

Across the valley

palm springs



COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

The Stephens House was designated a Class 1 historic site by the Palm Springs City Council last month. It will be publicly unveiled for the first time in 50 years on Saturday.

Family amazed former home is historic site

BY MARIECAR MENDOZA
The Desert Sun

Hidden behind bushes and trees sits a flat-roofed, mid-century "modernist gem."

But when Jim Stephens lived there off Morongo Road, it was simply the home his parents helped build. He never knew it would ever become one of Palm Springs' historic sites.

"I knew it was always unusual," the 56-year-old Stephens said, laughing. "It definitely didn't look like the other houses in the neighborhood."

Now, his family's home will be available for public viewing for the first time in 50 years during an open house event today hosted by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

The Stephens House was built in 1951 by the firm Clark & Frey — mid-century modernist architects John Porter Clark and Albert Frey — for Dr. Hugh E. Stephens, who's known as the first medical doctor to maintain a year-round practice in Palm Springs, according to foundation officials.

"We saw the name Clark & Frey on the plans ... so we knew we had something special here," said Bob Metcalf, who bought the house with his partner Dave Skousen in 2004.

The single-story, three-bedroom home has features typical of the modernist style with its expansive use of glass and masonry blocks, and is credited with being an important role in the local mid-century modern architecture movement, said Patrick McGrew, the local architect who wrote the historic site nomination for the property.

The Stephens House par-

If you go ...

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is scheduled to host a public viewing of The Stephens House from 1 to 3 p.m. today.

The home, at 645 Morongo Road, was designed in 1949 by the firm of John Porter Clark and Albert Frey and completed in 1951.

The home was built for Dr. Hugh E. Stephens, one of the desert's earliest physicians, and is considered an important element of the historic trend that helped place Palm Springs at the center of mid-century modern architecture movement, according to the foundation.

The "modernist gem" was designated a Class 1 historic site by the Palm Springs City Council on Nov. 3.

Tickets to the event cost \$35. Proceeds benefit the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

Appetizers and refreshments will be available. Visit pspreservationfoundation.org for more information.

ticularly earned national prominence after appearing in the September 1955 issue of "House Beautiful."

The magazine used The Stephens House to introduce the idea of the family room to post-war America, featuring pictorials of a modern kitchen with the era's latest appliances and storage solutions designed by Dr. Stephens' wife, Mary.

"It was a really functional house for a family," said the Stephens' granddaughter, Justine McLaughlin, 48. "It was really state-of-the-art at that time."

Jim Stephens, who now lives in Rancho Mirage and owns Record Alley at Westfield Palm Desert, said while he was just a year old when the "House

More online

To see some of the features of the Stephens House, a mid-century modern house in Palm Springs, visit mydesert.com/Video.

"Beautiful" shoot was orchestrated at his family home, he does remember that the family room was the focal point of the house. He said his fondest holiday memories happened in that room.

"It didn't really hit me until now how big of a deal it was to live in that house," Jim Stephens said. "But we loved that house."

Gary Johns, a Palm Springs Realtor and member of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, said he can understand why.

"When the house came to view, I knew," Johns said of his first visit to the home. "It really did come as a big 'aha' moment."

Johns and other foundation members hope during today's open house that other residents will appreciate the unique property, too.

"The town has something like 50 protected buildings that no one knows about so the more we can educate people about these wonderful houses, it's all to the good of Palm Springs," McGrew said. "We pride ourselves on architectural history and we just scratched the surface."

For Dr. Stephens' descendants, it's just an honor to be able to finally share the home with the rest of the city.

"To know that architecturally it means a lot to the history of Palm Springs, is amazing," McLaughlin said. "This is an incredible house and it warms me to know that it will be there for generations."