

palm springs

Foundation to honor 'the Don' of architecture

Wexler Weekend puts spotlight on icon of mid-century modernism

BY MARCEL HONORÉ

The Desert Sun

With his signature "folded-plate" roofs, steel-framed homes and floor-to-ceiling windows, Donald Wexler helped transform Palm Springs into a mid-century modern mecca — attracting scores of design buffs each year.

Later this month, the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation will honor the famed architect with Wexler Weekend, a one-time series of events to mark Wexler's 84th birthday and reflect on the Palm Springs resident's legacy.

The Jan. 22-24 event will include a film screening of "Journeyman Architect: The Life and Work of Donald Wexler" at Camelot Theatres and tours of Wexler-designed properties.

Wexler, a South Dakota native, began his architecture career in Palm Springs in 1952 after serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, he said.

"I didn't really know what I wanted to be" after leaving the Navy, Wexler said Thursday. "I wasn't looking for a legacy."

However, after a University of Minnesota aptitude test pointed him toward architecture and with more than five decades designing valley buildings, Wexler often is cited as one of Palm Springs' most important architects,

Please see **WEXLER, B4**



JAY CALDERON THE DESERT SUN

Architect Donald Wexler discusses some of his Coachella Valley buildings in front of a downtown Palm Springs storefront that is being used to promote the upcoming Wexler Weekend next month.

WEXLER: Event salutes architect

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along with others like Albert Frey, E. Stewart Williams, Richard Harrison and John Porter Clark.

"He has such a vast quantity of work," Palm Springs Preservation Foundation President Ron Marshall said Thursday.

Wexler estimated Thursday he's designed between 50 and 100 buildings across the Coachella Valley, including the one that greets most air travelers to the region — the Palm Springs International Airport terminal.

"What's more fundamental than coming to Palm Springs

and seeing the airport?" Marshall said. "It's the front door to the city" and "creates an expectation" for the type of architecture valley visitors will see.

Among Wexler's other well-known work is the cluster of seven steel development houses on Molino Road, Sunny View Drive and Simms Road in the north end of Palm Springs.

"Best thing about those steel houses, the whole area was undesirable" until recently, Wexler said. But new owners came in about a decade ago, renovated the houses, and "the neighborhood changed," he said.

Marshall said Wexler designed steel-framed homes that were stylish and easy to build at the same time.

Wexler said he was humbled by the upcoming weekend in his honor. "I'm amazed at all the things they're doing," he said Thursday, admiring posters for the event in a vacant storefront downtown. "It's very flattering."

The weekend will benefit the Palm Springs High School Jazz Band, according to the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation Web site. For ticket prices to individual events and more information, visit www.pspreservationfoundation.org.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 2010

INTODAY'S PAPER Mid-century master

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is set to honor famed mid-century modern architect Donald Wexler with a "Wexler Weekend" birthday celebration. **B1**

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5 Famed architect to be honored this month

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