

Culver Historical Highlights

Volume 25 No. 4

Published by the Culver City Historical Society

Fall 2004

MGM RETURNS TO CULVER CITY

MAYOR & FOUNDING CCHS MEMBER RICHARD "ALEX" ALEXANDER DIES

RICHARD "ALEX" ALEXANDER 1935 - 2004

Richard Alexander was memorialized in many publications, including the Los Angeles Times. He was an engineer, a member of the Historical Society, the Sister City



Mayor and Founding Member Richard Alexander, left, assisted the Historical Society with the unveiling of our first marker, the site of the 1928 City Hall. Officiating for the Society, were Founding President Cathy Zermeno and first Historic Sites Chair, Charles R. Lugo.

Committee, the Exchange Club and much more. But many of us had a personal relationship with Alex.

We will recall Alex as a compassionate and caring mayor and
(cont'd. on page 7)

SONY CORPORATION OF AMERICA ACQUIRES MGM

In September, a consortium led by Sony Corporation of America announced that it has entered into a definitive agreement under which the investor group will acquire Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, committing a total of \$1.6 billion in equity financing to acquire the legendary studio.

"We are delighted to be able to make this announcement ...," said Sir Howard Stringer, Chairman and CEO, Sony Corporation of America. "We all look forward to preserving and enhancing the legendary franchise that is MGM, and to ensuring that its extraordinary content continues to be enjoyed by people around the world."

Sony Corp. of America, based in New York City, is the U.S. subsidiary of Sony Corp., headquartered in Tokyo. Sony is a leading manufacturer of audio, video, communications, and information technology products for the consumer

and professional markets.

Soon after acquiring the historic studio in 1990, Sony (home to both Columbia Pictures and TriStar Pictures) invested \$100 million to refurbish and help restore some of the luster to the lot. It repainted every building, restored the original ironwork gates on Washington Blvd., built new walls, added nostalgic Art Deco touches and false fronts on Main Street, and put up huge, hand-painted murals of old movie posters. Studio buildings have been named after film luminaries such as Frank Capra, Cary Grant, Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn (www.seeing-stars.com).

Currently, MGM, which was founded in 1924, is actively engaged in the worldwide production and distribution of motion pictures, television programming, home video, interactive media, music and licensed merchandise. The
(cont'd. on page 7)

Free Studio Tours for CC Residents through November, 2004

Sony Pictures Entertainment is offering four free tickets per person for the Sony Studio Tours *only* to Culver City residents and business owners from September through November, 2004. The tickets, which are normally \$24 each, may be picked up at the Chamber of Commerce (*more information*: 310-287-3850).

If you miss this great opportunity, you'll have to wait until next year. And remember, these are walking tours, so make sure you wear comfy shoes!

~ OCTOBER 20TH GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING ~

Special Guest Speaker GENEALOGIST ALEXANDER KING

The Historical Society's Fall General Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 21st in the Lethbridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Ave. at 7:00 pm.

In answer to the many requests the Society has received for more information on the topic of "Genealogy," we are delighted to have published genealogist Alexander King as our special guest speaker. Born in Hollywood, Alex was raised and still lives in Mar Vista. He is an 8th generation Californio on his mother's side, descending from such central California families as the Ortigas, Leybas and Sweets.

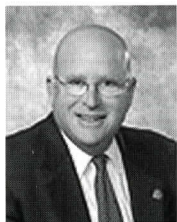
Among the many organizations Alex supports is Los Californianos which works to preserve the heritage of early Hispanic Californians in Alta California by conducting genealogical research in order to provide an accurate and authentic oral, written, and pictorial interpretation of the history of Spanish and Mexican Alta California. Join us to learn pointers for your own research!

The public is invited to enjoy the free program and students are encouraged to attend. For more information, please call (310) 287-3850.

NOVEMBER 2, 2004: REMEMBER TO VOTE!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Steven J. Rose



The Culver Theatre is now officially the Kirk Douglas Theatre! The gala Grand Opening, held on Thursday, August 30, 2004, was highlighted by the welcoming words of Mr. Kirk Douglas who accomplished what he said he would do at the 2002 ground-breaking ceremony on a cold Jan. day: to say the first words from the new stage of the theatre.

The renaming was in honor of Anne and Kirk Douglas' donation of \$2.5 million towards the total estimated renovation cost of \$11 million.

The bonus highlight of the evening was the lighting ceremony of the revitalized *Culver* sign on top of the theatre. And the newly renovated marquee – in all white – stands as a reminder of days of old when the Culver Theatre was the movie house of a bustling downtown in post-war Culver City. It brings back an era of modern architecture and neon that marked the birth of a new peaceful America that was full of possibilities.

We, as members of the Society who hoped for fuller preservation, did not get everything we hoped for, but we did get the *spirit* of the old Culver Theatre – with the new Kirk Douglas Theatre, built from the skeleton of a movie house where Douglas' movies appeared time after time throughout the years.

The Douglas family will carry on the style and culture that the owner, designer and builders of the 1947 theater dreamed and built for the people of Culver City and the Westside.

Best regards,

Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



Douglas Theatre, offers an image of the front since the "Culver" script is no longer being used. Do you remember when it was being built? Well, thanks to Charles Rozaire's collection, you can see it here!

NEW SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF DOWNTOWN CULVER CITY

A Self-Guided Walking Tour of Downtown Culver City was introduced at this year's Fiesta La Ballona (see centerfold).

It was very well attended, and although Robin Turner and I actually accompanied a couple of groups, others just picked it up and took off for a nice walk at their own pace – some enjoying a stop at the Farmers Market during their stroll. We even had a family on bicycles...pretty nice!

Special thanks to Program Chair Anita Shapiro and Sam Cerra who distributed the tour sheets, Museum Chair Robin Turner and Steve Rose, and of course, Martha and Sol Sigall.

There will be a drawing for a copy of the new book, *Images of America: Culver City*, at the October meeting. This is the prize for the word scramble distributed for the tour.

LANDMARK PLAQUES

The landmark plaques are continuing to go up on local buildings. The one on the Culver Theatre, now the Kirk



Culver Theatre under construction, 1946.



Culver Theatre Tower at dawn.

'30s "BURY THE HATCHET" CEREMONY

While doing research at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Margaret Herrick Library, I found an article on the "Bury the Hatchet" ceremony which took place in

Culver Historical Highlights

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The Culver City Historical Society, founded in 1980, is a non-profit membership organization created for the purpose of collecting, preserving and exhibiting the history of Culver City and its cultural and civic accomplishments.

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Editor's Column

There's been a lot going on in our fair city over the last couple of months!

Fascinating news that Sony has purchased MGM, bringing back to town a huge part of the "Heart of Screenland's" heritage. We'll all have to stay tuned to see how this develops.

Whenever one of our members performs something special, we certainly want to hear about it *and* to bring attention to it. Society member Norm Pattiz has continued to contribute to our community, through his many years as a CC Police reserve officer, and now via his generous gift of two "segways" to the CCPD. We're proud to salute him!

A note of apology to Jim Lamm for inadvertently not acknowledging him and the Ballona Creek Renaissance in the new "Pedestrian Bridge" article in our last issue (*Spring 2004*). To make amends, we have an extended story on the Creek's history and future.

Remember, it's *YOUR* Historical Society – we can't succeed without *YOU*!

► SPECIAL THANKS ►

Thank you for your donation:

* **STEVE FABIANO:**
"Beverly-Culver Funn Guide" (c. 1930s)

the 1930s. Included was the first photo I've found of this little media event which was intended to still the troubled waters between the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce and ours in Culver City, and was quite an affair! Our president Steve

(cont'd. on page 7)

REEL LIFE

IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins



"MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY" — A REAL SAGA

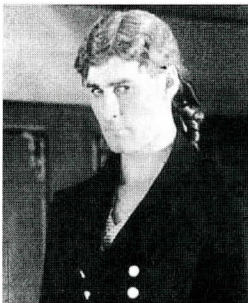
In 1934, Irving Thalberg set out to produce what would be MGM's most ambitious film to date: *Mutiny On The Bounty*. The film was based on the 1932 best-selling novel by Charles Nordoff and James Norman Hall which told the true story of the mutiny led by Fletcher Christian against Captain William Bligh, commanding officer of the *HMS Bounty*, in the South Pacific in 1789.

Thalberg was determined that the film would be accurate and authentic in every way. MGM researchers traveled across the Pacific and, after a 10-month search, they located the original logbook for the *HMS Bounty* in Sydney, Australia.

AUSTRALIAN "BOUNTY" STARS ERROL FLYNN

Interestingly enough, an earlier, Australian film version of the famous story had been made in 1933, starring Errol Flynn in his first starring role as Fletcher Christian. The noted Australian director Charles Chauvel saw a photograph of Flynn and offered him a part in his movie, *In the Wake of the Bounty*.

Flynn had no acting experience, but curiosity drove him to accept the offer. In this job, he found his hidden



passion. "I hadn't the least idea of what I was doing," Flynn later remarked, "except that I was supposed to be an actor."

[Note: Flynn is said to be actually a direct descendant on his mother's side of *Bounty* mutineers Fletcher Christian and Edward Young.]

Apparently, this Australian feature was never shown in the United States where Clark Gable's film was being released, because, by all accounts, MGM bought

the film rights. [Luckily, ScreenSound Australia has preserved the film.]

ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR FRANK LLOYD CHOSEN

Thalberg chose Frank Lloyd to direct *Bounty*. Lloyd was born in Glasgow, Scotland, the son of a musical comedy actor. At the age of 15, he took to the British stage and later came to the U.S. in 1913 where he began directing films a year later.

In 1933, he directed *Cavalcade*, an adaptation of Noel Coward's London stage hit which chronicled the lives of two families from the turn of the 20th Century to the beginning of the 1930s. The film, which is similar to television's "Upstairs/Downstairs," won the 1933 Academy Awards for both Best Picture and Best Director.

GIL PERKINS "ABOARD" THE "BOUNTY"

MGM built replicas of the *HMS Bounty* and the *Pandora*, the ship that Captain Bligh pursued the *Bounty*'s mutineers.



Gil Perkins (L) with Clark Gable (R) & the cast of "Mutiny on the Bounty."

Both of the ships actually sailed to Tahiti and back during the second unit work on the film. While most of the film was made on soundstages and backlots of MGM and on Catalina Island, Thalberg sent a crew of fifty technicians and bit players to Tahiti where more than 2500 natives were filmed in over 40 locations.

Stuntman/actor Gil Perkins was one of the crew who sailed to Tahiti. Perkins had become a stuntman in 1929 doubling for film star William Boyd. Gil turned down the opportunity to double Boyd again in the first *Hopalong Cassidy* film because the *Bounty* work would give him six months of steady employment!

Before Gil passed away in 1998, he told me that much of the film they shot was lost due to mishandling, as the film was stored in the hull of the ship and damaged by salt water. Another bit actor who journeyed to Tahiti with the *Bounty* crew was Ray Corrigan, better known later as "Crash" Corrigan in westerns and serials at Republic Pictures. Corrigan was also the founder of "Corriganville" a Western

New Beginnings Along Ballona Creek

by Jim Lamm

Centuries ago, Ballona Creek had its beginning as a natural and somewhat seasonal stream fed by tributaries in the Santa Monica Mountains and elsewhere, as well as rainfall in a large vegetated area extending to, and sometimes connecting with, the Los Angeles River.

It connected various marshes, or "cienegas," and drained into large wetlands along Santa Monica Bay. Providing nourishment to the land and native flora & fauna, it attracted to its banks the earliest Native American people in the area – the Tongva.

Soon, its natural habitat began to change. In the 1700s, the rancheros brought another new beginning and more changes, followed by other settlers from the East and around the world in the 1800s. Change began to accelerate in the early 1900s with the coming of the Red Cars, Harry Culver and real estate interests, the oil and movie industries, and a larger population.

The weather, too, caused changes when storms brought flooding not only from Ballona Creek but also the Los Angeles River and other waterways. The growing population of So. California understandably demanded protection. And so, in the 1920s, the County began to channelize Ballona Creek in earthen levees, followed by the US Army Corps of Engineers' construction of a concrete-walled channel around 1935 – at the time a necessary and yet stark new beginning.

Fast-forwarding to the present, another



Ballona Creek, 1922

new beginning offers hope for not just change (which isn't always positive) but renewal. Volunteer creek cleanups, colorful murals, a new pedestrian bridge, high-tech storm drain filters, creek-side plantings of native trees and shrubs, new restoration in the adjoining hills and wetlands, and visionary ideas about future improvements all point to ongoing renewal and new beginnings – a *renaissance*.

[CCHS member Jim Lamm is President of BCR] To learn more, go to www.culvercity.org/cityinfo/history/index.html To learn how you can become involved with the Ballona Creek and its watershed, visit www.ballonacreek.org.

town built in Simi Valley where countless TV westerns were filmed through the 1960s.

[Next time: Why wasn't Cary Grant in *Mutiny on the Bounty*? And other questions you never thought to ask are answered....] ###

A Self-Guided Walking Tour of Downtown Culver City

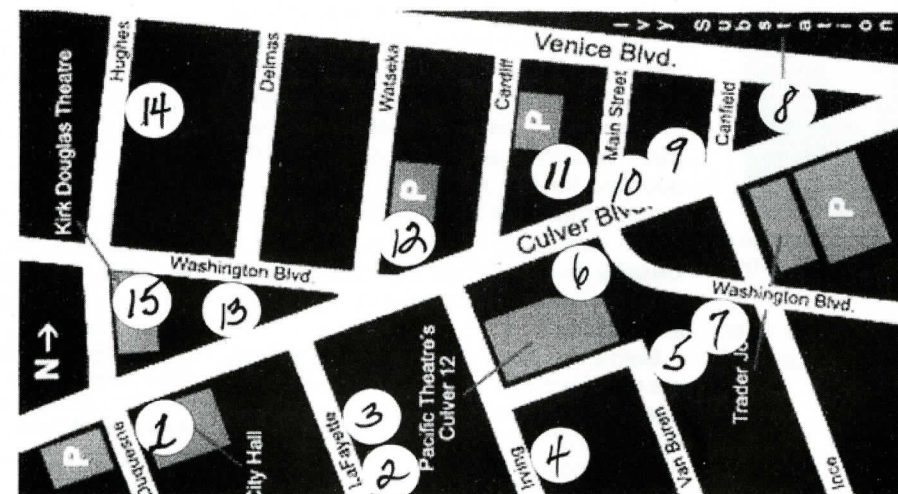
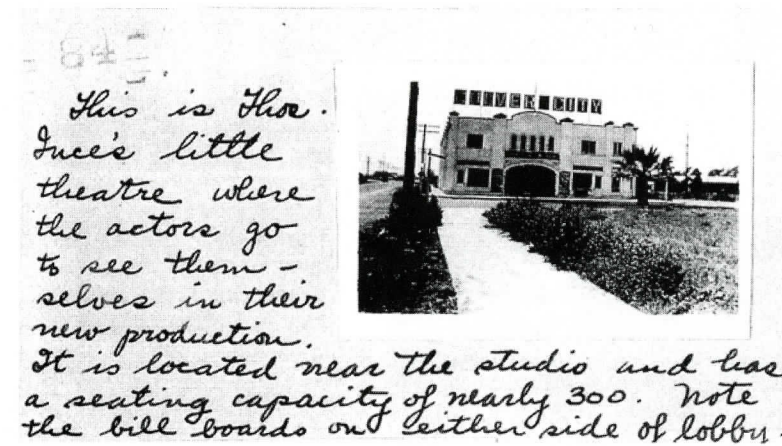
Culver City was the vision of Nebraska-born real estate entrepreneur Harry H. Culver. In 1913, after a year of study, he announced his plans for a city at the California Club in 1913. That was the year he filed his Main Street with the county. Culver City, centered about Main, was originally 1.2 square miles, which expanded over the years to nearly five square miles. Downtown Culver City offers jewels from the past and present that help tell the story of the

city's history.

This Scrapbook page, (c. 1918) found in another state, shows the first theatre in Culver City, The Heart of Screenland. The floor above housed the first city offices. That was the site of Harry Culver's six story landmark skyscraper hotel, preserved today.

Culver City has numerous

historic buildings and districts, protected by the city's municipal code since 1990. The City Council also enacted an Art in Public Places program, which has greatly enhanced the city. As you walk through Downtown, notice the old and the new, and stop to read the plaques for the sites and the artwork. You will also see the city flower, Lantana, adorning the route.



Begin at the corner of Duquesne and Culver, at the City Hall CCHS marker in the grass.

1. Walk through the 3/4 scale replica façade of the 1928 City Hall through the courtyard, noting public art, to city seal in front of the Mike Balkman Council Chambers, pass public notice board, back by flags to sidewalk

- Head east on Culver Blvd. across Lafayette; the Meralta Plaza, was named for the site of the old Meralta Theater.

2. Right along Meralta Plaza, to see the Lafayette Residential District, 1925 Spanish Colonial Courts (L)

- Note former public library, now a church, at SW corner at Braddock



3. Walk back to CCRA parking lot, cutting through to Irving Place

- Note Linwood Howe School (far right), and Fire Station #1 (left); cross to
4. The CCUSD District Office (site of early Culver Grammar School) is directly across; head east on "A" Street.

5. Walk behind the theatres, noting building ahead that housed City Hall, Fire and Police on Van Buren Place from 1922-28



3912-18
Van Buren

6. Left up to Harry Culver's 1924 hotel, noting plaques. Culver's offices were on the 2nd floor.

- See roof art on Plato building

7. Stop in front of The Culver Studios, (L), (HS#7); Update-new owners 1991 & 2004

- Cross Washington Blvd. at Ince, walking to the end of the block

- Cross Ince going east, then Culver to 8. Media Park, 1907 Ivy Substation, where Culver first noticed actress (and future wife) Lillian Roberts waiting for the Red Car. (NR)
- 9. Cross Canfield, walk to view plaque on The Citizen Building (L) (NR) (HS#4)
- 10. Continue to Main Street plaque NE corner)(HS #6)
- Walk north -right, to Venice (you are now in LA, notice the blue street signs?)
- Cross Bagley and walk back down Main, which begins at the alley (CC boundary)
- 11. Take the Paseo- right past La Ballona Restaurant. Spin the Zoetropes. Note Laurel and Hardy mural to the right, behind Stellar Hardware; continue to Cardiff- Cross Cardiff, to Washington right to Hughes, noting "Desilu" mural left.
- 12. Read the plaque on the front of the Hull Building (L) (HS#2) (now a restaurant)
- Cross Watseka
- 13. Note Washington Building across the street built in the 1920s by Charles Lindblade. (L) (NR)
- 14. Turn right up Hughes to the Legion Building (L)(HS # 5) Note plaque on front
- Return to Washington Blvd.
- 15. Cross Washington, noting the 1947 (L) Culver Theatre, now the Kirk Douglas Theatre - view Landmark plaque.



- Cross Culver Blvd., noting the Gateway Station Post Office ("gateway to the stars?").
- Back to City Hall, with CCPD beyond

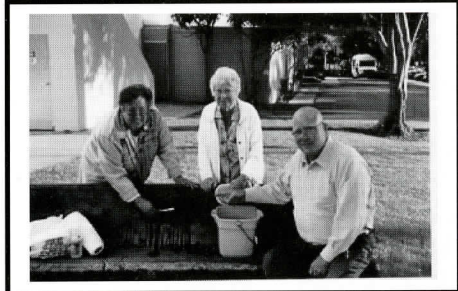
Legend

(HS#)	Historic Site marked by the CC Historical Society- bronze markers at each site
(L)	City designated Landmark structure
(S)	City designated Significant structure
NR	National Register status

Written by City Historian Julie Lugo Cerra for the Culver City Historical Society, 2004.

CULVER CITY, CA ~ "SNAPSHOTS"

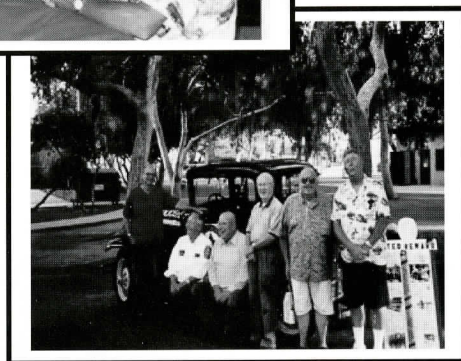
ANNUAL PICNIC: CARLSON PARK, JULY 21, 2004



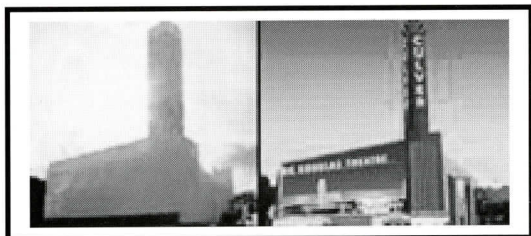
(L-R) Anita Shapiro, Martha Sigall & Steve Rose cleaning a bronze plaque on a bench in Veterans Park.

*A good time
was had by all!*

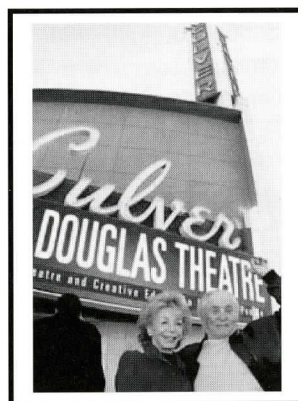
(R) Steve Newton brought
out his '30 "CC Police Car"
for all to enjoy!



AUGUST 30, 2004: THE NEW KIRK DOUGLAS THEATRE OPENS

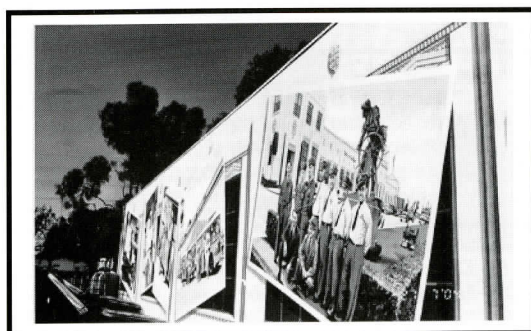


[Photos: <http://www.culvercity.org>]

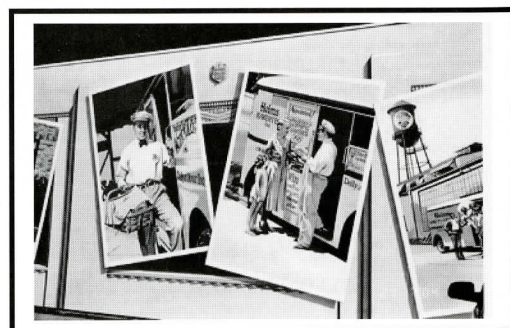


Anne & Kirk Douglas in
front of the new Kirk
Douglas Theatre, home of
the Center Theatre Group.

HELMS AVENUE HAS A NEW LOOK – A MURAL OF FIVE "POSTCARDS" OF THE EARLY DAYS OF HELMS BAKERY



The murals are on the
famed Helms Athletic
Hall side of the Bakery
Building.



Museum Notes

by Robin Turner, Museum Chair

We started the year out with a bang! Moving the museum's artifacts and memorabilia from the West LA College site – and we thank the College for their continued support – to the Bank of the West building in downtown Culver City has begun another exciting chapter. for us.

As your new Museum Chair, I worked with our industrious Mayor and CCHS President, Steve Rose, to set up an onsite visit for the CCHS Board so they could see our new home and begin an inventory of what needs to be done to the area so that we can work comfortably and safely, and open our rich collection to the public as soon as possible.

The new site is located in the upstairs portion of the bank and is currently in need of work such as some plastering, painting, flooring or carpet, light plumbing, and bathroom updates. We are negotiating with the bank to cover some of these costs and are also looking into grants and other possible funding sources.

If you are a tradesman in any of these fields, and/or can assist the Society with these preliminary repairs, please give us a call. We are also compiling a list of volunteers to then work on the cosmetics and décor of the area after the initial "clean-up," so the museum will be a welcome place for us to work and enjoy.

Along with the Board, I want to thank Steve Newton for his time in assessing the plumbing in our new building. I also want to thank Councilmember Alan Corlin for coming by and giving his support.

After the new facility is renovated and ready for use, we will resume our volunteer corps to help sort our artifacts, documents and other treasures. We plan to have the museum open to volunteers on one weekday and on Saturdays on a regular schedule. If you are interested in helping either during the renovation period and/or with the archiving, please call (310) 287-3850 or email cchistorical@pacbell.net and let us know.

As always, thank you for your support and service.

~ Robin

A CCHS MEMBERSHIP FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

Looking for that special Holiday gift? Consider giving the gift of your community's heritage with a CCHS membership!

"Alex" (cont'd.)

council member of 16 years tenure. We will remember him helping us start the Society, and taking part in the unveiling of our first marker in 1981 at the site of City Hall (see photo Page 1).

And we will smile, remembering that Alex drew his own "caricature" for his campaign literature. Alex was the epitome of a grass roots "mover and shaker." He was also a bellowing voice, and a huge hug.

Alex loved Andy. Alex loved Karen, Deborah and Kim, his girls. Alex just loved people. Alex loved dogs. Alex loved parks. Alex loved fireworks. Alex loved us all.

You will be in our hearts always, Alex.

~ Julie Lugo Cerra

"Sony-MGM" (cont'd.)

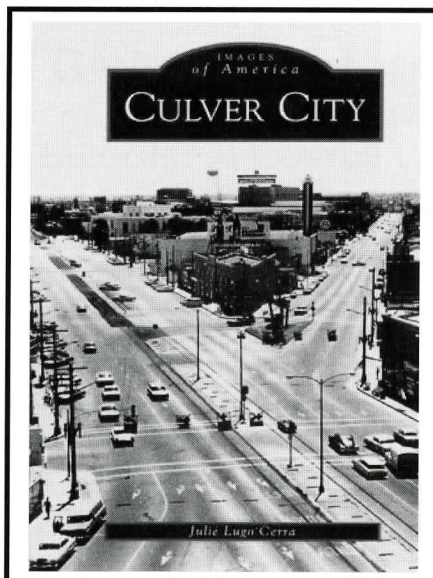
company owns the world's largest library of modern films, comprising about 4,000 titles.

In the last two decades, MGM has operated as a significantly scaled-down version of what it was during Hollywood's golden era in the 1930s and '40s. In those years, MGM was ruled by the likes of legendary moguls Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg, and it boasted of having "more stars than there are in the heavens."

What the historic results of this merger may be is still uncertain. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that it may mark the first time one of Hollywood's original "seven sisters," a group which included Columbia (acquired by Sony in 1989 and still operating as a studio), Disney, Fox, Paramount, Universal and Warner Bros., will cease to exist as a major studio, continuing in name only.

Time will tell.

###



~ 7 ~

NORM PATTIZ: SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Norm Pattiz, a Culver City reserve officer and Society member, has donated two new Segways (officially, Segway Human Transporters) to the CC Police Department which will be used primarily in places like Downtown's Town Plaza, Fox Hills and parking structures due to their great mobility.



CCHS member Norm Pattiz (center) with CCPD Officers, Neil Glickman (L) and Curt Massey (R). (photo: Glenn Esterly)

Founder and chairman of Westwood One, America's largest radio network organization and a major supplier of traffic, news and sports programming to local TV stations, and a graduate of Hamilton High, Norm has long been active in the community.

"In these times of tight budgets," he said, "I wanted to help the Department get this extra edge on enforcement."

We join with the CCPD in grateful thanks to Norm Pattiz!

.....

And a tip of the hat also to Stu Freeman, CCHS member who donated a number of old bricks to help Norm restore his building after the 1994 earthquake -- bricks which were originally given to Stu by Bob Sirchia of Sony to help with the restoration of the Hull Building. We have a great community!

[Our thanks to Glenn Esterly of the Culver City News for contributing to this story.]

###

"Notes" (cont'd.)

Rose had it enlarged and posted it in the window of the Pacific Theatres. Go by and enjoy some interesting reading.....

LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

We are working with Diane Fiello, who is the new Assistant Superintendent-Educational Services in Culver City Unified. We are hoping to do two skits in the third grade classrooms as we did last year – one on the Gabrielinos, and one with Pat Culver Battle talking about her father, Harry Culver. Our hope is to offer the Machado skit for the fourth graders as well. These will be performed in the classes sometime between January and March, 2005.

###

Julie Lugo Cerra's new book (L), "Images of America: Culver City" will be available at the October 20th meeting!

Become a Member of the Culver City Historical Society Today!

Join others in preserving the history of the "Heart of Screenland" and the efforts to create the Culver City Heritage Museum. We can't do it without you!

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
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| _____ Corporate Sponsor (\$500) | _____ Organization (\$15) |
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| _____ Family Member (\$25) | _____ Youth Member (\$5) |

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P.O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428. For further information, call (310) 287-3850 or email: cchistorical@pacbell.com.
*Contributions of both historic and social significance as well as monetary donations are encouraged, and the
CCHS IRS tax exempt status may make such contributions tax deductible.*

BUSINES MEMBER ROSTER

These fine Culver City area businesses support our work to preserve Culver City history for future generations.
Please show YOUR support by your patronage of their services and products.

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Culver City Historical Society

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