

TOLUCA LAKE

SPRING 2023

MAGAZINE



COMMUNITY OF **LEARNING**

Toluca Lake Elementary School
Thrives With Strong Local Support



Vinny

OCTOBER 2010 — JANUARY 2023

Here at TinaSmithHomes we lost our mascot...



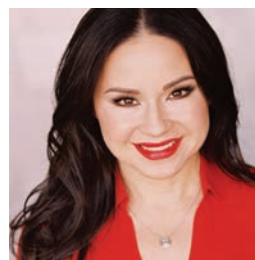
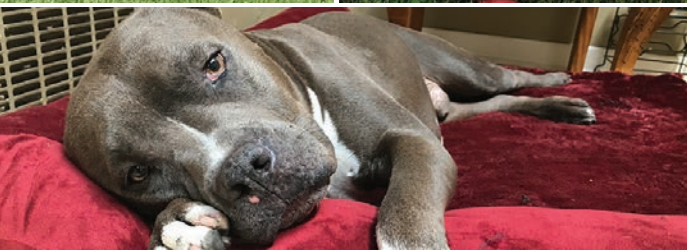
our beloved tripod Pit Bull named Vinny left us on January 23rd, after giving Cancer the greatest fight we could have ever imagined. He was diagnosed with terminal Osteosarcoma (bone cancer) in December of 2019 and was given a bleak prognosis. His options were immediate euthanasia, or an arm amputation simply for pain management, which would still only give him a 3-6 month life expectancy. Since he seemed happy aside from a limp, we chose to amputate, intending to just spoil him for a few months and make that short time amazing for him...never imagining he would still be with us over 3 years later, thriving through a global pandemic and beyond, happier and stronger than ever!

gave words of encouragement or simply gave him a kind smile... WE THANK YOU. The outpouring of support we received from the community and complete strangers, was overwhelmingly heart warming and spirit lifting. This TRULY is a special community, and we will be forever grateful for all the friends we met along this journey.

Vinny was a rescue, and we would also like to take this opportunity to promote animal rescue, as we could not have asked for a better buddy for all these years. He was also a Pit Bull who came from a bad situation, they all deserve a chance. I also want to encourage anyone who receives a similar daunting pet diagnosis to reach out to me. I would be happy to share more details of our experience, along with the Hollistic approach and resources we found, that were invaluable.

While this is typically a Real Estate ad, we chose this content because Vinny received a tremendous amount of support and encouragement from the Toluca Lake community, and we wanted to extend our deepest gratitude...we know that helped keep him going. If you ever stopped us on our daily walks to ask his story, gave him a thumbs up or a pat on the head, called him a champion,

Rest easy our sweet boy...we are so grateful we had three more years to love you. We will never forget you and will use the life lessons you taught us of strength, heart and perseverance to inspire, motivate and guide us throughout the rest of our lives.



Tina Smith

Estate Director

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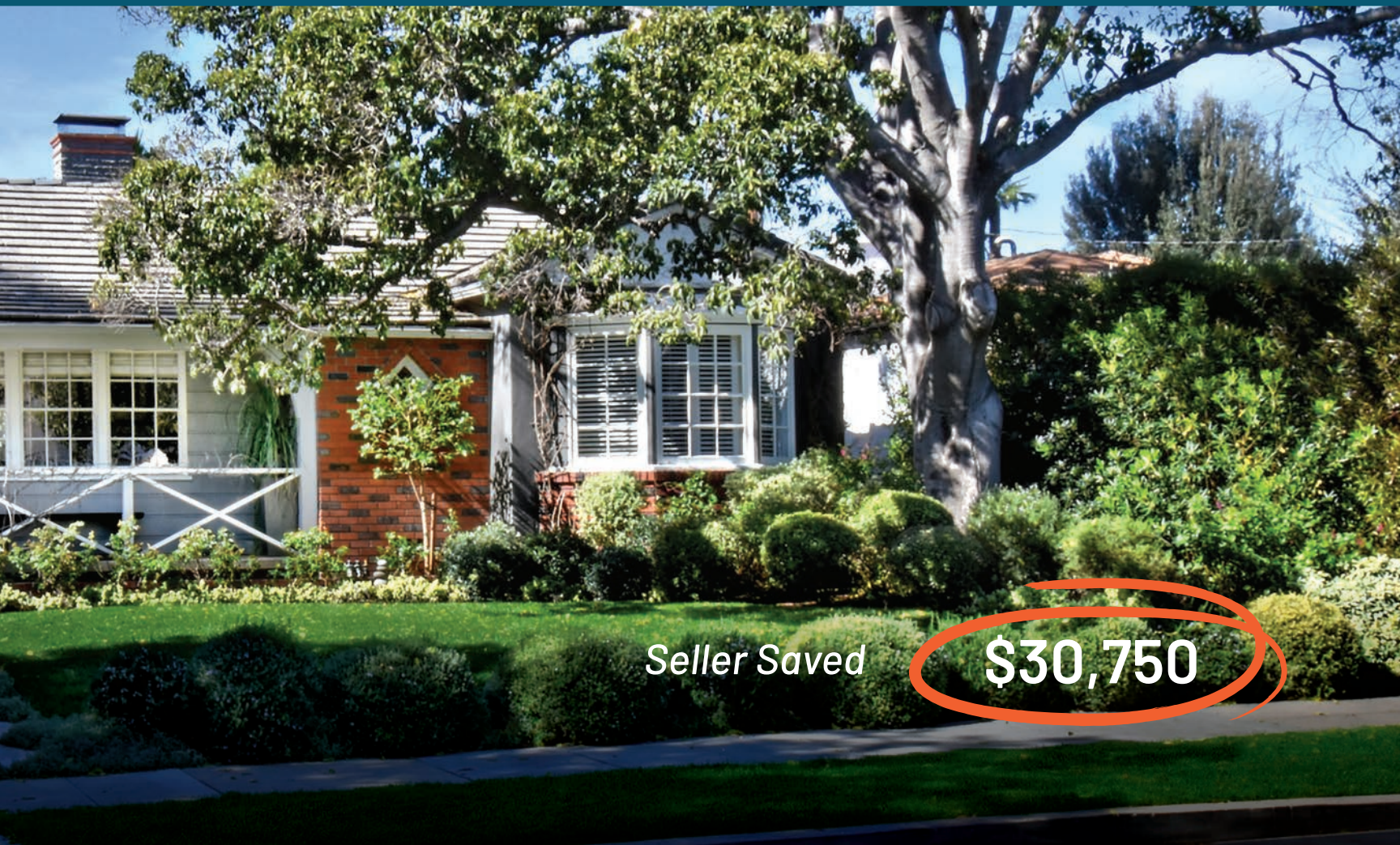
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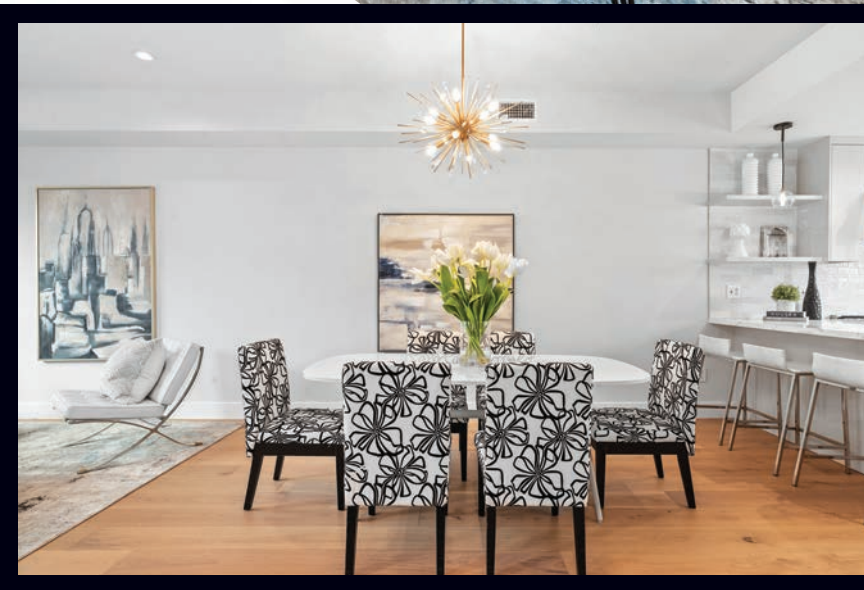
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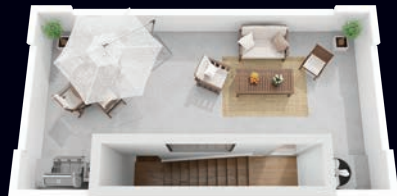


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Not only are Nicole and Michelle passionate about real estate; they are also passionate about the community they are a part of. We are proud members of the Toluca Lake Community. Throughout the last few years we have participated in many local events that support the community such as the **Fall Harvest Festival** and the **Holiday Open House**.

We also support the **Toluca Lake Chamber of Commerce**. We have a passion for giving back and are heavily involved in **LA Family Housing** as well.



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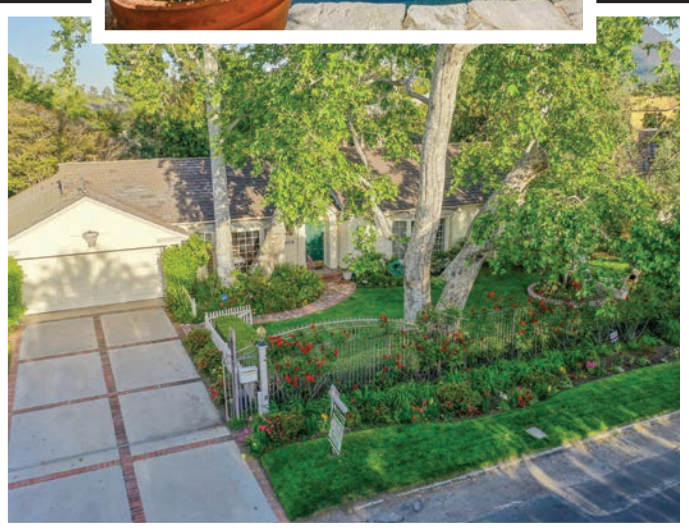
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A *NOTE* from the **PUBLISHER**

MARK DEITCH

Inspiration Close to Home

In this spring edition, we are thrilled to bring you inspiring stories of community members who have made a positive impact in our town. Among them are Tim and Linda Hawkins, a local couple who have lived in Toluca Lake for 60 of its 100 years, spending much of their time volunteering in countless community organizations. Their selfless dedication to improving the lives of those around them is truly admirable, and we hope their story inspires you to find ways to give back to your own community.

Or find your inspiration in the article about Paige Peter, a local artist who had a profound spiritual experience while painting a beautiful mural of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Through her creative expression, Paige found a deeper connection to her faith and shared it with the community through her stunning artwork. We hope her story stirs you to find your own spiritual connection through art.

As well, we are proud to showcase Toluca Lake Elementary School, which continues to garner support from many local groups and families. This school has stayed strong since it opened in 1944 by ensuring that all families and children feel included and connected. We believe that inclusivity and community are essential to inspire the good in all of us, and we applaud the school for its efforts to create a supportive environment for all.

What would springtime be without the beauty and scents of fresh flowers on the table? It's a scientific fact that flowers are uplifting, healing and bring joy and happiness — so says Kim Williams of The Enchanted Florist, who has a quarter-century of experience designing arrangements for TV shows and movies. This talented pro shares some of her tips and tricks for creating your own beautiful floral arrangements, so be sure to check it out and elevate your home décor.

We were thrilled to greet so many of you at the 2022 Holiday Open House last December, and we hope to bring you a smile with our heartwarming photo album of the pleasant memories we all shared as a community.

Lastly, Jenna Anderson, our managing editor, pays tribute to Patrick Curtis, who regaled our readers with many stories of growing up in Toluca Lake in the 1940s and '50s. We remember the fond reminiscences and valuable insights Patrick shared with us and hope his legacy will continue to inspire us to appreciate the rich history and unique culture of our community. We want to express our deepest condolences to his family and friends and will very much miss Patrick's contributions to this magazine, but we feel fortunate to be able to include our final episode of the enchanting life story of "The Crossdraw Kid."

Thank you for your continued support of *Toluca Lake Magazine* and our local advertisers. We hope this issue brings you joy, inspiration and a renewed sense of appreciation for our wonderful neighborhood, and as always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions for future content.



Mark

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Toluca Lake Magazine is published by Trade News International, Inc. 4444 Riverside Drive, Suite 202, Toluca Lake, CA 91505. Presort Standard, U.S. Postage. Paid in Los Angeles, CA. It is mailed to residents of Toluca Lake and distributed at commercial and retail locations throughout Toluca Lake and surrounding communities. Annual subscriptions available for \$28; single issues \$7. Printed in the U.S.A.

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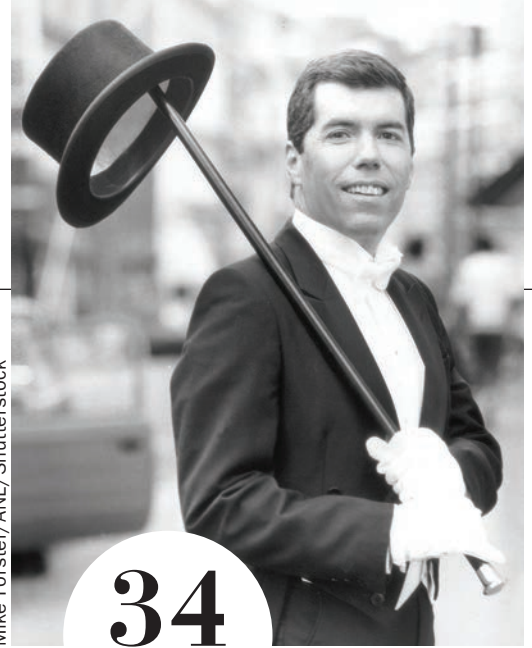


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Longtime residents Tim and Linda Hawkins show their love for the neighborhood by volunteering.



Mike Forster/ANL/Shutterstock



ON THE COVER

IT TAKES A VILLAGE Toluca Lake Elementary’s success is a true team effort driven by collaboration among faculty and staff, students and their families, and the larger community. Our cover features some of the school’s many dedicated professionals. Seated: coordinator Aidee Ramos, principal Jeffrey Daniel, community representative Maria Elena Flores and special education teacher Elizabeth Inai. Standing: teacher Rhory McConville; school administrative assistant Vilma Sabido; teacher Rick Lee; assistant principal, elementary instructional specialist Tomia Mitchell-Haas; and plant manager Juan Castellanos. *Photo by Daniel Deitch.*

OUT & ABOUT

NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES



Brandon Hawk



HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Seasonal cheer filled the air on December 3 as community members took part in Toluca Lake's annual Holiday Open House. The neighborhood went all out this year to make the event memorable, with a mariachi band performing live music outside **Pergolina** and along Riverside Drive, and the **Craig Strong Group** team working hard to "hand out freshly made doughnuts, popcorn, hot chocolate, wine and cheese, cookies, bags and other items, while always smiling and having a blast!" Strong says. Other businesses opened their doors or set up booths on the sidewalks with special offerings, including discounts on popular items, giveaways and fun games.

To Strong, the Holiday Open House is a great opportunity for residents to remind themselves why Toluca Lake is such an amazing place to call home. "Getting together with all the neighbors and enjoying our community truly reminds us all how lucky we are to live here," he says. "Serving delicious treats to the community while listening to either the carolers or the bagpipers has to be my favorite part."

Among those taking part in the festivities was Soraya Ardakani of **Rose & Sage**, who had a balloon twister for children outside the store and a holiday sale for customers inside. "I love always sticking my head out of the store and seeing the crowd outside," she shares. "Having all the activities and vendors on the



sidewalk made it great for everyone!”

Adding to the uniqueness of the Holiday Open House was its start time. While the event has traditionally kicked off at sundown, this time around it was held in the afternoon. “We’ve all had to adapt to change these last couple years, and one was to have it during the day versus the evening,” Ardakani says. “I’m just happy we are able to hold this great event again!”

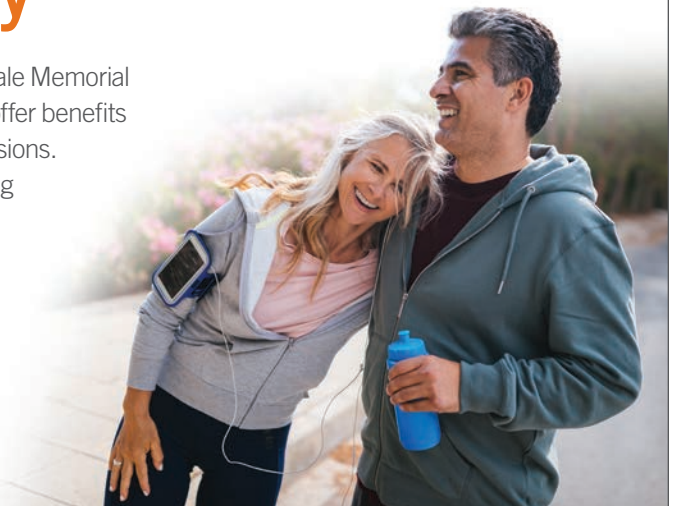
Honorary mayor Fritz Coleman also led a champagne toast and delivered a heartfelt message to residents, capping off a fantastic celebration that was enjoyed by all. 🍷



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LOCAL ARTIST MAKES THE VILLAGE HER CANVAS

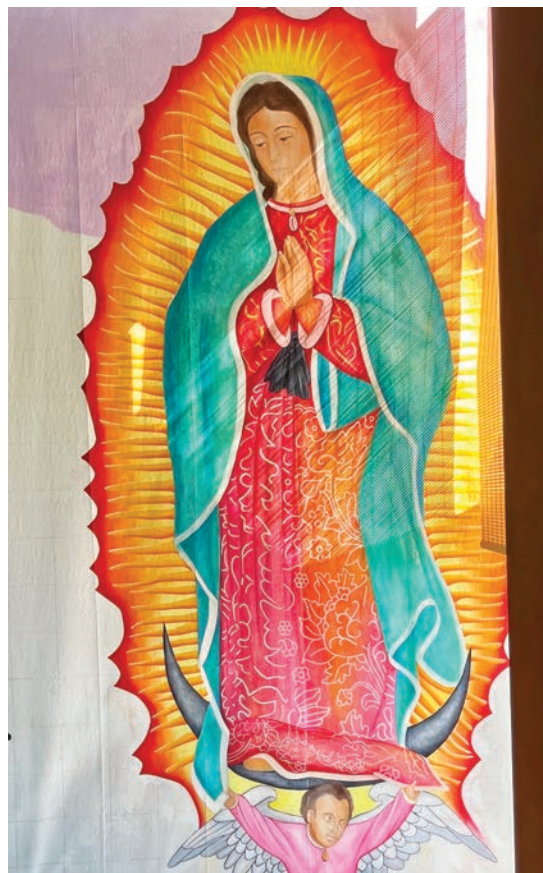
The sounds of spirited mariachi music coming from **Pergolina's** storefront resounded along Riverside Drive during the Holiday Open House on December 3, drawing in a large crowd to celebrate the unveiling of a vibrant mural of Our Lady of Guadalupe created by local artist and muralist Paige Peter.

Peter, who started painting murals professionally in her early 20s and specializes in large-scale figurative florals and spiritual icons, says the inspiration behind the piece came from friend and neighbor Annie Potts. "She suggested I look at the history of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was fascinating," Peter shares. "I became engrossed with her story, the symbolism and the aesthetics of her image. The color possibilities really resonated with me."

Peter took the idea of creating a mural to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, the long-revered symbol of the Catholic Church, to close friend and supporter Paulanna Cuccinello of Pergolina, who in 2019 had showcased Peter's work in a solo exhibition of floral-inspired pieces entitled "Fleur." "Paulanna was one of the first people I met when I moved



Paige Peter



Paige Peter

to Toluca Lake. I showed her a piece I was working on, and she said, 'Give me four more of those and I'll give you a show!'" Peter recalls. "She is a very gifted judge of art and beauty. We have been bonded ever since."

Cuccinello found a bare wall at a neighboring store and floated the idea to the store's owner of displaying a temporary mural on canvas as opposed to a permanent one. The owner loved the idea, and Peter immediately got to work.

Peter unwittingly became a fixture on Riverside Drive throughout October. "As I crouched on my scaffolding, as early as 7 every morning, residents and visitors would walk by and cheer me on," she says. "A day or two later, I see the same folks walking by checking on



Paige Peter with friend and neighbor Annie Potts

Paige Peter

my progress. They seemed to be as invested in it as I was. I fed off of their generous energy. It was like performance art!" It took her 31 days to complete the mural.

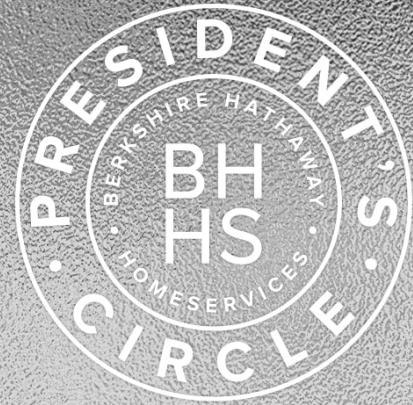
About a week after the mural debuted to fanfare at the Holiday Open House, on December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, "devoted Catholics from around the community festooned the mural with flowers, and we received wide media coverage from NBC 4, ABC 7 and Telemundo 52," Peter says.

The mural has since been purchased via auction by Peter's close friend, honorary Toluca Lake mayor Fritz Coleman. "Our goal was to have someone purchase it and gift it to a worthy enterprise, like a gallery, a church or other public space," Peter explains, adding that she and Coleman are working to get the mural displayed at St. Monica Academy in Montrose. After the mural finds a home, Peter plans to paint another sometime in the spring. "We consider it a public works project."

Peter says overall that making the mural was a very "spiritual" experience. "To be able to create this piece outside in the community where it would be displayed, and in the community where I live, that feeling, it made the piece even more organic. I was also left with civic pride in having been able to beautify our little village in some way." 🌸

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OUT & ABOUT

TOLUCA LAKE COUNTS

On January 24, volunteers came together at **Harmony Toluca Lake** on Cahuenga for the Toluca Lake Homeless Count. The counters used a mobile app to collect important information on those experiencing homelessness in our neighborhood. While final results won't be known until summer, conducting the Homeless Count is crucial to gauge if some of Los Angeles' many efforts to reduce the number of homeless residents in the county have paid off.

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), which started the annual Homeless Count in 2005, relies on thousands of volunteers to collect these demographic and numeric counts to determine where homeless services — like housing, shelter and food — are

needed. To LAHSA Director of Communications Ahmad Chapman, the importance of the Homeless Count cannot be overstated. "Government agencies, including LAHSA, use this important data that's collected during the Homeless Count to develop strategies to end homelessness and determine where funding and resources will do the most good," he says.

According to LAHSA, there were an estimated 69,144 people experiencing homelessness in L.A. County last year, a 4.1% rise from 2020, and 41,980 people were experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, up 1.7%



GTLNC President Colby Jensen, Chamber VP Corrie Sommers and Chamber Board member Ron Babbini helped with this year's count.

from 2020. (A count was not conducted in 2021 due to the COVID pandemic.)

The results of the 2022 point-in-time count, conducted over three nights in February, suggest that homelessness may be rising more slowly than in previous years, where L.A. County saw a 25.9% increase and the city of Los Angeles experienced a 32% increase between 2018 and 2020. 🐾



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OUT & ABOUT

CELEBRATING A TREMENDOUS TURKEY TROT



At **Hungry Crowd** on February 21, the Toluca Lake Homeowners Association recognized the hard work of its Turkey Trot Committee and supporters who helped make the 2022 event the most successful to date. With community leaders in attendance, including LAPD Senior Lead Officer Kurtis Delbar, former State Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian and City Council President Paul Krekorian, the HOA presented a donation of \$15,000 raised by the Turkey Trot to the East Valley Police Activity League Supporters (PALS). 🐔



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Toluca Lake Elementary School

Dedicated to educating children to become independent, creative and critical thinkers in a culturally diverse environment, **Toluca Lake Elementary School** makes learning a true community endeavor through strong partnerships with local families and neighborhood organizations. The school opened on July 1, 1944, to serve the many new residents who had been drawn to the San Fernando Valley by the aviation industry boom during World War II. Since then, it's grown from nine classrooms in a single main building to a campus of over 30 classrooms, with a total of more than 500 students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. It's also continued to expand and enhance its offerings to provide a high-quality public education for all its young learners.

"People are surprised to learn that Toluca Lake Elementary is a Title I school — meaning over 65% of our families qualify for free or reduced lunch," principal Jeffrey Daniel says. "Oftentimes, people equate a Title I school with low performance. That, however, is not our case. Toluca Lake Elementary is among the top-performing elementary schools in the area and, in fact, is the highest-performing Title I school in the area."

The school's assets include the ever-growing racial and cultural diversity of its students and staff, which it embraces through events such as the annual Around the World Multicultural Night, where families share food, artifacts and pictures representing their backgrounds. "Ensuring that all families feel included



Principal
Jeffrey Daniel

“Ensuring that all families feel included and connected to the school community has helped make us even stronger.”

and connected to the school community has helped make us even stronger,” Daniel explains. That philosophy has fostered another key element of Toluca Lake Elementary’s success: a high level of parent involvement. “Toluca Lake prides itself on its strong school-to-home connection,” teacher Rhory McConville

says. “We have a wonderful Parent Teacher Association that supports many school enrichment programs like music and the garden ranger program, which students attend weekly. They also host many school events for community families, like movie nights, dance parties and our annual Move-a-Thon, which is our largest fundraiser of the year.”

And it’s not only parents who contribute valuable time, energy and resources, Daniel notes: “The school has many wonderful partnerships with local businesses and organizations. The Greater Toluca Lake Neighborhood Council, Craig Strong Group, ExxonMobil gas station, Toluca Lake Chamber of Commerce and NBCUniversal are some of the businesses that donate annually to support our programs.” Toluca Lake Beautification Partners constructed a school garden with 12 raised vegetable beds, and the Toluca Lake Garden Club has donated plants and more than



WORLD OF LEARNING Students and their families shared food, dress, artifacts and customs representing their respective heritages at the 2022 Around the World event. *Photo by Hazelnut Photography.*

200 library books on gardening-related topics. Teacher Dennis Hagen-Smith shares that the UCLA neuroscience department visits annually so students can study brain samples firsthand, and NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Aerojet Rocketdyne and the Burbank Sidewalk Astronomers participate in the school’s popular annual Family Astronomy Night and Star Party, where community members can learn about celestial objects and stargaze through high-powered telescopes.

Such strong support helps Toluca Lake Elementary provide students with a host of enrichment options both in and out of the classroom, in STEM, the arts, sports and more. Through the Lasting Learning program, UCLA learning coaches teach kids how to become and stay curious, embrace mistakes, use the right study techniques and lead a healthy lifestyle. A turf field recently installed with joint funding from Out of Bounds, the PTA and the school has opened up many more opportunities for students to be active, including in the Out of Bounds after-school program where coaches lead play-based activities that foster friendships, cooperation and problem-



Hazelnut Photography



Hazelnut Photography

HOME TURF Volunteers helped install a new turf field in October with joint funding from Out of Bounds, the PTA and the school, providing a surface for students to enjoy outdoor sports and recreation.

solving. Education Through Music—Los Angeles (ETM-LA) provides every class with instruction from a music teacher on a weekly basis and runs an after-school choir. A ranger from EnrichLA leads weekly gardening classes for students, and a science teacher from STEM&More provides additional science enrichment throughout the week. Theatre West supports a fully funded annual field trip for kindergarten and first-grade students

to see a live theater performance, and will bring a 12-week theater program to campus this fall for all students to participate in. Among the other outreach programs Hagen-Smith recalls are “repeat visits from the Debussy Trio, the L.A. Jazz Society, Project Reef, Windows on Our Waters, Friends of the L.A. River, UCLA ArtsBridge, the L.A. Opera, the Story Pirates, the Geffen Playhouse, and even vocalist Maggie



Daniel Deitch

GROWING GREEN Created with help from Toluca Lake Beautification Partners and the Garden Club, the school's organic garden offers children the opportunity to learn about plants and the environment, with weekly gardening classes led by a ranger from EnrichLA.

Brown and the Tuskegee Airmen. Author visits from Dana Middleton, Keith Calabrese, and the writing team of Annabeth Bondor-Stone and Connor White have been very inspirational to students as well." Teacher Rick Lee adds, "Our students have also been very involved with several National Geographic projects, including the BioBlitz and the GeoBee." The school further boasts an active Spirit Squad of 22 fourth- and fifth-graders "who not only lead the school in cheer, but are also student leaders," Daniel notes.

Dedicated employees constitute another pillar of strength for the school, with a low turnover rate translating into a highly skilled teaching staff that maintains focus on not only academic rigor, but also social-emotional learning to promote mental wellness. Daniel himself has been part of Toluca Lake Elementary since the start of his education career in 1999. Beginning as a fourth-grade teacher, he went on to teach every grade from first to fifth, then served as the school's categorical programs and bilingual coordinator, gifted and talented education coordinator, technology coordinator and state testing coordinator. He was promoted to assistant principal at Arleta High School in 2018, but less than a year later he was called to return to Toluca Lake as principal. "I am filled with excitement and gratitude and am thankful for the wonderful students, families and colleagues who have helped me to be where I am today," he shares.

With broad-based support and so many opportunities for every child to learn, it's no wonder



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STRIKE A POSE Participants get active through a variety of games and fitness events in the annual Move-a-Thon, the school's largest fundraiser.

the school has made a name for itself. "The diversity and high number of enrichment programs have made Toluca Lake Elementary a highly desired school in the area," Daniel says. "Because of word-of-mouth about the many wonderful programs here, coupled with high test scores and the many amazing teachers, we are seeing many more families who live in the area enroll their children at this school rather than sending them to a private institution." But that doesn't mean Toluca Lake Elementary is resting on its laurels: "The school is always reflecting on how to make learning better." And there are still many more ways for the community to help. L.A. Unified School District Superintendent Alberto Carvalho recently announced a new program called Everyone Mentors L.A., with the goal of finding mentors for 27,000 students throughout the school district, and Daniel notes that some students at Toluca Lake would certainly benefit from such support. And for those who would like to contribute but may not have the time to be personally involved, there's always a need for donations, from smaller things like copy paper and physical education equipment to funding for programs and wish list items like renovating the 168-seat auditorium and acquiring a portable outdoor stage and folding chairs so that the school can accommodate larger audiences at special events.

All these group efforts pay off in simple yet profound ways for the young members of our community. "The best part of my day is when I am able to interact with the students and see robust learning in action," Daniel says. "I love experiencing the excitement of students coming to school every day. Seeing a third-grader master their times tables or a fifth-grader understand the principles of building a strong truss bridge design is priceless." 🐦

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Passing Along a “Cherished Jewel”

After more than a decade, Tina Simpson is bidding a bittersweet farewell to Toluca Lake. The mother of stars Jessica and Ashlee Simpson and president of the Jessica Simpson Collection brand has put her lakefront estate on the market, currently listed by **Craig Strong** for \$6,495,000. But she says she's eternally grateful for her time here. “When I first moved to L.A. in 1998, Toluca Lake was one of the first neighborhoods I fell in love with because it reminded me of Texas,” she says, recalling the feeling of community as residents strolled the sidewalks with their children and dogs. Her dream of dwelling in the area came true in 2012, when she learned through their mutual massage therapist that Jennifer Love Hewitt wanted to lease out her Toluca Lake Avenue house. “After my divorce, I was looking for a home that would give me a hug,” Simpson explains. “The second I heard it was in Toluca Lake, I knew it was kismet.”

She adds that “it was love at first sight” with the 1926 Spanish-style home, which she purchased in 2014. Simpson has fond memories of riding her bike around the neighborhood, walking to the Smoke House and going to “Patys for pancakes, Forman’s for a great burger and Don Cuco’s for the best Mexican food and margaritas hands down,” but time spent at home was even more special — whether hosting her daughter’s



Daniel Deitch

Tina Simpson



Adrian Van Anz/Craig Strong Group

200-guest engagement party, spending holidays with family and friends or just enjoying dinner in the front courtyard. “I had this big farm table with strung cafe lights that felt like you had been transported to the hills of Tuscany,” she remembers. “All the doors open up to the courtyard, creating this warm, romantic flow of dining al fresco under the stars.” And of course, there’s the “beyond magical” lakeside lifestyle, bonding with friendly neighbors, sipping wine

on sunset boat rides and watching spectacular Fourth of July fireworks. “Waking up in the morning, you grab your coffee, sit on the back porch, do your morning yoga and let that lake energy get your day going — guaranteed smile,” Simpson says. “If you had a rough day, you get on your paddleboat and churn out the frustrations

and suddenly all is right in the world.”

Simpson’s sojourn in Toluca Lake was all the more memorable because “I met the love of my life here,” she shares. She and fiancé Jon Goldstein are moving on to restore a 1935 historic estate in Encino, but she hopes the next lucky residents of her Toluca Lake refuge will love it as much as she has. “The opportunity to own a house on the lake is a cherished jewel,” she says. “The memories you create will last a lifetime.” 🐦



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Pets of Toluca



Shelby

Although her family has lived in Toluca Lake for almost 10 years, miniature dachshund Shelby just joined the household and the neighborhood last year. She loves walking down to Bob's Big Boy and stopping for a puppacino at Starbucks on the weekends. 🐾

Toluca Lake loves its animal residents, and they deserve the spotlight too! If you want to share your pet's tale, send a photo and brief description to stories@tolucalake.com and we might feature it online or in an upcoming issue.

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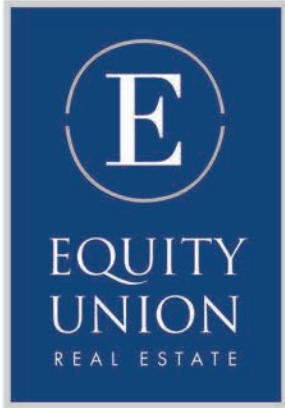
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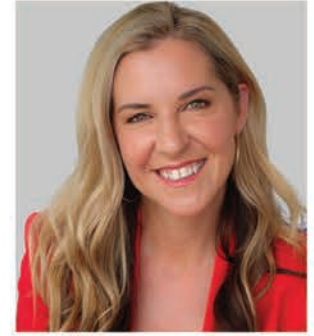
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Remembering Patrick Curtis

Toluca Lake's "Crossdraw Kid"

by JENNA ANDERSON

We were shocked and saddened to learn that Patrick Curtis passed away on November 24, 2022. Over the past three years, Patrick penned six articles for *Toluca Lake Magazine* about his fond memories of growing up in the neighborhood in the 1940s and 1950s. From taking a wild ride to the Smoke House in Clark Gable's sports car to trick-or-treating at Bela Lugosi's house, his tales blended humor, nostalgia and local history to paint a vivid picture of what life was like in midcentury Toluca Lake, when the polio epidemic was raging, movie Westerns were in their golden age, the drive-in at Bob's Big Boy was *the* Friday-night destination for area teens, and notable neighbors included Frank Sinatra and Audie Murphy.

Patrick's reminiscences chronicle an amazing series of brushes with fame. Born into a showbiz family (his father worked at Republic Pictures in Studio City, which specialized in Westerns), Patrick got his start in the entertainment industry as an infant when he played baby Beau Wilkes in *Gone With the Wind* in 1939. Though the role was uncredited and Patrick didn't even see the film until its rerelease in 1951, he was always happy to engage with its fans throughout his life, attending commemorative events and maintaining friendships with his co-stars — among them Mickey Kuhn, the last surviving credited cast member, who played an older version of the same character and died just four days before Patrick.



Collection of Patrick Curtis

Patrick and Annabel Curtis at the Audie Murphy Museum in Greenville, Texas, in May 2022. After seeing Patrick's story "Audie, the Colt and Me" in our winter 2021 issue, the Murphy family invited him to be the guest of honor at the annual Audie Murphy Day celebration, where he spoke to a crowd of several hundred attendees about his friendship with Murphy and how much they both enjoyed living in Toluca Lake.

Patrick described his early work as “a long, shaky career as a kid actor (usually the fourth kid on the right).” As a college student studying film, he had the opportunity to learn the production side of the business as a jack-of-all-trades behind the scenes on *Leave It to Beaver*, as well as occasionally appearing onscreen as one of Wally’s friends. The experience not only forged a 60-year friendship with actor Tony Dow, but also helped Patrick transition to a career as a writer, producer and director. His more than 35 movies and TV shows — a number of them featuring Raquel Welch, his wife from 1967 to 1973 — included *A Swingin’ Summer*, *The Sorcerers*, *Raquel*, *The Beloved*, *Hannie Caulder*, *The Avenging Angel* and *Meanwhile Back at the Ranch*. Continuing his love of Westerns, he was also a writer and producer for the Golden Boot Awards, which honored achievements in the genre for 25 years.

Of his many accomplishments and honors, Patrick always said that one of his proudest moments was receiving a Beautiful People Award from Saint Joseph Medical Center in recognition of his philanthropy in the community, which included producing and directing over a dozen public service announcements at no cost for Valley organizations such as MADD and Activities, Recreation and Care for Individuals With Developmental Disabilities. The experience was all the sweeter because the award was presented to him by his lifelong friend Clayton Moore, the star who played the Lone Ranger.

In conversation and in his writing, Patrick conveyed a genuine, boundless enthusiasm and admiration for the famous figures he came in contact with — particularly the cowboy heroes of his youth — and an ongoing affection for the Toluca Lake area, despite having spent the past 15 years enjoying the iconic Western landscapes of St. George, Utah, with his wife, Annabel. We loved being able to

Mike Forster/ANL/Shutterstock



share his wonderful stories with our readers and are so sorry we won’t get the chance to read the future installments he planned to write for us. At the time of his passing, we had one last unpublished article on file, and his family has graciously given us permission to print it in this issue as a tribute to Patrick. “Hoppy, Montie and the Cowgirl With the Lake-Blue Eyes” is a great example of his trademark self-deprecating wit, love of cowboy culture and ability to capture the intersections between the many famous figures who have passed through our neighborhood over the years. We hope it makes you smile and perhaps inspires you to check out some of the vintage Western films whose legacy Patrick was dedicated to celebrating. 🍷

HOPPY, MONTIE AND THE COWGIRL WITH THE LAKE-BLUE EYES

Memories of growing up in Toluca Lake during the golden years

by **PATRICK CURTIS**

Usually, being stuck in school on a beautiful spring day doesn't seem like the perfect way to enjoy the sixth grade. But for me and my pals at St. Charles School on Moorpark, this April Fools' Day would

be one that we would never forget. Hopalong Cassidy and Montie Montana were going to put on a Western show right in our schoolyard. As we looked out the window, we could see the ranch hands finishing setting up the animal pens and the trick roping arena for Montie, the crown prince of the roping cowboys.

Every eye was on the clock as it slowly clicked its way toward the 11:00 bell that would signal freedom. Sister Jean Dolores had it in her mind that the class would learn an extra 10 words in Latin before the bell. Not with Hoppy waiting in the yard, they wouldn't. I was sure she had never played cowboys as a child. I shuddered as a picture of the good Sister, resplendent in her black habit and shooting a pair of six-guns in the air, crossed my mind. I knew this thought was going to cost me a few extra prayers that night.

Butch Salas was the first one of the boys to start. By sitting a certain way in his chair and rubbing the seams of his bulletproof, rip-proof, stain-proof, atomic-bomb-proof, never-ever-wear-out, Catholic-school, gray corduroy pants together, Butch could make a sound



Collection of Patrick Curtis

SHINING STAR Toluca Lake resident and St. Charles Borromeo School student Eilene Janssen, Patrick Curtis' "cowgirl with the lake-blue eyes," was also a child actor with lead roles in four Western films in the early 1950s.



Collection of Patrick Curtis

HAPPY HOPPY Although the fictional cowboy hero Hopalong Cassidy was created by author Clarence E. Mulford in 1904, the name became indelibly linked to the actor William Boyd, who played the beloved character for nearly two decades — in a series of 66 movies from 1935 to 1948, and in radio and TV series that aired until 1952. Boyd acquired the white stallion Topper in 1937, and they continued to work together onscreen and in public appearances until their mutual retirement in 1954.

I also broke the same dreaded commandment: Don't *ever* mess with the nuns. God must be a cowboy, because just then, the bell finally rang.

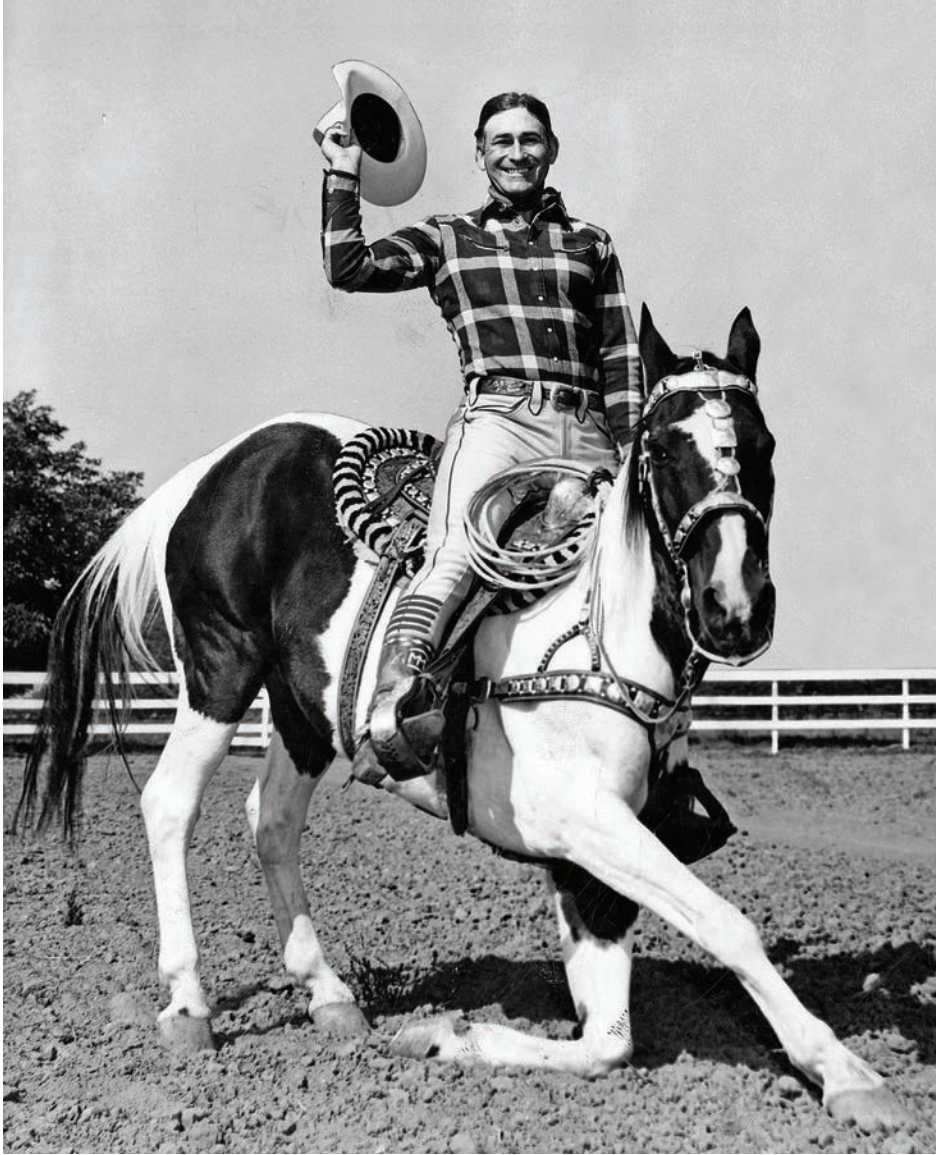
The whole school was seated on lunch tables and benches in a semicircle around the arena — little kids to the front, big kids to the back. This natural selection put the guys and me right in the middle. Sister Jean, yardstick in hand, patrolled the perimeter like a Marine drill sergeant, waiting for one of the boys to get out of line.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, here he is, in person, your favorite cowboy star ... Hopalong Cassidy and his wonder horse, Topper!” Hoppy rode into the ring, dressed in black from head to toe, sitting atop his beautiful white stallion. The crowd went wild. He dismounted and Topper was led away. Hoppy walked right up to

like tearing paper. Needless to say, the rest of the gang took up the clarion call. The class sounded like a bunch of crickets underwater. The girls, crisp in their blue-and-white uniforms, started to giggle. Sister Jean, all 4 feet 10 inches of her, turned and, in one fluid motion, threw a piece of chalk at Butch, who broke the 11th Commandment and ducked. The chalk, now with a mind of its own, headed right for Eilene Janssen's big, beautiful, lake-blue eyes. Without thinking, I reached up and intercepted the deadly missile, and, in an act of bravado, gently tossed the chalk back to Sister and took a bow. Thus,

the crowd, and for the next 10 minutes, in his unique voice and style, basically told us all to be good boys and girls. We should mind our parents and the nuns and remember to drink our Adohr milk. With that, the cowboys passed out small cartons of milk to everyone and Hoppy exited, stage right. *What?* Hoppy, Hoppy, do something, shoot something, punch a cowpoke, do anything! No, off he went. But gosh, he could have at least shown us his shootin' irons.

The crowd was getting restless. I was just about to volunteer to take a bunch of second-graders to the bathroom when Montie Montana came charging into



REAL-LIFE COWBOY Montie Montana (1910–1998) appeared as a stuntman and actor in about 20 films from the 1930s through the 1970s, often uncredited. Angelenos may remember him from his 60 consecutive appearances in the Tournament of Roses Parade or his frequent trick-riding and roping demonstrations at elementary schools — particularly in and around the Valley, where he lived for most of his adult life.

they signed 13-year-old Michael Chapin to play “Red” and 11-year-old Eilene to play “Judy.” This exciting series of Western films includes *Buckaroo Sheriff of Texas*, *The Dakota Kid*, *Arizona Manhunt* and *Wild Horse Ambush*. After the series, she starred opposite Shirley Booth in *About Mrs. Leslie* and played Bridey at 15 in *The Search for Bridey Murphy*. Eilene’s last movie Western was *Escape From Red Rock*, co-starring with Brian Donlevy.

With the decline of the movie Western in the ’50s, Eilene easily moved to television, appearing in dozens of shows, including *The Gene Autry Show*, *The Range Rider*, *Tales of Wells Fargo*, *Sugarfoot*, *Hopalong Cassidy* and *The Rifleman*. She then played the role of Donald O’Connor’s girlfriend on the *Texaco Star Theater* series for CBS.

the arena, spinning two huge ropes while standing on the saddle of his horse, Baron. What a showman! Montie proceeded to rope anything that moved. One rope, two ropes, three ropes, horses, cows, goats, chickens and a first-grader, who cried. He even roped Sister Jean’s yardstick, but unfortunately, moments later, he gave it back to her.

Montie then asked the lovely, talented Eilene Janssen to help with his show. Eilene had been in pictures since she was a beautiful baby. She was also my neighbor, a block or two away, on Whipple Street. To this day, she still owns the family home she was born in. Her mother designed the house and had it built around 1935. It may be the longest-held single-family-owned home in Toluca Lake. Her dad ran parts of the sound department at Universal Studios for over four decades.

In the late ’40s, Republic Pictures announced a nationwide search for two youngsters to portray a “junior” Roy Rogers and Dale Evans in their own series of films, “The Rough Ridin’ Kids.” After a long search,

I had worked with Eilene at Republic Pictures and other studios around town, and we have been friends since the first grade. Eilene and Montie did several rope tricks where she would skip in and out of the huge loops. For Montie’s finale, he asked two other big kids to come forward. Four stepped up, including Butch. “Well,” said Montie, “there are now five of you, and I only have two hands and four ropes,” as he spun them over his head. “I guess there’s only one thing to do.” He called to me in the crowd and asked me to join him on the back of Baron. Montie and his wife, Louise, were friends of my folks and knew me from the time I was a baby, but I couldn’t believe that I was suddenly a part of the act. I mounted up, took another lariat from the saddle pommel and swung it in a small circle over my head. Remembering everything that stuntman extraordinaire Yakima Canutt had taught us kids at Republic about roping, I didn’t look too bad. If only it had ended there!

“All right, boys and girls, here’s what we’re going to do,” Montie yelled, as he rode to one end of the



Collection of Patrick Curtis

Michael Chapin and Eilene Janssen with James Bell in *Wild Horse Ambush* (1952)



Collection of Patrick Curtis

schoolyard. "You five good-looking kids, spread yourselves out, and we'll gallop by and rope all of you." With that, Montie and I took off like the wind, five lassos whirling overhead. With two lariats in each hand, Montie was able to rope the first four kids. Now it was up to me. Eilene stood alone, untied and unafraid. I threw and connected; she was mine. But then, in one of those moments where a young boy's brain turns to

cow chips, I jumped off the back of Baron, ran to Eilene and wrapped the rope around and around her. Just as I was about to step back and raise my hands to what I expected would be cheers from the crowd, a lasso came from nowhere and encircled Eilene and me. Montie dallied the rope around the saddle horn and Baron backed up. The rope grew tighter and tighter, bringing Eilene and me nose to nose. I was about two years away

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Collection of Patrick Curtis

Janssen shared the screen with Hopalong Cassidy in *Borrowed Trouble* (1948).



Collection of Patrick Curtis

According to the National Rodeo Hall of Fame, Montie Montana's most impressive trick was roping four horses and riders at the same time, and he holds a world record for once capturing 11 mounted riders in a single loop. Perhaps his most famous stunt, however, was lassoing President Dwight D. Eisenhower during Ike's inaugural parade in 1953.

from really appreciating the position I was in. Eilene would *never, ever* appreciate it!

Suddenly, the always graceful Eilene tripped over my feet and fell backward, bringing me with her. The rope around both of us took up the slack and we slowly settled to the ground, still nose to nose, arms and legs akimbo. Now, the crowd cheered. The nuns went ballistic. Sister Jean was on me as fast as a minor miracle. How she could get me untied and



Collection of Patrick Curtis

Janssen was honored with a Golden Boot Award in 2005. Presented from 1983 through 2007 at an annual gala benefiting the Motion Picture & Television Fund, the awards honored the actors, writers, directors and stuntpeople who helped develop and preserve the Western tradition in film and television.

whap me with her yardstick at the same time has, to this day, never been fully explained.

All in all, the day was a rousing success. But I never again received a valentine from the girl with the big, beautiful lake-blue eyes. Not even when, over five decades later, I was the writer/producer of the Golden Boot Awards (the Oscars of Westerns) and we presented her with her very own Golden Boot at the Beverly Hilton Hotel for her contributions to the



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Oh, and about Sister Jean, our wonderful sixth-grade teacher: I don’t think you need to know a lot about college basketball to know a bit about St. Jean. For two decades or more, she has been spiritual adviser to the basketball team at Chicago’s Loyola University. Several years ago, when Loyola was in the Final Four, Sister Jean was featured on numerous television shows and publications. She even has her own bobblehead doll. Sister Jean has been a true inspiration to countless young people, still serving God and her loving students, at age 103!

In a lovely letter written to our class at St. Charles, Sister Jean had remembrances of many of our classmates. Her memory of me was that I was a “good square dancer”! Just what the skinny little 12-year-old boy in me wanted to hear! Oh, well ... “Yes, Sister.” 🐾

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Brilliant Blooms

by JENNA ANDERSON

photography by
DANIEL DEITCH

Welcome spring with floral inspiration from a pro.

After a cold and dreary winter, spring is the time to embrace all things bright and cheerful, and what better way than with a bountiful bouquet that showcases the best the season has to offer? “I am most inspired by spring flowers — the stunning colors and incredible fragrances that come from them,” says Kim Williams of The Enchanted Florist in Burbank, who offered us a behind-the-scenes look at how she puts that inspiration into action by assembling a showstopping seasonal display using some of the most in-demand spring blooms.

While Williams is a pro with more than 26 years of experience in crafting floral arrangements for movies and TV shows, corporate events, weddings and even the

Tournament of Roses Royal Court, she believes that it’s a creative pursuit everyone should be able to enjoy. “I so often hear, ‘I can’t arrange flowers, I am so terrible at it,’” she says. “Something I wish everyone knew about flower arranging is that it’s just practice; anyone can do it!” She offers some insight into the process on the following pages, but encourages those who want to try their hand at floral design to “simply choose what *you* like. There are no rules. Enjoy your creations. It’s nature and can’t be wrong.” After all, she adds, “It’s a scientific fact that flowers are uplifting, healing and bring joy and happiness. It is incredible to me that such beauty simply rises up from soil. If you love them like I do, simply surround yourself with them and they will make you happy.”







TAKING SHAPE

In addition to scent and color, visual variety is another important floral design consideration. Williams says using dried, preserved and freeze-dried flowers and foliage is trending as a way to bring in unexpected textures. “A great assortment leaves you with more to look at and enjoy!” she adds.



SPECTRUM FOR THE SENSES

To gather an assortment that screams spring, Williams selected flowers known for their fragrance, like freesia, peonies and sweet peas, as well as a range of colors from pastel to bright — including a couple of blue-tinted orchids for an element of surprise, a funky style she says is becoming increasingly popular. “The addition of unusual stem-dyed colors is really fun and exciting,” she says.

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

Incorporating further elements including poppies, tulips, hyacinths, hellebores, umbrella ferns and thistles, the finished product has a dynamic design that creates a natural feeling of spring bursting forth with wild energy. To achieve the effect you want in your own bouquets, “just play with it,” Williams counsels. “We rearrange things *all* the time.” And remember, it’s all about enjoyment: “The ideal floral arrangement is whatever makes you happy when you see it.”



Lasting Loveliness

“Fresh flowers and plants are more often a luxury item these days,” Williams notes, so whether you purchase an arrangement from an expert or try your hand at assembling your own, you’ll want those blossoms to stay vibrant for as long as possible. Always be sure to cut the bottom of the stems before placing them in water — “yes, even if you bought them five minutes ago,” she advises. Change the water every day, keep the water level high and be sure to display your bouquet in a cool location, as “a warm home or office is brutal on fresh flowers.” 🌸

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Committed to Community

Longtime residents Tim and Linda Hawkins show their love for the neighborhood by volunteering.

by **SOPHIA ISLAS**



Tim and Linda Hawkins

CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS Tim and Linda Hawkins on their wedding day in 1960. The couple grew up next door to each other in Atwater Village and started dating in high school.

Tim and Linda Hawkins are among Toluca Lake’s oldest residents, having lived in their Sancola Avenue home for the past 60 years. “When we moved here, we were very young, and now, we are the most senior people in our neighborhood,” Linda remarks. They are also some of the most involved members of the community. The Hawkinses have earnestly dedicated themselves to its betterment for a large part of their lives, volunteering countless hours to various organizations to help make the neighborhood a comfortable, safe and fun place to live, not only for the benefit of their family, but for their neighbors, friends and future generations of Tolucans.

Tim and Linda met growing up as next-door neighbors in Atwater Village, where they were raised by families who were deeply invested in the community and always volunteered whenever they could. They attended different area schools — Linda went to Glenfeliz Boulevard Elementary, Washington Irving Jr. High and John Marshall High; Tim went to Atwater Avenue Elementary, Our Mother of Good Counsel School and Notre Dame High — but remained close throughout their youth. “We were basically childhood sweethearts in high school,” Tim says, sharing that they started going to Bob’s Big Boy at 16 when they were dating.

Their relationship endured after graduation, when Tim enlisted in the Marine Corps. He served as a helicopter crew chief and was honorably discharged after four years at the rank of sergeant. He and Linda married soon after in 1960

and moved to Glendale. During the four years they lived there, they focused on their careers; Linda was a legal secretary with the L.A. City Attorney's Office, and Tim attended Glendale Community College and L.A. Trade Tech for a career in the elevator industry.

In 1963, after looking for homes in many areas, they relocated to Toluca Lake, purchasing their property for \$25,000 (which was a lot of money at the time, Tim notes). "It was a lovely small community with easy access to work and close to our family and relatives," Linda says of what drew them to the neighborhood. "When we moved here, there were many restaurants, such as Alfonse's, the China Trader, Sorrentino's, Kings Arms, Barone's and the Smoke House — most of which are gone now, much to our disappointment," Tim adds.

Two years later, they welcomed their son, Tom. As he got older, the Hawkinses, in a nod to their parents, began to get involved in their new community by volunteering to support their son's many youth activities. "We wanted our son to know what it was like to be involved in all the different things — he was in Indian Guides, Cub Scouts and Little League — and so, we just followed, volunteering in each of the things he did," Linda explains. "And it was important just for the upbringing of a child."

Linda became a member of the Toluca Lake Elementary School PTA and, after her son graduated, was hired on as the school's librarian, a position she held for 40 years before retiring about four years ago. "It was a wonderful job. I felt like, in a sense, I was volunteering ... and I still go back and I volunteer there now. My son, I think, appreciated the fact that we did all of that," she says, noting that all the teachers knew their family.

Through volunteering, the Hawkinses forged strong bonds and lasting connections with their neighbors. "We have



Daniel Deitch



LIGHT OF MY LIFE The Hawkinses' backyard features a sentimental artifact: the lamppost from Tim's childhood home under which he proposed to Linda shortly after completing his military service. Tim was able to save the lamppost when the city was in the process of removing them.



Tim and Linda Hawkins

CIVIC PRIDE Tim driving his military jeep in Toluca Lake's 75th anniversary parade in 1998



Tim and Linda Hawkins

NEIGHBORHOOD TRADITIONS Tim and Linda in the military jeep with friends on the Fourth of July in 2013



Tim and Linda Hawkins

SCHOOL DAYS Linda (standing) at the Toluca Lake Elementary School library during an open house event in 1978



Tim and Linda Hawkins

GIVING BACK As guild member for Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center, Linda (right) helped run the hospital's thrift shop for several years. "That was a favorite thing of mine. I really enjoyed that," she shares.

very dear friends of ours who we met through all our volunteer stuff, and they're still friends of ours, and we still do things with them. And that's very important," says Tim, sharing that he and neighbor Byron Hayes bonded through taking their children backpacking. "We ended up doing the John Muir Trail and still walk once a week."

The Hawkines naturally progressed to serving the community in larger capacities. Linda became a guild member at Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center, where she ran the hospital's thrift shop, organized fundraising events such as charity fashion shows and more. She has been a member for 43 years and remains on the guild's board to this day.

Tim became a founding member of the Greater

Toluca Lake Neighborhood Council, playing an instrumental role in getting the GTLNC recognized by the city and serving on a variety of boards alongside other dedicated neighbors — like Richard Bogy, Sol Ajalat, Byron Hayes, Steve Hampar and Jay Goldberg — for 10 years. He then served on the Toluca Lake Chamber of Commerce, co-chairing both the Pancake Breakfast and Holiday Open House for 15 years, and has remained on the board for the past 25 years. Outside of Toluca Lake, he serves on the board for Campo de Cahuenga and is an active member of St. Charles Borromeo Parish, which he's been a part of for over 60 years.

Tim playfully describes his community work as "grunt work," meaning that he "would help with

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Daniel Deitch

SELFLESS SERVICE

“Both of us actually come from families who always volunteered,” Tim says. “We were always in family-oriented things, so it just came naturally for us to stay involved in the community.”

July parades, the Christmas Caroling Truck, Little League parties and classic car nights at Bob’s Big Boy, where Linda, Tim and their son would showcase their white ’69 Mustang, ’43 Marine Corps jeep and black ’69 Mustang, respectively. It’s impossible for them to narrow down their favorites because “there were a lot of things that went on that you can’t pick one out and say, ‘Well this was the best.’ They were all good,” Tim says. “They were all a lot of fun. And the reason they were fun for us is because we always participated in them. And if you participate, it becomes fun. Whether it was through the Elementary School, the Little League, the Chamber or whatever, there were a lot of events that had

whatever needed to be done,” regardless of what group he was with. He loved being hands-on and doing things like running the kitchen during the Pancake Breakfast and putting up Neighborhood Watch signs (he and Jay Goldberg are responsible for hanging up all the original signs in the neighborhood). And while he’s taken a less active role to make way for the next generation of community leadership, he says that he and Linda still do what they can, like serving as block captains. “We just stay involved with the whole neighborhood because we know most everybody,” he says.

When asked about their favorite neighborhood traditions, the Hawkinses recount an exhaustive list of activities and events, including large Fourth of

a lot of community involvement, and that’s what we’ve always enjoyed — community involvement.”

As Toluca Lake approaches its 100th birthday, the Hawkinses reminisce about how they participated in the neighborhood’s 75th anniversary celebrations, which included a parade in which Tim drove his military jeep. Now, 25 years later, Tim is working with the Chamber to plan for centennial events this fall.

Despite their age, the Hawkinses show no signs of slowing down when it comes to giving their time and energy to the community they love and have called home all these years. As Linda puts it, “It’s important to be involved in your neighborhood activities because this is where you live and you want it to be great, and it is great here.” 🐾

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