

VALLEY VOICE

Tearing down historic buildings sends a bad message to students

The demolition of the Palm Springs High School Administration building is imminent. With the new school year beginning on Sept. 5, it is certain the building will be gone by then.

A valiant attempt to save the building from demolition has proven fruitless. Countless architects, museum curators, university professors, architectural historians and a legion of concerned citizens have petitioned the Palm Springs Unified School District board of education to spare the wrecking ball.

Even the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians has denounced the demolition. The school board has remained resolute. The building will go. It will be the first willful demolition, in recent memory, of a Palm Springs midcentury modern building by a noted architect, Donald Wexler a fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

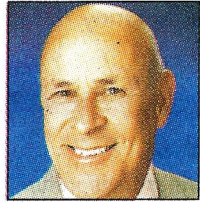
The demolition of this building will have long-lasting repercussions on the community — mostly for the students it benefits. The demolition paves the way for a new performing arts center, intended to be a specific enhancement to the band program.

Long after many of the students have forgotten how to play their musical instrument, they will remember the lessons they learned from this demolition:

- That recycling applies only to aluminum cans and newspaper but not to buildings.
- That sustainability is just a buzzword and didn't apply to sending tons of debris from this building to landfills.
- That the school district promoted itself as being green but that its commitment was limited to an image of a tree on the school's website.

■ Perhaps the biggest lesson of all, in a town that makes a good portion of its income from architectural tourism it is OK to demolish notable architecture only to replace it with the mundane.

■ And, maybe even more important, in a town that has increasingly recognized and designated midcentury architecture as historic resources it is OK to



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turn a blind eye to preservation.

In the year 2012, one would expect that students be taught the value of preservation, if not in an actual classroom with textbooks certainly then by example.

The school board has a moral obligation to teach students lessons they can take with them into life as adults. Instead, they send a troubling message to the students: playing the clarinet is more important than preserving our built environment.

The average age of the student affected by this demolition is 16. Fast forward 10 to 15 years and they will be active members of the community — dentists, lawyers, school teachers and merchants. Any one of these students may one day sit on the planning commission and one may even become mayor of this fine city. Their future decisions, affecting our city, will be based in the lessons learned from this demolition. A proverb proclaims that it is wise "to bend the tree when the tree is young." The school board has failed the young trees in their charge.

The decision to demolish this building earns the school board a black eye that will not fade anytime soon. They are well-intentioned individuals and they are elected officials.

The citizens of Palm Springs may want to remember their names when they come up for re-election. They are Richard Clapp, Karen Cornett, Justin Blake, Gary Jeandron and Shari Stewart. After all, their decision affects you and me as it affects the future of Palm Springs.

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