

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION?

“WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME....AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?”

By Georgette Korsen

Historical Preservation isn't just about nostalgia, or waxing poetic about the good old days. It has a meaning and relevance that translates into many benefits for our Spanish Village By the Sea...and pays dividends that enrich us all.

Historical Preservation is about Sustainability

Recently, our city sponsored an event at the Community Center where internationally renowned speaker, Donovan Rypkema, gave a presentation on the nexus between Historical Preservation and Sustainability. Mr. Rypkema conducts a class on the Economics of Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania, and is principle of PlaceEconomics, a Washington D.C. real estate and economic development-consulting firm specializing in historic structures. He stated that there is nothing greener than restoring and adaptively reusing an historic building. You are preserving a local asset while benefiting from solid waste reduction when a structure is not bulldozed and hauled off to a landfill where 40% of the content comes from construction and demolition debris. He pointed out that demolition of even a small commercial historic building taken to landfill negates the recycling of 1,344,000 aluminum cans! “Historic buildings are invariably where millions of dollars of infrastructure investment has already been made by previous generations,” he said, adding that the razing of historic buildings results in multiple hits on scarce resources. “First, you’re throwing away 1000’s of hours of embodied energy, and replacing it with materials vastly more consumptive of energy.” He pointed out that most historic buildings are built from brick, plaster, concrete and timber, the least energy consumptive materials. Whereas new buildings utilize man made materials such as plastic, steel, vinyl and aluminum, which are the most energy consumptive and create added environmental burdens for our planet. Restoration of an existing structure will always use fewer resources and be less expensive, than if you were to start over building an entirely new structure and simultaneously depriving the community of the “perks” of living in a community rich in heritage.

Now factor that restoration work on an historic building most often utilizes local materials, contractors, and artisans, and boosts the local economy, bringing us to the next benefit.

Historical Preservation pays dividends economically

Famed architect, Henry Lenny says, “The most successful communities are those that have not erased their memories.” Williamsburg, Santa Barbara, Carmel, Laguna Beach, La Jolla, are but a few such examples. It has been demonstrated that cities rich in historic resources enjoy “Heritage Tourism”. These tourists stay longer and spend more per visit, than those in non-historic counterparts.

Historic Districts within a city contribute to increased property values within and near the district, appreciating at higher rates than similar non-designated neighborhoods and increasing the value of all homes within a city of historic distinction. “Historic Districts are much less vulnerable to value decline in economic down turns,” declared Mr. Rypkema. 470,000 more visitors to the U.S. visited an historic place than went to an amusement park. 785,000 more of them went to an historic place, than spent time on the beach. And we have BOTH!

Today, approximately 20% of employees and businesses can be headquartered “anywhere”. These are knowledge based, highly educated, and usually affluent people who seek out areas abundant in natural resources and rich in culture, of which historical preservation is a vital component.

Not long ago, Shaheen Sadeghi, developer of the proposed LAB Project in North Beach, commented to past Historical Society president, Mike Cotter, that Del Mar is an Avenida of rare beauty because of its preserved historical buildings. He stated that these treasures have an authenticity that cannot be duplicated, and that we are truly blessed.

Historical Preservation is culturally enriching

It’s wonderful for people residing within a city to have a sense of its place in history. To have examples of fine architecture designed by famed architects of a bygone era, to be able to see first hand examples of such excellence put to good purpose in today’s world and time is a rare opportunity that few cities can offer to the degree that is still possible for San Clemente. The Miramar Theatre, even as it still waits to be restored and adaptively reused, is a fine example of the architecture of famed theatre designer Clifford Balch. The Lido in Newport Beach, The Fox Theatre in Riverside, and The Fox Theatre in Fullerton, all of which are currently in use or being renovated, are also beautiful examples of this same architect’s work. We still possess the ability to have this gateway icon restored to its original splendor, so that it can continue to whisper our memories.

The Casino is another such treasure, with a geodesic dome-like ceiling held together by tension rods. It is a place of architectural significance where Judy Garland’s singing echoed, and Mickey Rooney danced, along with stars such as Dorothy Lamour, Cesar Romero, Martha Raye and a host of others. When San Clemente boasted a population of a mere 500 people, weekends at The Casino were broadcast nationally by radio! Imagine...you could have been in New York City in 1937, and heard over the airwaves, “And now...Live from The Casino in San Clemente, with Sterling Young and his Orchestra performing”..... We were *really* something!

The Ole Hanson Beach Club, also part of the Historic District in North Beach, was a place where famed Olympic Champions trained...Buster Crabbe, Duke Kahanamoka, and Johnny Weissmuller. We have a rich, vibrant cache of wonderful stories that are uniquely our own. And we still have 202 of the original 500 Spanish Colonial Revival Structures left to remind us!

And so... my fellow lucky denizens of this amazingly wonderful city that we are so blessed to reside in...I will now answer that question, "What's in it for me?" I say "EVERYTHING"! And that, of course.... is "why" you should CARE.