

LOS ANGELES

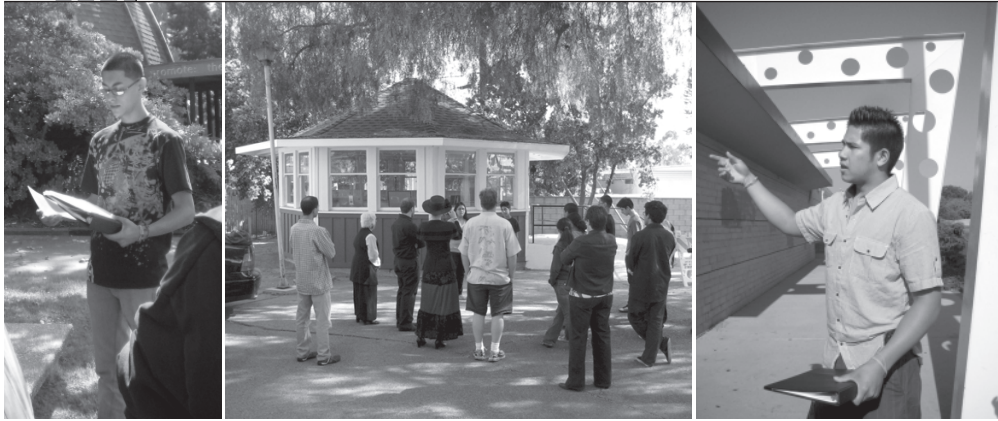
# CONSERVANCY

# news

AWARENESS  
ASSISTANCE  
ACTION

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Kennedy High School architecture students completed their first year of the Student Advocates program by leading peer tours of San Fernando Valley buildings they are nominating for landmark status. Sites include the "Onion" chapel (left), Lankershim Reading Room (middle), and Mission Hills Bowl (right).

## Kennedy High Student Advocates Complete Inaugural Year

by Adam Rubin

In May, the Los Angeles Conservancy completed the first year of our Student Advocates after-school program at the John F. Kennedy High School Architecture and Digital Arts Magnet in Granada Hills—and what a year it was!

Created in 2008 to build upon our existing relationship with Kennedy High, the program introduces an alternative aspect to the students' architecture and design education: the idea that while architects are trained primarily to create new buildings, creative and fulfilling careers also exist in the field of historic preservation and in the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

A total of twenty bright and talented individuals, ranging from freshmen to seniors, dedicated their time and energy to the Student Advocates program. They met every two weeks with Conservancy staff to discuss local architectural history and preservation fundamentals, all while working on semester-long historic preservation projects in their neighborhoods. You may also recognize the students from last fall's L.A. NOIR-architecture tour and this spring's City of the Seekers tour, on which they served as volunteer docents.

One of the goals of the Student Advocates program is to put the students in direct contact with people throughout the Los Angeles preservation community, from city planners to historic home dwellers. Throughout the year, the students met staff members from the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, the San Fernando Valley Historical Society, and Architectural Resources Group, as well as volunteers from the Conservancy's Modern Committee. They established personal and professional contacts with some of the many people in Southern California who consider our architectural history something of great and enduring value.

During the fall 2008 semester, the students participated in a historic resources survey for the proposed Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) of Balboa Highlands, a collection of mid-century modern tract homes developed by Joseph Eichler, located three miles north of the Kennedy High campus. The survey was completed in January and has since been submitted to the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission for evaluation.

Please see *STUDENT ADVOCATES* on page 4

## Century Plaza Hotel: One of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in America

by Mike Buhler

As you may know by now, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has included the Century Plaza Hotel on its 2009 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. This annual list highlights historic sites throughout the U.S. that face destruction or irreparable damage. While the National Trust for Historic Preservation typically unveils the list near its Washington, DC headquarters, officials traveled to Los Angeles to make this year's announcement, placing a national spotlight on the plight of the Century Plaza.

In December 2008, the new owners of the Century Plaza Hotel, Next Century Associates, announced plans to demolish the iconic 1966 hotel, designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki as the centerpiece of Century City, and replace it with two 600-foot towers. The new project would include a boutique hotel, condominiums, mixed-use space, and two acres of open space. Six months prior, after purchasing the Century Plaza, Next Century's Michael Rosenfeld had hailed the hotel as "a jewel in my hometown." (Please see March/April Conservancy News for more background.)

The National Trust for Historic Preservation announced its list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places at an April 28 news conference across the street from the Century Plaza. The event was attended by print, television, radio, and online media outlets, and garnered widespread local and national media coverage. Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, began the news conference by announcing all eleven sites (visit

Please see *CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL* on page 6

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## Los Angeles Conservancy

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The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works through education and advocacy to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

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Thanks to Julius Shulman and The Getty Research Institute for access to his photography archives.

## Letter from the Executive Director:

# New Methods, Same Need: Strength in Numbers

by Linda Dishman

As described in our cover story (and as you may have heard in the news), the National Trust for Historic Preservation recently named the Century Plaza Hotel to this year's list of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in America.

The Los Angeles Conservancy has been extremely fortunate to have had four local sites placed on this prestigious list over the years. Three of these sites have since been saved and revitalized: the world's oldest remaining McDonald's restaurant in Downey (listed in 1994), the former Cathedral of St. Vibiana in downtown Los Angeles (listed in 1997), and Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis House in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles (listed in 2005). The fourth, Santa Anita Racetrack (listed in 2000), still stands. Having a historic resource placed on this list is an honor, and the accompanying publicity helps greatly in garnering widespread support for preservation.

It's interesting to see how the process of advocating for an 11 Most site (or any endangered historic place) has evolved over the years. Clearly, the single greatest difference is in how we communicate with and engage people. In past years, we've informed and mobilized people through our member newsletter, other mailings, phone banks, and if we were lucky, through news coverage. After the 2009 11 Most list was announced, the Conservancy was able to notify 16,000 people instantly by e-mail and over 1,000 "fans" (and countless others) on our Facebook page.

Within 48 hours after the announcement, hundreds of people had taken our online pledge of support for preserving the Century Plaza Hotel (and given us their contact information so we can keep them informed of the issue as it progresses). As of press time, that number had grown to nearly 1,000. Blog postings on the issue spread the word even further, and reader comments offer invaluable insight. We have yet to take full advantage of social media for preservation advocacy, but we're working on it.

Of course, traditional media still play a central role in raising awareness of critical issues such as the Century Plaza Hotel. Yet print coverage is increasingly rare, and nothing can match social media for instant notification, fast mobilization, and true interaction.

The means may change, but the critical need for strength in numbers stays the same. **If you haven't yet taken the pledge to support preservation of the Century Plaza Hotel, please do so today.** It's fast, easy, and free. Simply visit our website at [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org), e-mail [info@laconservancy.org](mailto:info@laconservancy.org), or call the office at (213) 623-2489. I cannot overstate the importance of each and every voice in our ability to prevent the senseless demolition of the Century Plaza. As always, thank you for your support.



## Nominations Sought for 2009 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

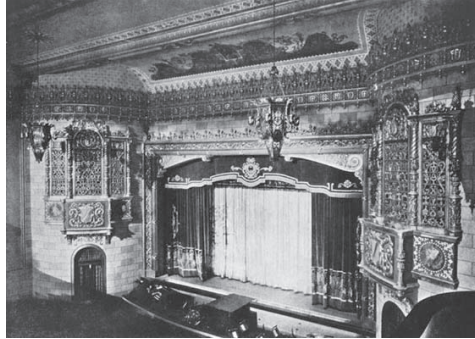
Celebrate California's heritage by participating in the 2009 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards, honoring organizations or public agencies whose contributions demonstrate notable achievements in preserving the heritage of California. Nominations are being accepted through **Friday, July 31, 2009**.

Sponsored by the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and California State Parks, the Governor's Historic Preservation Awards program has presented the awards annually since 1986. The program aims to recognize meaningful achievements in historic preservation and increase public awareness, appreciation, and support for historic preservation throughout the state. If you know of an outstanding organization or agency deserving of recognition at this year's awards, visit [ohp.parks.ca.gov](http://ohp.parks.ca.gov) for more information.



# Preservation Issues In The News

by Mike Buhler, Flora Chou, Karina Muñiz, and Marcello Vavala



LEFT: The Vega Building that once surrounded the Golden Gate Theatre (image c. 1955). Photo from LAC archives. CENTER: Historic image of the theatre interior. Photo courtesy Los Angeles Public Library. RIGHT: The Golden Gate Theatre as it stands today. Photo by LAC staff.

## Golden Gate Theatre

In March 2009, the County of Los Angeles released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for a proposal to convert the long-vacant Golden Gate Theatre into a CVS drugstore. Built in 1927 at the prominent corner of Whittier and Atlantic Boulevards in unincorporated East Los Angeles, the Spanish Churrigueresque-style theatre is one of a handful of neighborhood movie palaces remaining in Southern California.

The theatre was developed by Peter Snyder, known as the “Father of the East Side,” and designed by William and Clifford Balch, architects of the El Rey Theatre on Wilshire Boulevard and the Fox Theatre in Pomona. The Vega Building, an ornate historic retail building that once surrounded the theatre, suffered damage from the Whittier Earthquake and was demolished in the early 1990s. The theatre has sat vacant for over a decade.

In early May, the Conservancy submitted lengthy comments on the Draft EIR, noting that any alterations should meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and maintain the theatre’s listing in the National Register of Historic Places. We also recommended specific design changes that would leave the interior largely intact and visible to the public, and requested that the EIR thoroughly examine alternatives that are more compatible with the theatre’s historic function. A group of residents recently established the Committee to Save the Golden Gate Theatre to advocate for different uses that support local arts and culture.

Conservancy staff testified at the May 13 hearing before the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, along with many community members from East Los Angeles. The Final EIR is expected to be released in August 2009, when the project will again go before the Regional Planning Commission.

## Bringing Back Broadway

The Conservancy remains an active partner in Los Angeles City Councilmember José Huizar’s Bringing Back Broadway effort. Fifteen months after its inception, the program has produced two major planning documents to guide future improvements and development along the historic corridor: Design Alternatives for the Broadway Streetscape Master Plan and the Broadway Entertainment Community Design Overlay District guidelines and standards. The latter are based largely on the Conservancy’s Downtown Design Guidelines, which were completed in 2002 as part of our long-running Broadway Initiative.

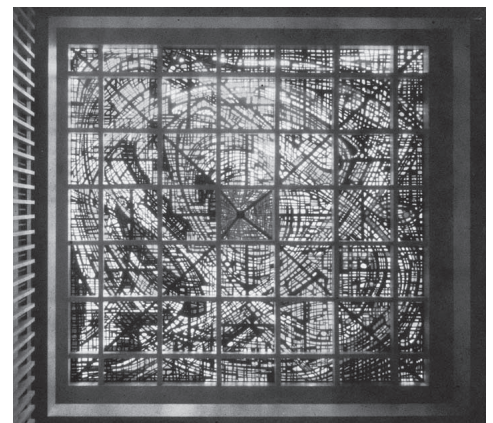
These concepts and draft projects were presented to the downtown community at a public workshop on May 27. You can see them online at [bringingbackbroadway.com](http://bringingbackbroadway.com).

## Columbia Savings Building

The Columbia Savings building (Irving Shapiro, 1965), located at the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and La Brea Avenue, is slated for demolition to make way for the massive Wilshire and La Brea Project, which includes 480 residential units and retail and restaurant space occupying the entire block. Despite detailed information submitted by the Conservancy on the bank building’s significance, the Final EIR for the project, released in February 2009, nonetheless concludes that it does not qualify as a historical resource under the California Environmental Quality Act. Consequently, the EIR does not evaluate any alternatives to the building’s demolition.

In an effort to definitively prove the building’s historic status—and require consider-

ation of preservation alternatives—the Conservancy has been working with Historic Resources Group to nominate the Columbia Savings building for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. The nomination is funded by the Modern Committee’s Advocacy Fund. Although the State Historical Resources Commission will likely not vote on the nomination until late 2009, the Conservancy submitted the completed nomination to the city on May 27, at an initial hearing on the project’s Final EIR.



TOP: Postcard image of the Columbia Savings building, 1965. Courtesy Marcello Vavala. BOTTOM: The 1,300-square-foot *dalle-de-verre* skylight designed by artist Roger Darricarrere. Photo by David Ruth.

## Thanks for Your Feedback!

Many thanks to the more than 1,300 Conservancy members who completed our 2009 Member Communications Survey. Naturally, your input is crucial to our ability to communicate well with members. Here's a quick summary of the survey results.

Happily, more than 90 percent of respondents feel well informed about Conservancy efforts. More than 90 percent also read at least half of the newsletter. The most popular types of newsletter content are (in order of importance) preservation issues, walking tours, and events.

You suggested a wide range of interesting topics you'd like to read about. By far, the most popular were specific historic sites and neighborhoods, upcoming events, and efforts and events by like-minded organizations. We're thrilled that our members are so actively engaged in local history and want to see more of the great places that make Los Angeles unique. Of course, we had many more suggestions, ranging from "how-to" articles and calls to action, to photos and human interest profiles.

In terms of timing, the vast majority of respondents would like to hear from the Conservancy once a month. However, replies were pretty evenly split in terms of **how** you would like to hear from us (print, web/e-mail, or both). Interestingly, only 40 percent of respondents subscribe to our e-mail newsletter, Conservancy E-News, although nearly 85 percent have e-mail access. We encourage everyone with access to subscribe to E-News, which supplements the print newsletter with breaking news and interactive content. (To sign up, visit our website at [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org).) We were thrilled to find that a full third of respondents are on Facebook (if you haven't yet become a Conservancy fan, please do!).

We will use the survey results in planning improvements to our print and online offerings. Although it's impossible to fully satisfy every single member, we'll do our absolute best to continue sharing the content you need and enjoy in the most effective ways possible.

If you have comments or would like more information about the survey results, please contact Constance Farrell, communications coordinator, at [cfarrell@laconservancy.org](mailto:cfarrell@laconservancy.org) or (213) 430-4215. Thanks again!



The Conservancy Student Advocates and staff pose before the 1964 "Onion" sanctuary at the Sepulveda Unitarian Universalist Society in North Hills. Top (L-R): Aaron Kahlenberg, Lupe Mora, Kevin Riewthong, Pablo Avila, Darin Reyes, Jose Benavides, Sammy Avila, Adam Rubin. Bottom (L-R): Ashley Leib, Therese Stoppiello, Martin Guzman-Garcia, Misael Perez. Photo by LAC staff.

## STUDENT ADVOCATES continued from page 1

The Student Advocates began the spring semester by selecting historic buildings in their own neighborhoods to research and nominate for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) status. The students worked in small groups to create landmark proposals for several historic San Fernando Valley buildings. They nominated the Lankershim Reading Room (1904) in Mission Hills, the last remaining building from the original ranch of one of the Valley's founding families. They also selected the Sepulveda Unitarian Universalist Society's "Onion" chapel (1964) in North Hills, a bulbous, experimental church building that has served as a venue for non-traditional services, absurdist plays, Vietnam War protests, and even a psychedelic "happening" hosted by countercultural author Ken Kesey.

In completing their nominations, the students conducted original research, photographed the buildings, wrote historic context statements and architectural descriptions, and toured each site with their peers. Once the proposals are submitted to the Office of Historic Resources, the students will be invited to present their work before the Cultural Heritage Commission later this year. We will keep you posted on the progress of the students' nominations as they make their way through City Hall.

In exchange for their dedication and effort, the Student Advocates received valuable service learning credits which are required for high school graduation—but they got much more than that. Two participants, Lupe Mora and Darin Reyes, were accepted into Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's High School Architecture Summer Career Workshop. Student Advocate and graduating senior Irene Guzman-Garcia wants to pursue a career in architectural history and is featured in the Conservancy's new membership brochure. We wish Irene and other graduating seniors Chris Avalos, Myra Correa, and Kevin Riewthong the best of luck in their future studies, and we hope to see the rest of the group return to the program next year!



# Summer Evening Tours Start July 22

Summer has come, and with it the Conservancy's popular "Downtown at Sunset" walking tours. This year we feature two tours that are no longer part of our regularly scheduled weekend tours: Little Tokyo and City Hall. In addition to these two tours, we will be offering slightly shorter versions of some of our regular walking tours.

Two different tours will be offered each Wednesday evening from July 22 through the end of August. Tours start at 5:30 p.m. and last approximately 1-3/4 hours. Tours offered include Art Deco, City Hall, Evolving Skyline, Little Tokyo, and Union Station.

The **Art Deco** tour highlights the architecture and ornamentation of buildings from the 1920s and '30s, featuring rich materials and classic geometric design.

The **City Hall** tour explores the fascinating history and magnificent architecture of Los Angeles' great 1928 civic building.

The **Evolving Skyline** tour explores the architecture and development of the Central Business District and Bunker Hill.

The **Little Tokyo** tour travels through the cultural and historic heart of the Japanese community in Los Angeles, once the largest in the United States.

The **Union Station** tour offers an in-depth look at this iconic L.A. landmark, the last great railway station built in America.

Tours are \$5 for Los Angeles Conservancy members and children 12 and under; \$10 for the general public; reservations are required. Space is limited, so reserve now! Visit [laconservancy.org/tours](http://laconservancy.org/tours) or call (213) 623-2489.



## SCHEDULE

<b>July 22</b> Art Deco Little Tokyo	<b>July 29</b> City Hall Evolving Skyline
<b>August 5</b> Evolving Skyline Little Tokyo	<b>August 12</b> Art Deco City Hall
<b>August 19</b> Little Tokyo Union Station	<b>August 26</b> City Hall Union Station

LEFT: The Far East Building in Little Tokyo, recipient of a 2004 Conservancy Preservation Award. Photo courtesy of Little Tokyo Service Center CDC.

## Workshop Encourages Retail in Historic Downtown

On May 9, the Conservancy and the Historic Downtown Retail Project of the Valley Economic Development Center (VEDC) held a free workshop for existing and potential small business owners in historic downtown. The event raised awareness about resources available to help existing small business owners, as well as those considering opening new locations downtown. This was the seventh such workshop co-sponsored by the Conservancy since 2003, made possible with generous grant support from the Bank of America Foundation.

About twenty business owners attended the workshop at Clifton's Cafeteria, one of many longtime downtown businesses that have benefited from free technical assistance provided by the Historic Downtown Retail Project. With panelists from Bank of America, the Community Development Department of the City of Los Angeles, VEDC, and the Downtown Center Business Improvement District, attendees learned about current downtown demographics and economic assistance programs, including low-interest loans, no-fee business assistance, and tax incentives. Conservancy staff provided Spanish-language translation services.

## Volunteer Profile: Regina O'Brien

by *Connie Humberger*

REGINA O'BRIEN is a twelve-year member of the Conservancy's Modern Committee (ModCom) and currently serves as its residential chair. Her considerable talent, creativity, and focus have led to a range of accomplishments, both inside and outside the Conservancy.



Hailing from Newport Beach, Regina attended the University of Irvine, the University of Madrid, and UCLA, where she received a degree in photography. She also holds a degree in architecture from Otis College of Art and Design.

Regina has a wide range of interests, both personal and professional. She works in the entertainment industry as a production designer and set decorator, including past stints as set decorator for the TV series *American Dreams* and production designer for the Oscar-nominated documentary *Operation Homecoming*. She directed a film about Frank Lloyd Wright that was screened at the 2006 Silver Lake Film Festival, and her photography has been in several gallery shows. In the 1980s, she even ran an avant-garde nightclub in downtown L.A. called Plastic Passion.

Her interest in architecture led Regina to the Modern Committee in 1997, when she took the Cruising Industrial Los Angeles tour. As residential chair, she leads ModCom's efforts to preserve modernist homes, including coordinating the nomination of the extant Case Study Houses for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. She has volunteered for many architectural tours by the Conservancy and other organizations.

Regina is proud to be engaged to home builder Hardy Wronske of Heyday Partnership, who built their current home in Lincoln Heights.

Thank you, Regina, for all the energy, enthusiasm, and time you devote to the appreciation and preservation of Los Angeles' built environment.



(L-R) Board Members Maura Johnson, Clare De Briere, and Charmaine Atherton with Bank of America representative Gail Lannoy at the Last Remaining Seats opening night reception. Photo by Gary Leonard.

## Donors Celebrate Opening of Last Remaining Seats

The Conservancy’s 23rd annual Last Remaining Seats film series kicked off May 27 with a sold-out screening of the Robert Redford and Paul Newman classic, *The Sting*, at the magnificently restored Orpheum Theatre in downtown L.A. Pop culture enthusiast and author Charles Phoenix hosted the evening, interviewing *The Sting* Academy Award-winning producer Tony Bill and screenwriter David Ward. Legendary organist Bob Mitchell performed on the theatre’s Mighty Wurlitzer organ before the show.

Last Remaining Seats sponsors, Conservancy Benefactor and Cornerstone members, and other major Conservancy donors were invited to a pre-show reception with *Sting*-themed décor by Loft Appeal and *hors d’oeuvres* by Colori Kitchen.

We offer special thanks to our sponsors who made this event possible: Evening Sponsors Steve and Cathy Needleman, owners of the Orpheum Theatre; and VIP Reception Sponsor Bank of America.



(R-L) Conservancy Executive Director Linda Dishman with Board Member Robert Foster and his wife Linnie. Photo by Gary Leonard.

## CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL continued from page 1

*PreservationNation.org/11Most* for the full list). He ended the list with the Century Plaza Hotel, introducing Linda Dishman, the Conservancy’s executive director, who spoke briefly about the significance of the hotel and our resolve to save it.

Academy Award-winning actress and Conservancy Board Member Diane Keaton ended the conference with passionate remarks. She described the Century Plaza’s unique, elegant design as “sexy,” comparing its juxtaposition with surrounding skyscrapers to “Sophia Loren in the 1960s, encircled by an adoring mass of male fans.” Keaton lamented the loss of other Century City landmarks, dismissed Next Century’s development plan as “greenwashing,” and reaffirmed her longstanding commitment to preservation.

“L.A. can’t withstand a replay of the Ambassador Hotel,” she stated. “Three years ago, I spoke at the Ambassador’s wake. I said then, that next time, I’d try harder. Well, here we are, with another historic hotel on the precipice of oblivion. I’m trying harder. Why don’t you?”

The news conference launched the Conservancy’s public engagement regarding the Century Plaza. Our website lists five simple ways you can help save the hotel from senseless demolition. The first step is simply pledging your support for the hotel’s preservation. At press time, nearly 1,000 people had pledged their support from nineteen states and twenty-two countries. By pledging your support, you add your voice to the growing call for preservation, while making sure you’ll receive the latest updates on our efforts to save the Century Plaza. To take the pledge and/or for more information, please visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org) or call the office at (213) 623-2489.

The Conservancy looks forward to working with concerned citizens and local elected officials to save the Century Plaza. At press time, the Los Angeles City Council election in District 5 (which includes the hotel) had yet to be certified following the May 19 runoff, though Paul Koretz was the projected winner over David Vahedi. However, both candidates voiced support for the hotel’s preservation during their campaigns, with Koretz even sending a letter to voters promising to do everything possible to stop the demolition of the iconic hotel.



Minoru Yamasaki, one of only about a dozen architects ever featured on the cover of TIME magazine (January 18, 1963). Photo reprinted through the courtesy of the Editors of TIME Magazine © 2009 Time Inc.



The curved facade of the Century Plaza Hotel, looking west from Avenue of the Stars. Photo by Lizy Moromisato.

# MARCH 18 / MAY 21 MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Los Angeles Conservancy would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of our new Supporting members, and the new and renewing members of our Sustaining, Benefactor, and Cornerstone groups.

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The Los Angeles Conservancy is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization. Please mail or fax (credit card payments) this form to receive your membership card entitling you to a full year of benefits. Thank you, and welcome to the Los Angeles Conservancy!

Los Angeles Conservancy  
Attn: Membership  
523 West Sixth Street, Suite 826  
Los Angeles, CA 90014  
(213) 623-2489 ■ fax: (213) 623-3909



## CONSERVANCY WALKING TOURS

Walking tours begin at 10 a.m. except where noted. Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; \$10 for the general public. Walk-ins are accepted on Art Deco, Evolving Skyline, and Historic Core. Pre-payment is required on all others. For details and reservations, visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org) or call (213) 623-2489.

### WEEKLY TOURS

#### **Art Deco**

Every Saturday

#### **Biltmore Hotel**

Every Sunday, 2 p.m.

#### **Broadway Historic Theatre District**

Every Saturday

#### **Historic Core**

Every Saturday

### BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS

#### **Angelino Heights**

First Saturday

#### **Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main**

Second and Fourth Saturdays

#### **Evolving Skyline**

First and Third Saturdays

#### **Union Station**

Third Saturday

#### **Union Station Family Tour**

Fourth Saturday, 11 a.m.



## Los Angeles Conservancy

523 West Sixth Street, Suite 826

Los Angeles, California 90014

[laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org)

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## HELP SAVE THE CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL!

We need your help to prevent the senseless demolition of the Century Plaza Hotel. You can pledge your support, join our growing coalition of organizations, weigh in on our Facebook discussion, and more.

For details, visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org) or call (213) 623-2489.

Thanks for your support!

Photo courtesy  
Yamasaki Associates.

### DONATE TODAY!

Contributions to the Conservancy's Preservation Advocacy Fund will directly support the fight to save the Century Plaza Hotel and can be made online at [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org).

