their birthright,” he says.

Whatever the cause of separation, the ISRR cross-references personal information in the hope of reuniting loved ones. Anyone who is searching may participate. The ISRR also receives referrals from other search organizations and state agencies. All information gathered is confidential.

*Soundex* in the title emphasizes the importance of phonetic spelling and filing. Many times the spelling of a name is different than its sound. “We try matching the name pronunciation first, before trying to find exact duplicates on the basis of spelling,” Vilardi explains.

“Most of the time we have no names, so we go with what we have — the location, hospital and time of birth to the minute. With 5 million adoptees in the US, there are often hundreds of possible matches for any one individual,” says Vilardi.

“Medically, it’s especially important to find matches when inherited diseases are involved,” he says. Information sharing about genetically transmitted conditions may be crucial for individuals. ISRR’s Medic Alert System is available to help adult adoptees and adoptive parents of minor children.

In the past, state adoption laws emphasized confidentiality over any other consideration. Once a child was legally adopted, the records were sealed. There was no way for children and birthparents to find each other. Many birthparents wonder if their child is safe and happy. A regis-



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tration with the ISRR lets birthparents determine if a child is seeking them.

Vilardi emphasizes the voluntary nature of the service — no one participates without consent. Registry with the ISRR implies legal consent for contacting parties to a match. When a match is found, appropriate parties are notified by phone. Details of contacts are left to the individuals. If assistance is desired, ISRR’s Post-Match Consultant Service will make connections with professional counselors.

Retired from a defense department career, Vilardi devotes full-time effort to ISRR and bringing families together. It’s important to Vilardi to continue the work of his late wife, Emma May, who began the Soundex Registry in 1975.

“Emma May was a genealogist and true humanitarian,” Vilardi

says fondly. The daughter of an adoptee who was refused information about her birthparents, Emma May helped other searchers who had had bureaucratic doors slammed in their faces.

By creating the ISRR, Emma May established a mutual consent registry to serve as a clearing house for those searching for parents, children or siblings. The ISRR became a new avenue to overcome the lack of freely flowing information. Now, the ISRR keeps records on thousands of people pursuing their past and future.

One obstacle that troubles Vilardi is the need for registrants to constantly update files with

new addresses and information. “It’s a shame when we find a match after 15 years, but the original records weren’t updated and contact can’t be made,” Vilardi laments.

When matches are found using the ISRR, Vilardi considers the feelings of all concerned. Some adoptive parents are fearful of having their children seek birthparents. “But they shouldn’t be,” he says. “It’s a service of hope, helping people who are reaching out for each other.”

A nonprofit organization, the ISRR is supported by tax-deductible donations. Registration and assistance services are free.

Tony Vilardi’s reward comes via the cards of thanks and photos from those who benefit from the ISRR. His mission is in his heart.

For more information or to make a donation, contact Tony S. Vilardi, International Soundex Reunion Registry, PO Box 2312, Carson City NV 89702; 702-882-7755 (during regular business hours, Pacific Time) ❖

### NEW ISRR FORMS AVAILABLE

New International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR) forms are available. According to Tony Vilardi of ISRR, the new forms are less confusing than earlier documents. ISRR services are complimentary, but donations are welcome. Obtain copies of the new forms from: International Soundex Reunion Registry, PO Box 2312, Carson City NV 89702-2312.

### About the author

Vicky Hinshaw is a freelance writer who dabbles in fiction, travel writing and the arts. She works as a fundraiser for a major midwestern art museum. If she recovers sufficiently from her recent high school class reunion, she may share her experiences in a future issue of *Reunions* magazine.