



# THE NEWS

Pasadena, California

Celebrating 64 years  
of community service

Summer 2026

WPRA IN MOTION

CITY IN MOTION

LAND USE/PLANNING

PUSD IN MOTION

2026 WPRA ANNUAL MEETING

COMMUNITY

OPEN SPACE/NATURAL RESOURCES

## Reduce wildfire risk by unleashing the power of the neighborhood

The West Pasadena Residents' Association convened its 2026 annual meeting — its 64th — on June 4 in the Maranatha High School Student Center. The meeting attracted an audience of nearly 200 city residents and business associates. The meeting program theme was to help residents better protect life and property from the threat of wildfires by unleashing the power of *the neighborhood*.

### Proceedings begin

Sounding the figurative opening gong of the 2026 WPRA annual meeting, event emcee **Blaine Cavena** welcomed the assemblage and introduced the presentation of colors by the Scout Troop 131, sponsored by St. Philip the Apostle Church, and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Cavena welcomed special guests Pasadena Mayor **Victor Gordo**; District 6 Councilmember **Steve Madison**; **Amaya Rucker**, representing U.S. Rep. **Judy Chu** (D-28); and Fire Chief **Chad Augustin**, Pasadena Fire Department.

Additionally, he recognized **Gil Dominguez**, director of Maranatha High School Operations and Facilities, and his staff, who made the meeting venue available and donated beverages; **Rachael Kinney** for the sweet treats served during the meet-and-greet segment of the meeting; and **Bobbie Ferguson**, Pasadena Media's chief production officer and her team, for recording the meeting, which is now available on the WPRA website.

Cavena gave special recognition to the following WPRA directors, who worked diligently to make the meeting a success: **Carlos Javelera**, **Lee Wallace**, **Gretchen Brickson**, **Jackie English**,



Incoming WPRA President Carlos Javelera (left) presents the Dorothy Lindsey Community Service award to Blaine Cavena, who has served the WPRA for 25 years, 20 of which as treasurer. Cavena joins only three others — Claire Bogaard, Mic Hansen, and Vince Farhat — who have earned this honor.  
*Photo by Bob Reiter*

### Joan Hearst, Susan Kinney, and Pete Ewing.

### Election of directors, incoming president's address

WPRA members in the audience unanimously elected the 2026-2027 WPRA Board of Directors. [See page 2 for a listing of board members and officers]

Addressing the very real risk of life and home to wildfire risk, incoming President **Carlos Javelera** said, "The risk is no longer theoretical — it's real, growing, and increasingly complex. The good news is that we've already made meaningful progress." [Editor's note: See page 2 for incoming President Carlos Javelera's related message.]

### A peaceful transition of power

Javelera marked the close of outgoing President **Pete Ewing's** presidency with

the customary awarding of the gavel. [Turn to page 9 for the related photo.] Although Ewing could not be present at the meeting, Javelera applauded Ewing's years of service to the WPRA and the city at large.

"This, of course, hasn't been Pete's first rodeo," said Javelera. Ewing also served as WPRA president in 1993 and 1994. "Inexplicably, 30 years later, Pete again agreed to lead the WPRA," said Javelera.

### Rewarding exemplary behavior

Each year, the WPRA recognizes individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to our community. This year, incoming President Carlos Javelera presented the special Dorothy Lindsey Community Service award to Blaine Cavena, who has served the WPRA for 25 years, 20 of which as treasurer.

Continued on page 9

- For more coverage of the WPRA 2026 annual meeting, turn to pages 8-11.
- To watch the annual meeting (thanks to Pasadena Media) visit: [youtube/04SLV1sDfXs](https://youtube.com/04SLV1sDfXs) or scan the accompanying QR code with your smartphone camera.



- Answers to the audience's questions during the meeting will appear on the WPRA website and in the next issue of this newsletter.

# Now it's time to get the 'bigger boat' we need — together

By Carlos Javelera  
President, WPRA

In the 1970s movie "Jaws", a seaside community is terrorized by a massive great white shark. When the local chief of police finally sees the size of the shark and recognizes the scale of the threat, he delivers the now-famous line: "We're going to need a bigger boat."

That moment captures the realization that the challenge to that community was more, much more than they'd prepared for. Our neighborhoods are facing their own version of that moment.

Wildfire risk is not theoretical — it's real, growing, and increasingly complex. The good news is that we've already made meaningful progress to mitigate much of that risk.

- We've formed Firewise communities and taken steps to more effectively manage living and dead plants and trees in the Arroyo Seco.
- We've run a pilot program to determine if goats can consume wildfire fuel in the Arroyo Seco.
- And the City is exploring thermal monitoring technology to identify hot spots before they erupt into fire.



Carlos Javelera (Photo by Bob Reiter)

That is all to say, we're not at zero. These are real steps that are making a difference.

But like the sheriff in "Jaws", we recognize that more is needed.

Looking ahead, the focus must be on ensuring proper budgeting, advancing the most effective implementation of Zone Zero, and continuing to strengthen coordination between residents, organizations, and the City. But preparation at the household and neighborhood levels — where defensible space and smart design meet — is critical.

This is where the power of neighborhoods comes in. When communities organize, share responsibility, and act together, they become far more resilient than individuals. Protection and prevention are not just policies. They are collective commitments.

The WPRA remains deeply engaged in this priority, while also continuing our work on traffic concerns, the future of the 710 ditch, and land-use planning. These issues are all connected by a common goal: protecting and strengthening our community for the long term.

We've seen the risks. We've made progress. Now it's time to make sure we get the "bigger boat" we need — together.

## Your city (and the WPRA) needs you!

Want to make a real difference in your community? By committing as few as three hours a month you can help your city and the WPRA be more efficient and effective — and no special skills are required. If we've piqued your interest, please send an email to [president@wpra.net](mailto:president@wpra.net) and note any specific interests or special skills you have.

## 2026 - 2027

### Officers

**President: Carlos Javelera**

[president@wpra.net](mailto:president@wpra.net)

**Vice President, Susan Kinney**

[vp@wpra.net](mailto:vp@wpra.net)

**Treasurer: Dave Bise**

[treasurer@wpra.net](mailto:treasurer@wpra.net)

**Secretary: Lee Wallace**

[secretary@wpra.net](mailto:secretary@wpra.net)

- Jay Davis
- Jacky English, Wildfire Prevention chair
- Pete Ewing, 710 reconnecting chair
- Mic Hansen
- Joan Hearst
- Chuck Hudson, Communications chair
- Mark Mastromatteo, Education chair
- Ann Scheid

### Board of Directors

- Dan Beal
- Gretchen Brickson, Traffic chair
- Cynthia Cannady
- Blaine Cavena

**Mission:** Founded in 1962, the West Pasadena Residents' Association is dedicated to maintaining the character of our community and enhancing the quality of life in west Pasadena.

**Service area:** The WPRA service area is bounded on the north by Colorado Boulevard, on the east by Fair Oaks Avenue and on the south and west by the city limits.

All WPRA activities are funded through membership dues and contributions. The WPRA receives no public funding and has no paid employees. The WPRA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public benefit corporation. Contributions and donations are fully deductible to the extent permitted by law.



The News is mailed each quarter to more than 9,000 homes and businesses in the 91105 and 91103 ZIP codes and beyond.

**Editor:** Chuck Hudson, [editor@wpra.net](mailto:editor@wpra.net)

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Visit our Facebook page at [facebook.com/westpasadena](https://www.facebook.com/westpasadena)

**LOW-FLYING HELICOPTERS, SOUNDS OF EXPLOSIONS, AND SIMULATED WEAPON-FIRE RATTLED** communities in Los Angeles and Orange counties on June 3. In Pasadena, the event was conducted at the former site of the St. Luke Medical Center on Washington Boulevard. The FBI reported that the exercises represented interagency training ahead of the special upcoming Southern California events, including the World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. *Source: Pasadena Star-News*

**CITY COUNCIL APPROVED** a new five-year, \$10.6 million contract with Pasadena Humane. The total expenditure represents a 23% increase over the previous five-year agreement. The increased cost reflects rising direct-service costs and demand for animal services. *Source: City of Pasadena*

**MANAGEMENT OF NASA'S JET PROPULSION LABORATORY WILL NOW BE SUBJECT** to a competitive bidding process — for the first time in JPL's history. Now, Caltech will have to compete for control of the La Cañada-Flintridge institution it has managed since NASA's inception in 1958. *Source: LA Times*

**PASADENA'S PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT IS PREPARING** for major budget and, possibly, staffing reductions as nine grants expire. As a result, the department may have to cut nearly \$3 million from its programs tied to homeless outreach, disease investigation, H5N1 bird flu surveillance, nutrition education, and community health workers. On a positive note, voters recently approved Measure ER (Essential Services Restoration Act) that will increase the county's general sales tax by a half-cent (to 10.25%, from the current 9.75%) effective Oct. 1 and in place through Oct. 1, 2031. County officials said the measure could generate about \$1 billion annually, with the goal of offsetting reductions in state and federal funding for various healthcare programs. Pasadena's health department could receive as much as \$1 million a year from the measure. *Sources: Pasadena Now and NBC4 Southern California (KNBC-TV)*

**THE ROSE BOWL STADIUM IS UNDERGOING** a \$30 million overhaul of its south end, which faces the San Gabriel Mountains. The plan is to transform 5,000 underutilized bench seats into a field-level club featuring slightly

more than 1,000 VIP seats. The overhaul is expected to be finished in time for UCLA's football home-game opener on Sept. 12. *Source: LA Times*

**THE CITYWIDE HOURLY MINIMUM WAGE INCREASED** on July 1 to \$18.57 from \$18.04 and applies to all Pasadena businesses. *Source: City of Pasadena*

**AN AUDIT OF THE PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT'S USE** of Flock, an automated system of license-plate reader cameras, found no evidence of misuse or unauthorized access. The Flock system uses AI-enabled cameras to snap photos of every vehicle that passes, creating a digital "fingerprint" that includes data as personal as bumper stickers or gun racks. *Source: Pasadena Now and The Washington Post*

**THE CITY OF PASADENA PERMIT CENTER LOBBY, AT 175 N. GARFIELD AVE., HAS TEMPORARILY CLOSED** to make way for the Phase II renovation of the George Ellery Hale Building, a 1929. All in-person services — building permits, plan checks, or face-to-face conversations with City inspectors — have been moved to Hearing Room 120, accessible only through the City employee entrance on Ramona Street from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and on alternating Fridays. The renovation work will likely be completed by June of 2027. *Source: Pasadena Now*

**PASADENA WATER AND POWER HAS COMPLETED** its annual utility pole inspection program. Most inspections took place in ZIP codes 91103, 91104, 91105, and 91107. *Source: City of Pasadena*

**CITY COUNCIL APPROVED** a contract of up to \$781,000 for storm drain repairs and improvements as part of ongoing efforts to reduce the risk of floods across the city. *Source: Pasadena Now*

**THE CITY OF PASADENA IS CELEBRATING** a major milestone in its life sciences and innovation economy: its BioCollaborative Incubator (PBC) marked 22 years of operation and recently welcomed its 100th company. The incubator has played a vital role by providing laboratory space, hands-on training, and support for emerging biotech and environmental technology companies. *Source: Pasadena Now*

**PASADENA FIRM TETRA TECH AND ITS JOINT-VENTURE PARTNER HAVE BEEN AWARDED** a \$99 million, five-year contract by the U.S. Navy to provide engineering and design services for military infrastructure across the southeastern United States. *Source: Pasadena Now*

**IN APRIL, CITY COUNCIL SENT** a clear message to City staff: The five budget priorities identified last December are not aspirations. Rather, they are essential funding commitments that must be met. The priorities are: (1) modernizing fire department facilities and enhancing fire prevention, (2) improving roadways and implementing pedestrian- and bike-safety strategies, (3) investing in year-round shelters and transitional housing, (4) moving Pasadena Water and Power decisively toward a carbon-free power generation future, and (5) implementing the City's economic development strategy. *Source: Pasadena Now*

**CITY COUNCIL RECENTLY APPROVED** electric rate increases to help fund major upgrades to the city's power system. Pasadena Water and Power will raise electricity rates across all customer classes by 7% three times: April 2026 (already applied), October 2026, and March 2027. *Source: Pasadena Now*

**THE LA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS DIRECTED** staff to develop a coordinated strategy to thwart rampant theft of copper wire, catalytic converters, and non-ferrous metals across the region. Since January of 2023, thieves have stolen 6½ miles of copper from Pasadena's streetlight system, and as recently as May of 2025, more than 570 feet of copper wire was taken from three streetlight boxes near Colorado Boulevard and San Rafael Avenue. *Source: LA Times*

**THE CITY'S MUNICIPAL SERVICES COMMITTEE APPROVED AN UPDATED** urban water management plan and concluded that the city will have enough water to meet projected demand at least through 2050. The plan, a state-mandated document, outlines the city's long-term water supply outlook and response plans for drought and other emergencies. It must be updated every five years. *Source: Pasadena Now*

Screened Water Color Painting by Joseph Stoddard

## A preservation perspective

# Opinion: Effects of state housing laws will soon be evident

By Sue Mossman  
Former executive director,  
Pasadena Heritage

As state legislation governing housing construction has become law, with SB-79 and more to come, Pasadena's skyline will change, and impacts will become visible in commercial corridors and residential neighborhoods across the city. Several projects have recently been approved that are much taller, denser, and more massive in scale than in their surroundings.

The Design Commission has been challenged to improve the design of these projects, but could not alter the height or density because state law requires that they be permitted. Two major projects in the 2000 block of Colorado Boulevard have recently been approved, as did one on Rosemead Boulevard, one on N. Lake Avenue at Walnut Street, one on Oak Knoll Avenue, and two on Locust Street east of Lake Avenue.

For most of these, the design did improve, thanks to community commentary and the hard work of city staff, commissioners, and sub-committees, but I'd be hard-pressed to call any of them architecturally

distinguished. And these are only the tip of the looming iceberg.

Repeated concerns include the sheer size and height of these projects and how they overwhelm their surroundings — five- to seven-story buildings towering over existing one- and two-story structures — plus, incompatible design and inadequate parking.

These projects, and those to come, will certainly change the character of streetscapes and nearby neighborhoods. In some cases, the parking provided is minimal (fewer than one space per unit), and the question is: Are there enough prospective tenants who are car-free and faithful public transit riders? Or will adjacent streets be constantly lined with parked cars?

Dozens of multi-family projects are in the pipeline, with developers anticipating the provisions of SB-79 that call for dense housing near public transit hubs. On June 8, City Council thankfully voted to delay the implementation of SB-79 in affected



Sue Mossman

areas zoned for the lowest density. The City planning department staff will use the 18-month delay to develop an alternative plan to accommodate more housing.

Yes, Pasadena needs more housing, especially more affordable and workforce housing. However, most would agree that managing growth is a constant balancing act. But we, as a community, have been planning for this growth for a decade and more through our General and Specific plans.

Our local approach anticipates more gradual, curated change that considers immediate context, Pasadena's overall character, and our tradition of architectural excellence. State legislation almost entirely ignores our historic districts, our local zoning and design regulations. Rather, it imposes extreme, one-size-fits-all solutions that don't respect Pasadena as a unique and largely built-out historic city.

These recent months remind me of the building booms of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Those pressures led to the downzoning of many single-family neighborhoods, the rise of neighborhood associations (more than 90 at one time), and increased support for historic preservation as an important community ethos.

With explicit direction now coming from Sacramento, it seems, sadly, that little can be done to wrest back local control of how and where Pasadena will grow.

**PASADENA HAS APPROXIMATELY 11 MILLION SQUARE FEET** of retail space and more than 1,600 businesses, one of the highest concentrations of retail space per resident in the region. Old Pasadena has the highest vacancy rate of just over 11%. The vacancy rate for the Playhouse Village is mid-6%, and South Lake Avenue is 9%. Source: *Economic Development and Technology Committee and Pasadena Now*

**PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS BEGUN SEEKING A COMPANY TO DESIGN AND BUILD** 110 below-market-rate rental apartments and townhomes for its teachers and staff on the site of the now-closed Roosevelt Elementary School campus, at

315 N. Pasadena Ave. The projected cost is \$82-\$85 million, and will be funded by two voter-approved bonds. Source: *Pasadena Now*

**THE STATE COMPENSATION INSURANCE FUND HAS PURCHASED** a nine-story, 158,785-square-foot Class A office building at 35 N. Lake Ave. The workers' compensation operation will occupy a portion of the building as a regional hub for its Southern California operations, and lease the remaining space. Source: *ConnectCRE*

**CITY COUNCIL CLEARED THE WAY** for a controversial 46-unit housing development at 511 S. Oak Knoll Ave. Supporters of the

project pointed to Pasadena's ongoing housing shortage and the inclusion of below-market-rate units. Opponents argued the building's mass and exterior corridor design would create light and noise impacts, increase traffic and parking pressure, and threaten a nearby protected canyon live oak. Council did, however, request a design change that would still provide the developer its full rights, but reduce the visual impacts on the neighborhood, make the building more livable for future occupants, and comply with City design rules. Source: *Pasadena Now*

# The secret to San Rafael Elementary's success

By Mark Mastromatteo  
Education chair, WPRA

Nestled at the corner of Nithsdale and San Miguel roads in the San Rafael neighborhood of west Pasadena sits San Rafael Elementary School, a testimony to over 100 years and thousands of area students and their families. For generations, San Rafael was the ultimate neighborhood school, the center of the neighborhood. Area residents in their 60s and older still hold great fondness for the school.

The 1976 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Pasadena City Board of Education v. Spangler*) unwound Pasadena's city-wide desegregation plan, begun in the early 1970s. The adjacent rows of houses today represent a patchwork of educational loyalties, and for a while, it appeared that San Rafael might be left behind amid the changes.

Today, however, the school is vibrant, a beehive of activity. Honors are bestowed with regularity, families across the city line up to enroll, and PTA meetings are

bursting with project ideas and support concepts that find fertile ground and make a difference. Of special note, San Rafael was the most requested Pasadena Unified School District transfer school in the 2025-2026 school year.

So, what's the secret to the success of San Rafael Elementary School?

The linchpin of the school's revival seems to be the decision more than a dozen years ago to create a Spanish-English dual-language immersion program. This special feature attracted both area residents who spoke some Spanish in their households as well as families who wanted that enrichment for its own merits.

Second, the expansion of California's educational funding to include kindergarten and now early kinder (transitional kindergarten) built upon the foundation of area families who wanted to continue the tradition of a neighborhood elementary experience for their children. Plus, when, in 2006, nearby Linda Vista Elementary closed, the adjacent neighborhood naturally looked south to San Rafael Elementary.

All these factors recreated the magic formula seen in many successful schools. Families of means, families of all ethnic backgrounds, families who believed in the merits of public education, and families for whom public education is the only option joined together for a common purpose and got to work.

In that environment, enrichment options can and have multiplied. This year's classes included special programs at the Rose Bowl Aquatic Center; the city park system; Brookside Golf Course, through its First Tee program; the Jet Propulsion Laboratory — taking advantage of the school's proximity to these unique opportunities.

The school has created other special programs, such as math field day/math Olympics programs, led by Math Club organizer and parent Helen Bacon; a multi-day science camp field trip for fifth graders; and musical performances underwritten by parents and the community.

While nearby neighbor families are no longer the only component of San Rafael's enrollment, there has been an increasing number of close-by neighbors who have chosen San Rafael and are actively engaged.

For example, the San Rafael Neighbors & Friends group focuses on immediate neighbors; the San Rafael Neighborhoods Association, over the past 15 years, has supported and donated to the school; and the West Pasadena Residents' Association has been a consistent and enthusiastic advocate, supporting school projects for well over 20 years. WPRA donations have funded the purchase of musical instruments, a public-address system, special educational programs, campus beautification, and many other San Rafael needs.

In short, the school is quite a jewel, a testimony to generations of support and the synergy of what can happen when families of all backgrounds come together for their children.



San Rafael Elementary parent leader Lindsey Amstutz-Sullivan (Left), San Rafael Elementary School Principal Sandra Rizzo-Smith (center), and WPRA board member Mark Mastromatteo show off the results of the WPRA's latest donation to San Rafael Elementary — playground tables, benches, and umbrellas.

# Tree of the quarter: Pasadena's first Landmark Tree

## Ficus macrophylla

Origin: Australia  
Family: Moraceae

By Emina Darakjy  
Past president, California  
Urban Forests Council

**P**asadena's most historic tree is a *Ficus macrophylla*, also known as the Moreton Bay Fig. Yet few people today know its story.

In 1880, six years before Pasadena was incorporated, Thomas Early planted a Moreton Bay Fig in front of his home at 170 S. Marengo Ave. Early went on to serve as mayor of Pasadena from 1907 to 1911 and died a year later in 1912.

Early's home is long gone; however, 146 years later, the tree he planted is still standing tall. In 1971, Pasadena's Board of Directors, known today as councilmembers, voted to bestow landmark status on this tree to guarantee its protection.

That same year, as part of the Civic Center development, the city purchased the land where the tree stands, thereby making it a public tree. The tree trunk is 110 inches in diameter at breast height, is 80 feet tall, and has a canopy spread of 110 feet.

Native to Australia, the Moreton Bay Fig is evergreen, massive in size with buttress roots, which are really not roots; They are extensions of the trunk that look like an octopus' arms and help stabilize this giant tree.

The tree does very well in our Mediterranean climate and requires ample space to grow. Due to its size, this tree is best suited for parks and open spaces.

The fruit of the Moreton Bay Fig is small and round; it turns purple when ripe and provides a good source of food for all kinds of birds.

Several years of drought put this living specimen of Pasadena's history at risk,

and it began to show signs of decline. Fortunately, the city acted by repairing the automatic irrigation system, testing the soil to determine nutrient deficiencies, and providing the care needed to improve its health.

I am happy to say the tree is faring much better today, and hope the city will install a historical marker near the tree that tells its story.

The next time you are driving or walking by 170 S. Marengo Ave., take a moment to stop and admire this remarkable, living piece of Pasadena's history.

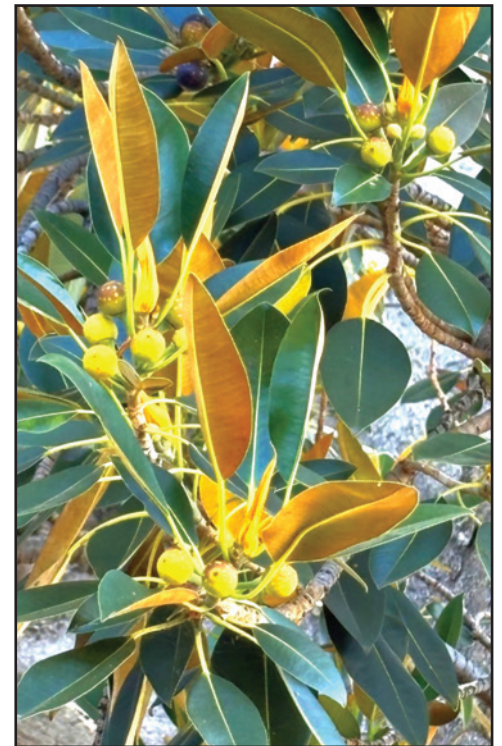
*Emina Darakjy is the past president of the Pasadena Beautiful and Street Tree Seminar, Inc. She also consults with other tree organizations, including California Re-Leaf, the Arbor Day Foundation, and American Forests.*



The Moreton Bay Fig does very well in our Mediterranean climate and requires ample space to grow. Due to its size, this tree is best suited for parks and open spaces.



This evergreen tree has massive buttress roots, which are really not roots; They are extensions of the trunk that look like an octopus's arms and serve to stabilize this giant tree. Emina appears in the photo to provide scale.



The fruit of the Moreton Bay Fig is small and round; it turns purple when ripe and provides a good source of food for all kinds of birds.

# Images that inspire action: Photography for conservation

By John Howell  
CEO, Arroyos & Foothills  
Conservancy (AFC)

Even if you've never visited Yosemite National Park, you've probably seen the iconic black and white photographs by Ansel Adams. His striking images of the region's towering trees, sheer cliffs, and majestic mountain vistas helped shape how America sees the natural world.

When Adams brought his camera to the wild areas of the Western United States, he created art that inspired people to care. His photographs transported viewers to new places and evoked awe and reverence for the country's untouched wilderness. In the 1930s and 40s, they helped galvanize a conservation movement and build public

support around protecting our natural landscapes. They continue to inspire viewers today.

Photography has always been a tool for social change. A single image can reveal a beauty we don't yet appreciate, tell an untold story, or introduce a perspective that changes our beliefs. It can make a distant environmental issue feel personal and spark a curiosity that motivates us to join a movement.

This is why AFC holds a nature photography contest every year. Through photography, we hope to foster a connection between people and our natural landscapes and wildlife. While Adams focused on the vast wilderness far from cities, our contest celebrates

nature that's a bit closer to home. We invite contestants to explore where urban life intersects with wild habitat.

We receive submissions of doves nesting in streetlights, deer leaping against a backdrop of freeways, and bees pollinating native wildflowers growing along a driveway. We hope these images remind people that even the birds in our backyards and the patches of habitat growing between homes deserve protection and care.

AFC's 2026 Nature Photography Contest is open for submissions now until August 1. Whether you're a professional photographer, hobbyist, or someone who just enjoys spending time in nature, we encourage you to submit your images.

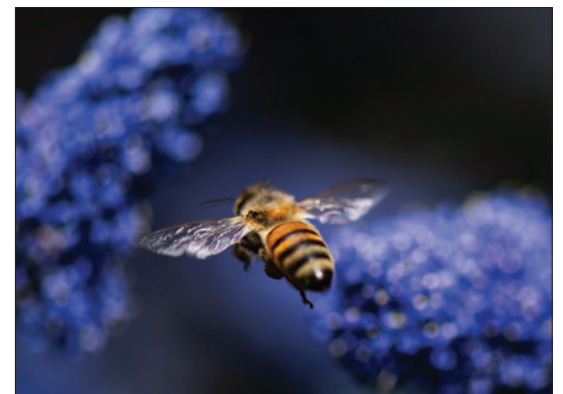
A photograph of how you see the natural world may be the very image that empowers someone else to protect it!



Atop Toyon Canyon, with Griffith Park in the background, a mule deer crosses as drivers on the 5 and 134 commute to work. Photography by Michael Perry/AFC's 2024 Photo Contest.



A mourning dove nesting in a traffic light. Photograph by Moses Aubrey/AFC's 2025 Photo Contest.



**Top:** AFC's 2026 photo contest is open for submissions until Aug. 1. Scan the QR code for more information and to share your images.

**Bottom:** A honey bee explores the dazzling blooms of the California native ceanothus plant. Photograph by Gordon Ownby/AFC's 2024 Photo Contest.

# Meet & greet kicks off 2026 WPRA annual meeting

The evening opened with a meet-and-greet segment that, in addition to sweet treats from Rachael Kinney, offered opportunities to gain insight into the missions and initiatives of more than local not-for-profit organizations as exhibitors.

This year's exhibitors were (Red letters below correspond to the letters on the photos by Bob Reiter):

- Arlington Garden **K**
- City of Pasadena Department of Transportation
- City of Pasadena Fire Department **A**
- City of Pasadena Public Works Department
- CORE/Community Organized Relief Effort **J**
- FormLA Landscaping
- Friends of the Pasadena Library
- Maranatha High School **G**
- Mount Wilson Observatory **F**
- One Arroyo Foundation
- Pasadena Beautiful **C**
- Pasadena Heritage **E**
- Pasadena Museum of History **B**
- Pasadena Public Library **I**
- Pasadena Senior Center
- Pasadena Water & Power **H**
- Ready Fire One (RF1) **D**
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains
- Rose Bowl Stadium





Panelists for the annual meeting are (from left): Chad Augustin, chief, Pasadena Fire Department; Daniel Rossman, executive director, One Arroyo Foundation; Cassy Aoyagi, president & co-founder, FormLA Landscaping; Gabriel Albarian, LA County regional coordinator, NFFA Firewise USA. (Photo by Bob Reiter)

## Digging deeper into protecting life, property from wildfires

**T**he theme for this year's WPRA annual meeting was a continuing discussion started last year that emerged from the ashes of the January 2025 wakeup call residents and businesses received. What once seemed unlikely, even unimaginable, was suddenly all too real: The Eaton Fire destroyed nearly 10,000 structures on

14,000 acres in Altadena and, to a lesser degree, in north Pasadena. The fire also resulted in 18 deaths, all but one in Altadena. To acknowledge the risks and opportunities, this year's meeting focused on what residents can do to reduce the risk of wildfires by better protecting life and property and unleashing their neighborhood's power.



New WPRA President Carlos Javelera (right) presents outgoing President Pete Ewing with the customary gavel, which signifies his two years of exemplary service. He remains a member of the Board of Directors. Photo by Bob Reiter.

*Continued from front page*

## Reduce wildfire risk ...

The WPRA board created the award in 2011 to honor the late Dorothy Lindsey, who, as WPRA president and board member, delivered exemplary community service over many years to help maintain the unique character of our community and enhance the quality of life in west Pasadena. Cavena joins only three others — Mic Hansen (2011), Claire Bogaard (2012), and Vince Farhat (2015) — who have earned this honor.

"Cavena was born, raised, and continues to live in the WPRA service area," said Javelera. "He was a proud product of Pasadena Unified School District, graduating from San Rafael Elementary, McKinley Middle, and Blair High schools." Javelera noted that Cavena was instrumental in developing the WPRA's presence on the internet and introduced the ability, through its website, for our members and other supporters to more conveniently donate to the WPRA."

"He has advised us on various mailings and served as the lead, eagle-eyed proofreader of the various WPRA online and mailed communications. Thankfully, Cavena remains on the board, but has handed the treasurer's role to fellow board member Dave Bise," said Javelera.

### We still need you!

At the close of the business session, Cavena made the pitch for help. "Even if you've just elected a new WPRA board of directors tonight, that doesn't mean you aren't needed. Our effectiveness and success depend on you."

"And while your financial support is important," said Cavena, "we also depend on volunteers — neighbors interested in making a difference in their community — who can spend a few hours a month to speak at City meetings, investigate a problem, work on a solution, or just help with back-office tasks."

To get involved, send an email to [president@wpra.net](mailto:president@wpra.net). It's that easy.

## “We’re kidding ourselves if we think that another disaster isn’t just around the corner.”

**K**eynote speaker, Pasadena Fire Chief Chad Augustin, led off the panel discussion with a comprehensive update on the Fire Department’s operations, long-term vision, and emerging technologies to improve early wildfire detection and community safety.



Fire Chief  
Chad Augustin,  
Pasadena Fire  
Department

**Staffing levels matter.** “Just recently,” Augustin said, “17 newly trained firefighters brought our unfilled positions down to three — the second lowest in about 15 years.” With Southern California experiencing an early wildfire season, Augustin emphasized how important staff count is to ensuring the department can effectively serve the community and surrounding areas.

**Annual brush inspections in high-risk areas.** The chief noted that the department has completed the annual brush inspections for all high-hazard severity zones. “Just over the past year, we went from about 3,900 inspections to 4,611,” Augustin said. It’s a tall task for our firefighters who walk every single one of those properties. By doing so, we’re able to show residents of high-risk properties how they could benefit from trimming trees and moving wood stacks away from homes, for example — all things that can reduce the possibility of fire spreading during a brush fire.”

**Advanced training, detection.** The department has also taken giant steps to help Pasadena better prepare for the next natural disaster through a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), Augustin said. The program offers a consistent, nationwide approach to volunteer training and organization that professional responders can rely on during disaster situations, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks. Created by the LA Fire Department and recently adopted by FEMA, the CERT program also provides basic training in disaster survival and rescue skills.

The department is also considering deploying new AI-assisted infrared detection technology capable of sensing heat and flames in areas as small as one yard to reduce the time between initial fire ignition and 911 reporting.

**The bottom line.** Augustin emphasized the department’s overarching focus on preparedness and resilience, noting that future disasters are inevitable. “We’re kidding ourselves if we think that another disaster isn’t around the corner,” he said.

## “Arroyo Seco is a uniquely valuable natural community space.”

**D**aniel Rossman, executive director of the Arroyo Seco Foundation, opened his presentation with a simple, but foundational, question: “Why do we care about the Arroyo Seco?” The answer, Rossman said, is that the Arroyo is a unique, valuable natural community space.



Daniel Rossman,  
executive director,  
One Arroyo  
Foundation

**A special place.** “The Arroyo Seco is a special place that provides natural habitat to a range of species,” he said. “It’s also a corridor wildlife can use to move through. And beyond its ecological importance, it is a place for recreation — whether that means attending events at the Rose Bowl Stadium, visiting the Rose Bowl Aquatic Center, playing golf at Brookside Golf Club, or simply taking a walk with friends.”

**The foundation’s mission.** The Arroyo Seco Foundation’s mission is to protect and preserve this landscape, Rossman said. “We work in partnership with the City, and help leverage public and private funding, while engaging the community to foster a deeper appreciation for the Arroyo.”

**New approaches to reduce wildfire risk.** Rossman highlighted some of innovative projects to help manage vegetation and to reduce wildfire risk — an approach reflecting a broader commitment to nature-based solutions to reduce wildfire fuel on steep, hard-to-access terrain.

“The Arroyo can act like a wind tunnel,” Rossman explained. “We were fortunate that the 2025 Eaton Fire did not travel through the Arroyo corridor. Had the Santa Ana winds been blowing differently, we could have seen that fire move quickly through the Arroyo and up into residential areas.”

**Here come the goats.** The Foundation and the City launched a pilot program using goats to clear vegetation across approximately 100 acres in targeted high-risk areas, defined as areas with steep slopes and near residential neighborhoods in the central and lower Arroyo.

“The goats may be the first city contractors to finish ahead of schedule,” Rossman said.

He noted that while natural systems such as grazing wildlife or periodic controlled burns would traditionally reduce fire fuel loads, urban conditions make those processes unsafe.

“By bringing in goats, we introduced a safer, managed version of that natural cycle,” he said. “The project had also become a community attraction. Residents from across the city stopped to watch the goats at work. It created unexpected moments of joy and connection.”

**But wait, there’s more.** In addition to the goat pilot, the City now maintains a year-round vegetation management crew, has partnered with the California Conservation Corps to supervise the crew, and engages volunteers through organizations such as hiking and conservation groups to help maintain the Arroyo’s health and resilience.

## “We can be safe without creating a moonscape”

“I live in a high fire severity zone,” said Cassy Aoyagi, president & co-founder of FormLA Landscaping, to open her presentation. “I’ve had to evacuate from my home multiple times over the past decade, so I understand the challenges many residents face when it comes to home hardening and complying with Zone Zero.”



Cassy Aoyagi, president  
& co-founder,  
FormLA Landscaping

### Defensible partners well with sustainable.

Based on her experience, *defensible* landscaping and *sustainable* landscaping often go hand in hand. That is, the same practices that help protect homes from wildfire can also conserve water, reduce energy use, improve groundwater recharge, and create attractive outdoor spaces. “We can be safe without creating a moonscape,” she said.

**Costs are relative.** While some home-hardening improvements can be expensive, many high-impact defensible landscaping actions are relatively affordable. Many of these improvements, she said, can reduce long-term operating costs. Lawn replacement projects, for example, can often pay for themselves within five years through lower water usage and minimal maintenance expenses, even before factoring in rebates, insurance discounts, or future tax incentives. She also stressed the importance of regular maintenance. “This remains one of the most effective and least expensive ways to create defensible space. Small changes can make a significant difference,” she said.

### The leading causes of home fires.

Following the 2025 wildfire season, post-fire reports identified two leading causes of home fires: trash cans stored up against homes and combustible fences attached directly to the home. Even more daunting, however, is that Cal Fire reported that one trash can has the same incendiary power as three cans of gasoline. “This blew my mind,” said Aoyagi.

### The solutions to those causes.

The solutions can be surprisingly simple. Moving trash cans away from the home costs nothing, but can dramatically reduce risk. Likewise, replacing or modifying the first 5 feet of combustible fencing nearest the home with noncombustible materials can provide one of the highest returns on investment for fire safety. Another low-cost improvement is upgrading home vents with tighter mesh screens to prevent embers from entering attics, crawl spaces, and other vulnerable areas. These upgrades can also reduce maintenance needs, pest intrusion, and water-related damage.

### Trees can survive Zone Zero compliance.

“Dozens of trees came with

my property,” she said. “It may surprise you to learn that trees can remain an important part of defensible landscapes. She’s sensed the “fear and resistance during conversations about trees and Zone Zero.”

“But rather than removing trees, she suggests that homeowners should focus on strategic pruning.

“I’ve spent years carefully pruning the many trees on my property,” she said. “The result is that I’ve improved tree health, reduced maintenance costs, and brought my property into compliance with fire safety codes. Proper tree care has also helped keep her roof and gutters cleaner and safer.

**The takeaway.** “Homeowners do not have to choose between beauty, sustainability, and wildfire safety,” said Aoyagi. “With thoughtful planning and maintenance, it’s possible to achieve all three. We can actually have it all,” she said, “and we can do it together.”

## “When neighbors work together, communities become safer, stronger, better prepared for wildfire.”

**G**abriel Albarian, LA County regional coordinator for NFFA Firewise USA, spoke about the power of community in reducing wildfire risk and protecting neighborhoods.



Gabriel Albarian,  
LA County regional  
coordinator, NFFA  
Firewise USA

### The Firewise program.

Albarian became involved in wildfire preparedness following the devastating 2018 Woolsey Fire in LA and Ventura counties. His own community lost four homes to fire and faced a lengthy rebuilding process, along with a dramatic increase in insurance costs. Those experiences motivated him to seek solutions that would help make communities safer and more resilient.

He found those answers in the NFFA Firewise USA program, a voluntary, education-based initiative designed to help neighborhoods reduce wildfire risk through collective action.

“What I like about this program is that it encourages and empowers homeowners through education,” Albarian said. “We’re not creating rules. We’re working together to save homes, lives, and communities.”

**Reduce insurance premiums.** One of the program’s key benefits is the potential to help homeowners qualify for insurance discounts. Through California’s Safer from Wildfire framework, residents can receive discounts for home-hardening improvements, defensible space measures, and participation in recognized Firewise communities.

### The importance of Zone Zero.

Albarian emphasized the importance of “Zone Zero,” a state-mandated, ember-resistant defensible zone within 5 feet of a structure’s perimeter. Research increasingly shows that many homes catch fire from embers landing in combustible materials immediately adjacent to homes. Creating a noncombustible zone free of vegetation, mulch, and other flammable materials can significantly reduce wildfire risk.

“About 90% of home ignitions start in that first 5 feet,” he noted. “If we can keep that area clear of combustible materials, we can greatly improve our chances of protecting our homes.”

### Steps to joining the Firewise community.

The first step in becoming a Firewise USA community is to identify a small group of three to five residents willing to lead the effort within a defined neighborhood of eight to 2,500 homes. Firewise representatives then work with local fire officials to conduct a community assessment.

Once the assessment is complete, residents develop a three-year action plan focused on education, home hardening, wildfire fuel reduction, evacuation planning, and emergency preparedness.

**A shared responsibility.** Albarian emphasized that wildfire preparedness is ultimately a shared responsibility. “The theme of tonight is community,” he said. “It doesn’t take one of us — it takes all of us. When neighbors work together, communities become safer, stronger, and better prepared for wildfire.”

# A glimpse into the ‘infinite possibilities of science, discovery’

Located high above the Los Angeles basin in the San Gabriel Mountains, the Mount Wilson Observatory has stood for more than a century as one of the most significant sites in the history of astronomy and astrophysics.

Founded in 1904 by astronomer George Ellery Hale, the Observatory was home to the largest telescopes of its era and the site of some of the twentieth century’s most transformative scientific discoveries, including Edwin Hubble’s confirmation of galaxies beyond the Milky Way and the discovery of the expanding universe. Mount Wilson also played a foundational role in establishing Southern California as an international center for scientific research and innovation.

Established in 1989, the Mount Wilson Institute (MWI), a nonprofit corporation, was created to preserve, operate, and promote the Observatory following the transition of Carnegie Observatories’ major astronomical research activities to Chile, which placed the Observatory at risk of permanent closure.

MWI’s mission is to preserve the Observatory’s historic telescopes, buildings, archives, and surrounding campus while advancing education, public engagement, scientific literacy, and cultural programming. Through tours, lectures, telescope observing, school field trips, concerts, exhibitions, and other public programs,

the MWI ensures that Mount Wilson remains an active and publicly accessible center for learning, discovery, and cultural engagement.

Today, the MWI continues to manage the Observatory under a long-term sublease from the Carnegie Institution for Science, which retains ownership of the facilities located within the Angeles National Forest on land managed by the United States Forest Service. The MWI is responsible for the stewardship and preservation of the Observatory’s historic infrastructure while maintaining broad public access to the site.

Each year, from May through October, special events are scheduled, including Afternoon Concerts in the Dome, Talks & Telescopes, Art Exhibits, and Movie Matinees. (See sidebar below.)



George Ellery Hale, founder, Mount Wilson Observatory

## Public events at the observatory

For more information and maps indicating the best way to reach the Observatory, visit: [mtwilson.edu](http://mtwilson.edu). For specific event interests, visit:

- Sunday Night Concerts: [mtwilson.edu/concerts/](http://mtwilson.edu/concerts/)
- Talks & Telescopes Lecture Series: [mtwilson.edu/lectures/](http://mtwilson.edu/lectures/)
- Matinees on the Mountain: [mtwilson.edu/movies/](http://mtwilson.edu/movies/)
- Telescope Nights: [mtwilson.edu/public-ticket-nights/](http://mtwilson.edu/public-ticket-nights/)
- Arts @ the Observatory: [mtwilson.edu/arts-the-observatory/](http://mtwilson.edu/arts-the-observatory/)



Andrew Carnegie and George Ellery Hale pose near the 60-inch telescope on Mount Wilson during Carnegie’s 1910 visit. Carnegie referred to the observatory as “The pulpit in the universe.”

# PSC expands community wellness, social services

**[Editor's note:** In the 2026 spring issue of the WPRA News, an article on page 14 a caption that incorrectly refers to Dr. Chrystal Yen as an M.D. and failed to add Dr. Yen's credentials: PT, DPT, GCS. The article described how a Pasadena Senior Center program can, following an initial fitness exam, create a personalized exercise routine for each participant and be led by a personal trainer. The editor is deeply sorry for the inadvertent error and hastens to add that no fault should be assigned to Dr. Yen or the Pasadena Senior Center.]

By Sheryl MacPhee

**T**he Pasadena Senior Center (PSC) — known for being a hub for older adults in the San Gabriel Valley — is now expanding its array of social services and wellness offerings.

The expanded offerings — in both English and Spanish — are designed to help the wider community who were emotionally and physically impacted by the Eaton fire. Those services, under the direction of Dr. Anil Arora, PhD, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and his social services staff include individual cognitive behavior therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, community events, and overall case management. Case management is another of the

expanded PSC offerings. For example, Dr. Arora has helped an individual whose home burned in the Eaton Fire parse builders' estimates, and helped another individual explore legal options for naming a successor trustee for an estate.



Anil Arora, PhD, LCSW

"Anil brings both clinical expertise and a compassionate, personal approach that aligns with the mission and values of the Pasadena Senior Center," said PSC Executive Director Akila Gibbs. "His deep commitment to supporting older adults and their families will have a truly positive impact on our community."

## Addressing trauma to age well

"Trauma exists long before we become adults," said Dr. Arora, "but as we age well, we can begin addressing any unwanted thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. "I am so happy to be walking the journey of aging along with those who come through our doors. Ageing well can start at any time, so why not now?"



## Save the date: Eaton Fire survivors' luncheon

The PSC will host a special luncheon to support those impacted by the Eaton fire. The luncheon, which will be held at the PSC on Saturday, Aug. 22, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., features access to resources that will support efforts to rebuild lives. *More information about this event will be available in August.*

## But wait. There's more

In addition to offering individual therapy and case management to members and the community, the PSC also recently introduced prevention and wellness services under the guidance of community-based geriatric specialist physical therapist, Dr. Chrystal Yen.

*Dr. Arora can be reached by email at [AnilA@PasadenaSeniorCenter.org](mailto:AnilA@PasadenaSeniorCenter.org) or by phone at (626) 685-6760. Also, for more information or to enroll in any of the programs, contact the Pasadena Senior Center at (626) 795-4331.*

### THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF PASADENA IS CELEBRATING

its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The nonprofit organization marked its centennial by awarding \$10,000 grants to five Pasadena-area nonprofits — Altadena Girls, Kidspace Children's Museum, Pasadena Educational Foundation, Pasadena Humane, and the Pasadena Senior Center. Founded in 1926 as the Junior Aid Society, the league has spent a century building civic infrastructure in Pasadena. *Source: Pasadena Now*

### THE CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY AND CALTRANS HAVE AWARDED

the City of Pasadena with an official Clean California Community designation. The recognition confirms the city's documented, long-term commitments to litter reduction and community beautification. *Source: Pasadena Now*

### THE PASADENA FIRE DEPARTMENT NAMED Armen Hagopian

Firefighter of the Year. Hagopian, a firefighter/paramedic, served the City for more than six years, and in 2025 was assigned to Firehouse 36. He was involved in an off-duty motorcycle accident that resulted in a severe spinal cord injury. *Source: City of Pasadena*

### THE TOURNAMENT OF ROSES FOUNDATION, IN ITS 2026 GRANT CYCLE, HAS AWARDED

more than \$200,000 in grants to 18 community organizations serving the greater Pasadena area. The foundation also awarded \$20,000 in 2026 ROSE scholarships to eight graduating seniors from the Pasadena Unified School District. *Source: Pasadena Star-News and Pasadena Now*

### THE PASADENA TOURNAMENT OF ROSES REOPENED

its historic Tournament House to the public for free guided tours. The tours, led by volunteer guides, are offered every Thursday at 2 p.m. through Aug. 27. Reservations are required, with each tour limited to about 80 people. *Source: Pasadena Now*

### THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, THROUGH THE NONPROFIT PASADENA VILLAGE,

PROVIDED \$450,000 in cash grants to 61 older adults still displaced by the Eaton Fire. The grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$8,175, went to residents ages 55 and older in Altadena and Pasadena. *Source: Pasadena Now*

# Along Route 66: Pasadena's lost novelty architecture

By Christian Rodriguez  
 Visitor Services and Outreach manager  
 Pasadena Museum of History  
 crodriguez@pasadenahistory.org

When people think of Pasadena architecture, images of the City Beautiful movement, Beaux-Arts grandeur, or Craftsman masterpieces often come to mind. Yet alongside these celebrated traditions existed a more whimsical chapter of Pasadena's architectural history — one populated by giant shoes, Dutch windmills, and oversized ice-cream freezers.

Variouly known as programmatic, mimetic, or novelty architecture, these unusual buildings emerged at the turn of the twentieth century as the automobile



Inspired by the nursery rhyme "There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," architect Walter C. Folland designed a two-story restaurant in the shape of an enormous boot. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Collection

transformed everyday life. Although notable examples existed before the automobile age, the style flourished during the 1920s and 1930s, when businesses faced a new challenge: attracting the attention of motorists speeding past at 35 miles per hour.

In Pasadena, that challenge became especially acute after Route 66 was routed through the heart of the city, bringing a steady stream of travelers along Colorado Boulevard. Rather than relying solely on signs, business owners transformed their buildings into advertisements themselves, creating eye-catching structures that were impossible to ignore.

Perhaps Pasadena's most outlandish example was the Mother Goose Pantry, which opened at 1955 E. Colorado Blv. in 1927. Inspired by the nursery rhyme "There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," architect Walter C. Folland designed a two-story restaurant in the shape of an enormous boot, complete with storybook details and a revolving Mother Goose sign visible from afar. The restaurant catered directly to Pasadena's growing automobile culture, offering curb service and food "To Take with You" at a time when takeout dining was still a novelty.

Among the most recognizable roadside businesses in the region was Van de Kamp's Holland Dutch Bakers. Founded in Los Angeles in 1915, the company grew from a modest potato chip stand into a bakery and restaurant chain with hundreds of locations across the West Coast.



Van de Kamp's Holland Dutch Bakers grew from a modest potato-chip stand into a bakery and restaurant chain with hundreds of locations across the West Coast and all featuring the Dutch windmill. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Collection

Its trademark Dutch windmills became familiar landmarks throughout Southern California and served as both architecture and icon for the brand that is still fondly remembered. The Pasadena branch was particularly striking.

Built in 1927 on the southeast corner of Colorado Boulevard and Bonnie Avenue, it featured the chain's signature rotating windmill and incorporated traditional Dutch architectural elements reminiscent of the company's headquarters in Glassell Park. The owners clearly understood the appeal of themed environments; they were also responsible for the famed Tam O'Shanter restaurant in Los Angeles.

*[Editor's note: The late John Van de Kamp — Pasadena native, LA District Attorney, California Attorney General, and long-time WPRA Board member — was a nephew of one of the founders and later served as chairman of his family's Lawry's Restaurants chain.]*

Pasadena also hosted two locations of Samarkand Ice Cream (also known as "The Freezer"), a chain of ice-cream stands founded by South Pasadena entrepreneur Frederick Schmidt. To attract motorists, he constructed stands shaped like hand-cranked ice cream freezers, complete with rotating cranks that gave the impression the gargantuan machines were perpetually churning ice cream, as if by an invisible giant. By 1929, roughly 20 locations operated across Southern California, including a stand at 1206 Fair Oaks Ave. in Pasadena.

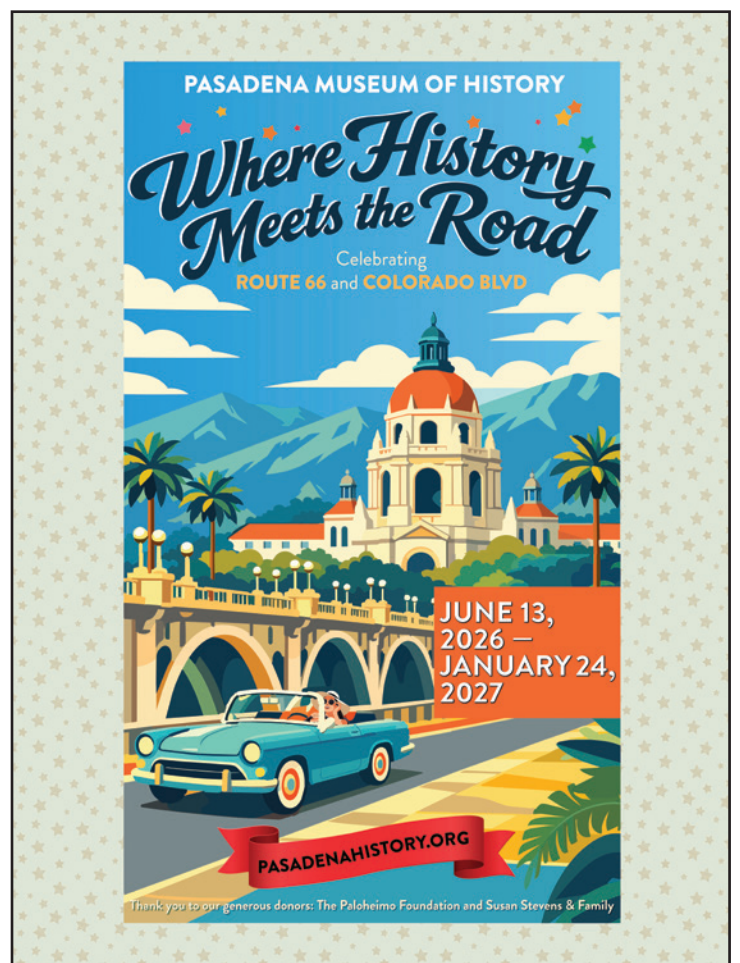
Today, none of these structures survive. But while they may be dismissed as silly, they tell an important story: the rise of automobile culture and its impact on Pasadena, as well as the ingenuity of business owners competing for attention in a rapidly modernizing world.

Whether shaped like a shoe, a windmill, or an ice-cream freezer, these buildings transformed architecture into advertising and show us a colorful reminder of Southern California's playful and entrepreneurial past.



Samarkand Ice Cream chain of ice-cream stands attracted motorists with a giant hand-cranked ice cream freezers, complete with rotating cranks. Photo courtesy of the Huntington Library

"Where History Meets the Road" traces the impact of Route 66 and the evolution of "roadside culture" along Colorado Boulevard. The Pasadena Museum of History invited its local partner, Pasadena Heritage, to add a contemporary perspective to the exhibition by presenting four new oral histories that will bring lived experiences along Colorado Boulevard to life.





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