

Celebrating WEXLER

BY RICHARD "KIP" SERAFIN

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation celebrated a three-day "Wexler Weekend" on January 22-24, 2010 educating over a thousand people about the work of desert architect Donald Wexler. The weekend coincided with the release of a scholarly 60-page tribute journal entitled *Donald Wexler: Architect* published by the foundation.

Wexler Weekend was supported by 27 local and national partners, including the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The weekend included seven events and celebrated Don Wexler's 84th birthday. More than 1,125 people representing 15 states and Canada attended the event. More significantly, 80% of house tour-goers came from outside of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley highlighting the growing importance of architectural tourism to Palm Springs.

More than 200 of Wexler's buildings contribute to the architectural significance of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. Some of Wexler's more significant achievements include the Steel Development Homes, the Spa Bathhouse (a joint-venture with architect William Cody), the Canyon Country Club Clubhouse, the Merrill-Lynch Building, the Desert Water Agency, the Palm Springs International Airport, the Larson



PALM SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. By Glenn Wexler. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Gary & Don Wexler with author Patrick McGrew; Don Wexler with sons, Gary & Brian.

Justice Center, El Rancho Vista Estates, Royal Hawaiian Estates (which recently became Palm Springs' first residential historic district), numerous schools and many celebrity homes (including the stunning Dinah Shore and Leff/Florsheim Houses).

The weekend kicked-off on Friday with an evening pre-party attended by the Wexler family and event sponsors. The pre-party was followed by a showing of the film *Journeyman Architect: The Life and Work of Donald Wexler*—a 67-minute movie produced by Design Onscreen. The film was then followed by a brief



City Council member Ginny Foat reading proclamation honoring Donald Wexler; Photos courtesy of Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

Question and Answer session with Wexler tribute journal author Patrick McGrew and architect Doug Hudson.

Saturday began with a Champagne Jazz Brunch at Leon's Bar & Grill, Indian Canyons Golf Resort, a city proclamation and entertainment provided by the Palm Springs High School Jazz Band with vocals by Don Wexler's granddaughter, Marilynn. The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation donated \$1,000 to the PSHS Jazz Band in honor of the architect's 84th birthday.

The Saturday House Tour included 14 Wexler-designed properties. Highlights included Wexler tract homes in

El Rancho Vista Estates, the architect's original Palm Springs home, the Krizman Residence, the Kirk Douglas and Dinah Shore Houses.

A Saturday evening cocktail fundraiser was held at the recently restored Leff/Florsheim House (1957). In 2004, the home was taken down to the slab and received a full restoration intended to recreate and honor Don Wexler's original vision. The original 1957 blueprints were used as a guide to maintain the integrity of the original design while incorporating modern day conveniences and upgrades. A silent auction included unpublished photographs by architectural photographers Julius Shulman and Juergen Nogai. Also included was a gorgeous photograph of the Palm Springs International Airport by Glen Wexler and a beautiful architectural watercolor by artist Thomas W. Schaller.

Sunday began with "Steel Some Time" at the Wexler Steel Development Houses, noted for their folded plate roofs, steel frames and floor-to-ceiling windows.

The weekend ended with the release and book-signing of *Donald Wexler: Architect* by author Patrick McGrew. This is the third in a series of Palm Springs Preservation Foundation monographs celebrating modernist desert architects. ■

Richard "Kip" Serafin is the Principal of Richard Allen Associates and serves on the Board of Directors for the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

The mission of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is "to educate and promote public awareness of the importance of preserving the historic resources and architecture of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley area." PSPF offers educational lectures, produces a variety of publications, issues preservation alerts, conducts architectural tours, hosts preservation events and gives grants to worth preservation projects.

For additional information and free membership, visit PSPF at www.pspreservationfoundation.org.