

Oviatt Friends

Oviatt Exhibit Marks CSUN's 50-year Celebration

Fifty years ago it was farmland. Today it is a top-tier regional university with a multi-ethnic student population and global reach. In celebration of its remarkable metamorphosis from agriculture to academe, CSUN on September 22 kicked off a yearlong observance of its 50th anniversary with the first-ever Founders Day celebration. As part of the festivities, returning alumni, former faculty and staff heard Professor Emeritus John Broesamle, author of the institution's history, *Suddenly a Giant*, expound on the campus's coming-of-age, and afterwards joined in dedicating the James and Mary Cleary Walk, named in honor of the institution's longest serving president and his wife. At day's end the returnees were treated to a visual rerun of the campus's bygone times at the launch of the Oviatt Library's exhibition, "Fifty and Fabulous," in the Tseng Family Gallery.

As I roamed among the exhibition's cases seeking information for this article, I found the to-be-expected historical documents establishing the institution and the mandatory photos and paeans of praise for its founders, leaders, and benefactors. But I

also found some unexpected historical gems that collectively highlight the institution's triumphs and thrills, trials and tumults, as it matured over the past half-century. Here I'll focus on items that most caught my attention.

My first surprise was a photo of legendary anthropologist, Margaret Mead. Although a member of the University's faculty for more than 45 years, I was unaware that in 1957 this remarkable, much-in-demand woman had expounded on "Changing ideas of discipline" in a temporary classroom on the near-barren campus of a fledgling San Fernando Valley State College, the institution's original name. But, I discovered she was just one among many luminaries to grace the young institution's halls of learning. I also found photographic affirmation of visits by: Pulitzer prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks, who in 1972 enchanted a class with a poetry recitation; actor Jon Voight, who

played Hamlet in a campus production; world-renowned composer/conductor Aaron Copland, who in 1975 demonstrated his skills in Professor David Whitwell's class; renowned guitarist Andrés Segovia, who in 1978 lectured to



Images from the Fifty and Fabulous Exhibition



Professor Ron Purcell's guitar class and in 1983 returned to receive an honorary degree; and science-fiction giant Ray Bradbury, who on the occasion of the University's 20th anniversary celebration read from his works. Remembrances of the visits of the last two distinguished guests were also on exhibit: signed copies of Bradbury's classics, *The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451*, and a score of *Macarena* arranged by Segovia.

As I wandered about the gallery I was stopped short by the sight of several photographs and artifacts from the 1960s, a time of great political and social turmoil both on this campus and throughout the nation that I remember only too well. Prominently displayed was an image of presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, the first national political figure to visit the campus, addressing an adoring crowd of more than ten thousand near the bookstore in spring 1968. Not far from this poignant reminder of the tragedy that was to follow were graphic images of the traumatic skirmishes between police and students protesting the Vietnam War, and of the 1968 takeover of the Administration Building by Black athletes and activists, a seminal event in the University's youthful years; though destabilizing at the time, the student revolt proved a catalyst in the formation of the University's ethnic studies departments, among the first such academic units in the

nation and models for similar entities at other universities throughout the nation. I also was drawn to a display about a contentious 1964 Civil Rights debate between conservative William F. Buckley, Jr. and Louis Lomax, reporter for the *Baltimore Afro-American* and *Chicago American*, an exchange both emblematic of the times and a harbinger of the civil turmoil to follow. Adjacent to photos of the debate were books authored by the debaters: Buckley's *God and Man at Yale* and Lomax's *The Negro Revolt*.

For a relatively young institution, CSUN has scored more than its share of "firsts," but in my mind two stand out: the fostering of strategic alliances with a host of universities in the People's Republic of China and the formation of the highly acclaimed Center on Deafness. I was delighted that both received appropriate recognition in the historic display. In a showcase devoted to the China connection, former University President Cleary's role in spearheading the educational exchanges is rightly touted, for without his forward-looking attitude and ardent support the Sino-American program might

not be, as many believe it is, the best in the nation. Also showcased was an array of unique and beautiful gifts from our Chinese sister institutions, tokens of the value they place on the reciprocal relationships, among them a white porcelain vase delicately decorated with birds and flowers, a set of 56 porcelain figurines, a highly polished black lacquer plate, several medallions,

even a bone fragment. I also found the Deaf Center's history nicely laid out with appropriate recognition paid to principal players and events: The planting of the idea for a center in 1958; a National Leadership Training Program for the deaf in 1962; the admission of the first two deaf students in 1964, with interpreters, note-takers and full access to University classes; and in 1972 the culminating achievement, the founding of the Center, the first post-secondary program in the nation to provide paid inter-



preters for deaf students. How could one not be proud of what has become the largest center of its type in the western U.S.?

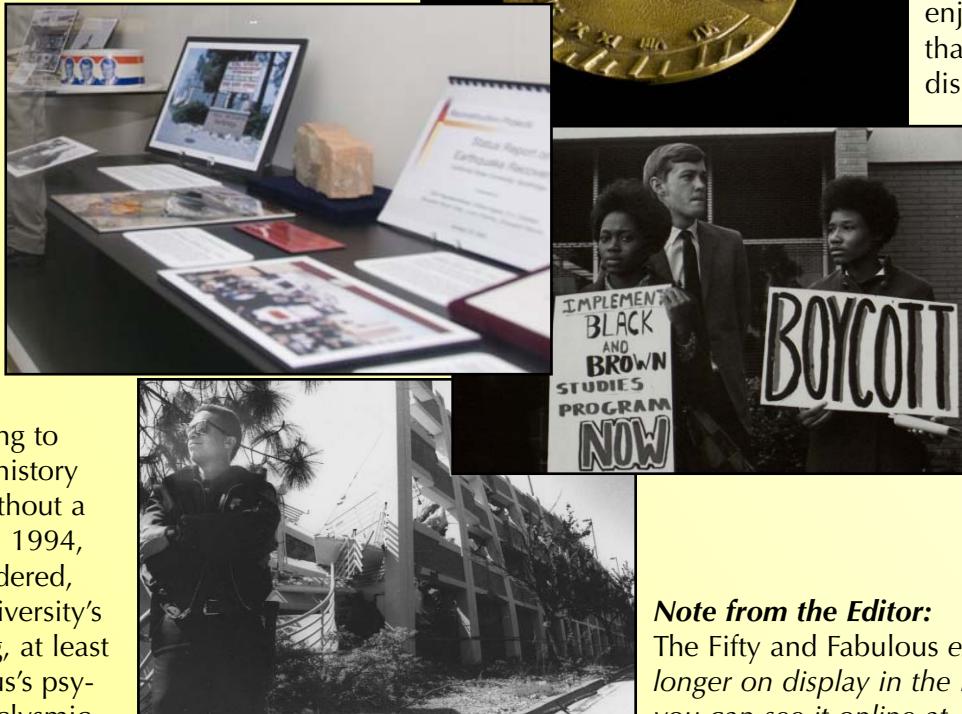
As representative of the thousands of University alumni who have succeeded far beyond expectations the exhibit's curators singled out just three, all clearly worthy of special recognition: Lyric soprano, Carol Vaness, who launched her career with the New York City Opera and went on to star in diverse operas in myriad venues worldwide; reporter, columnist, and editor of *The Los Angeles Times*, Frank del Olmo, whose illustrious career, begun as a student reporter for *The Daily Sundial*, spanned decades; and astronaut Scott J. Horowitz, pilot for NASA's February 1997 Discovery flight and its Atlantis flight of May 2000. A banner flown on the Atlantis flight and a sweatshirt taken on the Discovery flight, both presented to the University and on view were physical indicators of the potential of our alumni to do great things!

No exhibit purporting to cover this institution's history would be complete without a mention of January 17, 1994, the day the earth shuddered, laying waste to the University's facilities and shattering, at least temporarily, the campus's psyche. Because that cataclysmic event is indelibly etched in my mind I was gratified that the quake and its aftermath had been given a prominent place in the exhibit. There were photos of devastated buildings, a collapsed parking structure, mobile classrooms, disheveled library stacks, and a temporary tent that for years afterward served as the "Lindley Library Dome." But the chaos was nicely balanced by indicators of the pluck and determination demonstrated by the University's populace in the weeks that followed: A sign at a campus entrance declaring "Cal State Northridge Stands," and another proclaiming the campus was "Not just back" but "Better." And who could forget the day just one year after the quake when then-President William Jefferson Clinton stopped by to extol the unprecedented cooperation of state, local and University officials who together accomplished

the "...most efficient and effective disaster operation in American history."

Much else about the exhibit is worthy of mention, but I leave it to you to find the treasures that pique your interest, jog your memory, or put a smile on your face. For you it might be a look back at student life, a recollection of the snaking registration lines of early years, a reminder of the University's early athletic accomplishments, or a photo of a 1970's streaker. If you've been around for a while, you might even discover your own visage peering

back at you from a photo from yesterday, as I did. Though I enjoyed all that was on display, for me that find alone made the visit worthwhile!



Note from the Editor:

The Fifty and Fabulous exhibit is no longer on display in the Library, but you can see it online at

<http://library.csun.edu/50/exhibition.html>. Also available are many voices from the University's past at <http://library.csun.edu/CSUNStories/>.

The exhibition drew largely from historical records and memorabilia in the Library's University Archives, but it also included items on loan from alumni and friends. Robert Marshall, the Library's head archivist, curated the exhibit.

Special thanks go to Gus and Erika Manders who provided monetary support for both the exhibit and the opening reception. —jd

The Original "Gidget" Visits Northridge, Tells All

She was a diminutive 15-year-old when she first rode the Malibu waves in the company of a beach bum named Kahuna and surfer dudes with monikers such as Moondoggie, Misto George, Scooterboy, the Fencer and Meatloaf. "Everyone," she said, "had a nickname," and one day she was anointed with hers: Gidget. "What does that mean?" she asked, and was told, "You're a girl and a midget. You're Gidget." With that, she became "one of the guys."

So said Kathy Kohner Zuckerman, daughter of Frederick Kohner, the author of the 1957 hit novel *Gidget, the Girl with Big Ideas* in a September talk at CSUN's University Club sponsored by the Friends of the Oviatt Library. Though fictional, the book had a real-life basis: Diaries that Zuckerman kept of her adventures as a member of the then-nascent Malibu surfing culture. "They call me Gidget," she told her father as a girl, "and all they think about is their surfboards, riding the waves and waxing their boards." At her suggestion, and using his daughter's diaries as his entrée to the sport, Kohner quickly penned the hugely successful story. "Whatever fiction my father created, the truth is in my diaries," exclaimed the authentic Gidget, prototype of the book's fictional protagonist.

The best-selling *Gidget* was more than a literary sensation that spawned many movies and TV shows, for it also generated widespread interest in a new aquatic sport that in turn kick started a billion dollar industry. Though the art of guiding a board along cresting waves while standing upright is deeply rooted in Hawaiian tradition, in the 1950s surfing was just making its way to the mainland. Evidence of the sport's Hawaiian connection is clear from the nickname of Gidget's beach bum friend, Kahuna, a Hawaiian name for an expert surfer whose chants and rituals christen new boards and give courage to challengers of big waves.

Zuckerman discovered surfing because her par-

ents, convinced that beach-life was healthy, made regular pilgrimages to Malibu, a beach with "...cachet among the Hollywood crowd." Finding her parents' activities at the coast unexciting, she gravitated towards the few beach-goers, most of them young males, at the forefront of the emerging surf riding phenomenon. A 1956 diary entry chronicles her first forays among the breakers: "I (went) to the beach. I didn't think I'd have fun, but I met Matt and he took me on his surfboard... let me catch the waves by myself... (and) rode the waves with me. I then rode the board in alone... I hope Matt will take me surfing again."

The real-life Gidget was among the first of her gender to become ensconced in the surfing subculture in California. "I was one of just three surfing girls," said Zuckerman. "It was not something that young women did. There weren't too many surfers to begin with, but very few girl surfers. I was just so happy to be accepted." And accepted she was, as evidenced by the fact that in 1999 at the age of 58, decades after she had last toted a board into the

water, *Surfer Magazine* listed Zuckerman at number seven among the century's 25 most influential individuals of the surfing world!

Though the book was a commercial blockbuster, not everyone in America was thrilled with *Gidget*. Said one reviewer, it is "A vulgar little book about a nice little girl who tries to be hard. In language, at least, she succeeds... Any parents who allow their teenagers to talk as Gidget does should be soundly spanked." The language found so offensive, said Zuckerman, included such words and phrases as "bitchen," "stoked," "I'm so jazzed," "a giant fiasco," "the cuzzies," "the kooks," and "barfy," but not the widely used surfing term, "cowabunga." Robert Hersh of *The Los Angeles Times* also panned the book saying, "If Mr. Kohner

was attempting satire, the summer is over." Even an eleven-year-old sixth-grader condemned the book, writing: "Dear Sir, ... I just wanted to tell you that any book as dirty as your book should not be on sale." A more appreciative reader wrote to inquire of the female protagonist's authenticity.



"Dear Sir," she penned, "I enjoyed reading all your Gidget books but ... one thing bugs me ... I know Gidget is patterned after a real person and you show great insight into her character ... Could Gidget be a close friend or a relative?" Could be!

In view of the book's immense popularity, it is not surprising that the Gidget story was quickly snapped up by the film industry. "I remember when the phone rang," said Zuckerman, "and the agent said 'Mr. Kohner, you've hit the jackpot. This is going to be a movie, a TV show, and a comic book.' I wrote in my diary, 'How stupid is this? They're making a movie about life in Malibu.'" The original Gidget movie, one of the first of the "beach movie" genre, was released in 1959 starring Sandra Dee as Gidget and Cliff Robertson as the Big Kahuna. Two sequels quickly followed: *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* in 1961, the most popular of the three, and in 1963 *Gidget Goes to Rome*. Deborah Walley and Cindy Carol, respectively, played the part of Gidget in the latter movies. Over the ensuing years several tele-movies were also produced, among them *Gidget Grows Up* in 1969; *Gidget Gets Married* (to Moondoggie) in 1972; and *Gidget's Summer Reunion* in 1985.

Success of the Gidget books and movies proved grist for a television series. Sally Field was the ersatz Gidget in a 32-episode ABC series that ran just a single season, 1965-66, its demise perhaps triggered by stiff competition from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. "It was Sally Field's first role for television, and she actually learned how to surf," said Zuckerman. In contrast, a 1986-88 TV sitcom titled *The New Gidget* starring Caryn Richman was "...hugely successful."

For the talk, Zuckerman brought along an original copy of *Gidget* plus copies of many of its sequels written by her father, all now collector's items, among them four original novels—*Gidget Goes New York*, *Gidget in Love*, *Gidget Goes Parisienne*, and *The Affairs of Gidget*—and two novelizations of movies: *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* and *Gidget Goes to Rome*. She also read an entry from her University High School annual penned in 1958 by a male friend: "Boy, I feel like I'm writing in the

book of an international star. Wow! Good luck Kathy Gidget.... Just keep on water skiing and making those sexy covers for books." The confusion of surfing with water skiing was not unusual, she noted, for few of her acquaintances were familiar with the up-and-coming pastime.

Though she remained part of the surfing scene into the late '50s, in 1960 Zuckerman quit the waves. "I went to Oregon where no one had heard of Gidget or a surfboard." At Oregon State University she discovered foreign films and poetry reading and "fell in love with every English professor I had." Transferring to Cal State Northridge, the institution from which she earned her BA degree in

English and a teaching credential, she again found herself "...in love with all my professors." Indeed, she ultimately married an English professor, Marvin Zuckerman, of L.A. Valley College. "I was always in love with English professors.

Maybe Marvin reminded me of my dad, a little bit older, a little bit wiser, better read, very patient. We've been married for 44 years." Her degree in hand, the prototypical Gidget pursued careers first in teaching, then as a travel agent and finally as a restaurant hostess, most recently at Duke's Malibu, where she can be found every Sunday with an array of Gidget books at the ready.

Though unconnected with the surfing scene for decades, an issue of *Wahine* magazine in the late '90s bearing her photo on its cover caused Zuckerman to dive back in. Upon seeing her visage, a friend called saying, "You've got to get back into the water; you've got to get wet, girl!" Taking her friend's suggestion to heart, she took the occasion of a Legends of Surfing fundraiser for cancer at La Jolla to plunge back in, plying the breakers in tandem with Mike Doyle, the man from whom she had purchased her first surfboard as a teenager. She now rides the waves regularly at Malibu and is a member of the Malibu Surfing Association. All this recent activity, she said, "gives me a great sense of community. I feel very much at home, just as when I was younger. The surfing community was hugging me. And when someone gives you a hug, you've just got to hug back!"

—jd



Kathy (Gidget) as a Valley State (CSUN) student in front of Sierra Hall.

Irving and Rita Streimer Fund Library Study Room

Coincident with the dedication of a study room named in their honor, on April 10, 2008, Irving and Rita Streimer were feted with a wine and cheese reception at the Oviatt Library. Both are long-time members of the CSUN family; Irving joined the Psychology Department faculty in 1964, and Rita has for many years been on the Friends of the Oviatt Library board. The dedication of the study room, one of a dozen available for faculty and graduate student use in academic research, recognizes a significant contribution made by the Streimers to the Library's endowment fund.

A plaque on the study room door acknowledges their much-appreciated donation.

Decorations adorning the room's walls reflect Irving and Rita's life-long interests: Quilts hand-sewn by Rita, an accomplished quilter and teacher of the craft; plaques documenting patents that Irving received for his inventions—a metabolator, a respirometer, a sphygmomanometric device, and a "six degrees of freedom" simulator used to study work done in the absence of gravity—and a University Founder's Day Award and Ph.D. diploma from New York University. "All study rooms are decorated by their donors," says Cindy Ventuleth, Library Development Officer, "so as to create a homey feel that is very much appreciated by the rooms' users."

After earning his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in chemistry and then psychology at Brooklyn College and City College, New York, Irving pursued his doctoral work at NYU in psychology. Difficulties he encountered while working in the dark as chief film chemist for Pathe Laboratories sparked an interest in the then-emerging field of human factors, or ergonomics, the study of how humans relate to the world around them with the aim of improving performance, efficiency and safety. After several years in industry directing human factors research, first at Boeing in Seattle and then at North American Rockwell, he joined the University's Psychology Department where he developed courses and was instrumental in establishing a graduate program in human factors. He retired in 1991.

Rita, an accomplished artist and teacher,

received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in art and art education from Brooklyn College, her artistic media mainly paints, collage and fiber art. While raising the couple's children, she taught art and craft classes, as well as ESL, in the LAUSD's Adult Education program. Along the way she introduced her artistic love, quilt making, to the curriculum, and even now, though retired, continues to teach her craft for the LAUSD and for Glendale Community College. A member of the Friends of the Oviatt Library for more than a decade, Rita was instrumental in establishing and running the group's bookstore and has served as the organization's president.

The reception was well attended, with more than 70 friends, colleagues and former students honoring the Streimers. As the evening progressed, many attendees offered effusive praise of and thanks to both Rita and Irving. A former student, now a professor himself, commented that Irving "...had a way of making complex things simple...and had an appreciation of the efforts people put in." Another said, "My entire career is based on things I learned in his class." But perhaps the best evidence of Irving's impact is the naming of the Psychology Department's graduate student award in his honor.

Rita's influence on her students was also amply displayed at the get-together, as evidenced by such comments as: "She is probably the most prepared, best teacher I have ever had"; "She is just a marvel of an instructor"; and "The most important thing I learned from her is, if you make a mistake, repeat it and it becomes part of the design; that has become a rule in my life!"

Said Rita, "The Library is the heart of any university, and this study room seemed to us to be an ideal way to give back just a little to the University that has given us so very, very much." In acknowledging their donation, Library Dean Sue Curzon said she was both grateful for the contribution and "delighted that Irving and Rita's names will be linked to the Library forever."

Sadly, on October 1, 2008, just a few months after the room's dedication, Irving Streimer passed away. A memorial celebration of his life was held at the University Club in November.



Rita and Irving Streimer

Library Celebrates Darwin's Birthday

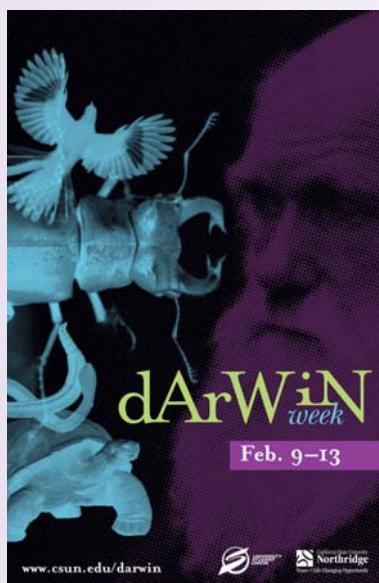
February 2009 simultaneously marked the bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his seminal opus, *On the Origin of Species*.

Triggered by the confluence of these dates, on February 9, CSUN joined universities worldwide in a weeklong celebration of this influential scientist's life and works. As a part of the celebration, the Oviatt Library hosted an eclectic exhibit commemorating the momentous impact the gifted naturalist's ideas have had, and continue to have, on science and society. The exhibit continued through mid-March.

Though best known for his then-revolutionary idea that organisms change gradually over time by means of natural selection, Darwin's lifework also included myriad less-well-known contributions to biology and geology. On display were samples of his investigations—on the ecological significance of earthworms, the morphology of climbing plants, the life history of barnacles, the formation of coral reefs and atolls, the nature of adaptation, and artificial selection in pigeons—as well as specimens of the beetles Darwin so enjoyed collecting, and a Patagonian lizard, *Diplolaemus darwini*, one of 120 species and nine genera named to honor the prolific scientist. Alongside the book that sparked a still-smoldering debate between science and religion, *On the Origin of Species*, were two recent treatises devoted to the issue: *Science, Evolution and Creationism*, a modern look at the controversy from the National Academy of Sciences; and Michael Ruse's *The Evolution Wars from the Controversy of Science* series.

Darwin's influence extended far beyond the natural sciences,

nowhere more dramatically than into our understanding of human origins. Reflecting this, the Anthropology Department provided an exhibit of primate skulls that collectively track our human heritage: Skulls of our extant distant relatives, the apes, and of our



predecessors from the distant past, among them *Australopithecus africanus*, possibly our earliest bipedal relative, and *Homo erectus* and *H. neanderthalensis*, the latter at one time a contemporary of modern humans. Also on view were tools used by early humans, among them projectile points, hand axes, and scraping, cutting and chopping tools, evidence of social evolution.

Other exhibits made the critical point that occasionally Darwin's theory has been misapplied or misinterpreted, sometimes with devastating results. In a display subtitled "Inspirations and Mistakes that Haunt," the influence, both positive and negative, that Darwinian theory exacted on the field of developmental psychology was made evident. But most gut wrenching was a description of the manner in which the now-discredited eugenics movement twisted Darwin's

ideas to justify enforced sterilization of humans deemed to have "undesirable traits," and provided Hitler with his justification for the mass murder of Jews.

In addition to the exhibit, the Library hosted an Evolutionary Film Festival on Darwin Week's opening day. Four of the films dealt with aspects of biological evolution, including: *Great Transformations*, a depiction of the journey of animal life from water to land; *Beyond Genesis*, a portrayal of Darwin's voyage on the Beagle; *Accidents of Creation*, an exploration of how mistakes in DNA lead to changes in life itself; and *Why Sex?* an investigation into the powerful influence sex exerts over all living things. Rounding out the program were three films that illustrated the extensive impact that Darwin's ideas have had on education, the humanities and the arts: *Inherit the Wind*, a re-creation of the Scopes Trial, the 1925 titanic courtroom battle about the teaching of evolution in the classroom; *Clay: Origin of Species*, an artsy film offering a whimsical view of evolution using clay models; and *Gattaca*, a science fiction drama exploring possible consequences of reproductive technologies and genetic engineering on society. All were from the Media Library and are available for viewing by any interested individual.

Dean Arnold, the Library's Music and Media Supervisor, and Christina Mayberry, Science and Engineering Librarian, coordinated both the exhibit and the film festival. Objects and specimens on exhibit were provided by James Hogue, Biology Department; Christina Campbell, Helene Rougiers and Matthew Des Lauriers, Anthropology Department; and Janet Fish, Educational Psychology Department.

—jd

Oviatt Friends

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Coming in the Fall
“Now Give Three Cheers”
The Timeless Magic of Gilbert and Sullivan

*September 8, 2009 -
July 16, 2010*

*Expect your postcard announcing
the exhibit in August.*

