

# || well defined ||

## Rancho La Puerta's Deborah Szekely Shares Her Thoughts on Life and Longevity As She Prepares To Celebrate Her 100th Birthday

👤 Julie Keller Callaghan

April 5, 2022



*Deborah Szekely, the godmother of wellness*

Deborah Szekely, co-founder of [Rancho La Puerta](#) and a spa luminary who is often hailed as the “godmother of wellness,” will be celebrating her centennial birthday on May 3.

A revolutionary figure in the world of health and wellness, Szekely was a visionary from the ripe age of 18—co-creating Rancho La Puerta, the world's very first fitness and spa resort in North America in 1940. What started as a summer health camp in primitive conditions developed into a secluded, joyous wellness haven, with Szekely at the helm, embracing her role from chief cook to general manager to activities director. More than the guiding principles of the resort experience, which ranged from healthy cuisine, body movement, restful sleep, and moments to bask in the sunshine, Szekely's enduring gratitude, genuine friendships, and deep compassion for every guest is what has kept travelers returning year after year, transcending generations and making The Ranch an abiding tradition for the course of more than 80 years.

Today, thanks to Szekely, Rancho La Puerta is a thriving, internationally acclaimed wellness destination. It is set on a sprawling 4,000 acres of land among the hills of Tecate and welcomes guests week after week for regenerative and transformative stays, with more than 80 fitness classes, a selection of insightful lectures and speaker series, a spa with cutting-edge treatments, organic gardens, cooking school and more.

As Szekely approaches her centennial year around the sun, here are a few incredible insights:

### **What are some life tips you'd like to share?**

First, do good! If you're hurting people, you're hurting yourself. It's a law of nature. We're like plants; water us, and we thrive. Second, surround yourself with people smarter than you. That's where I got my education. Some of my friends today are still my role models and teachers. Third, cultivate a few best friends. Support one another. A true friend is one you can call in the middle of the night, say “I need help,” and they will be at your side in minutes. True friendship involves loyalty. The friend becomes family...perhaps more than your own relatives.

### **What is the secret to your longevity and good health?**

I don't know. I can say probably, and this is probably—I've done the right things when it comes to food, sleep, and exercise. But most important in my life, although I've experienced uncertain and stressful times, I've been protected by my Pollyanna attitude. I just know things will work out, and they usually do.

**What is the most amazing thing you have seen in your lifetime?**

Again, I must say that there has been more than one. Every day after 100 is amazing. Of course, there have been more specific examples. My husband was burned terribly and not expected to recover, but he did. On a happier note, I shook the hand of Eleanor Roosevelt, a great lady I could not have admired more. For sheer beauty, it was seeing the forest in Mexico where millions of Monarch butterflies from North America spend the winter.

**Do you still have any life goals? If so, what?**

I'm concerned about climate change's effect on Tecate in Baja California, and I'm euphoric over our plan to launch a "green umbrella" tree-planting campaign there. Instead of a bench or a plaque or a wrapped gift for my 100th birthday on May 3 this year, I desire only trees. It's a gift that has no end in sight, for it will grow and grow, and cool Tecate for many years to come.