

AVP 4-29-12 MOAH adds to BLVD

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Another gem has been added to the downtown Lancaster Boulevard, said city officials, as the Lancaster Museum of Art and History prepares for its public unveiling on Saturday.

The museum, which officials are fondly calling MOAH, is at the corner of Lancaster Boulevard and Ehrlich Avenue (Elm Avenue) kitty-corner from the Lancaster Performing Arts Center, often referred to as the jewel of the Antelope Valley.

The Lancaster City Council unanimously voted to change the name to Lancaster Museum of Art and History in June 2011 after a request made on behalf of Dan Venturoli, president of

Page 2

the museum foundation board.

The new moniker better suits the modern, contemporary feel of downtown Lancaster, officials said.

A former bank building that has been remodeled into a contemporary, state-of-the-art facility, the visually stunning architecture of the building with three floors including a rooftop terrace featuring a breathtaking 360-degree view of the Valley, is meant to draw people to the heart of the city, said Lancaster Mayor R. Rex Parris.

"The whole downtown Lancaster Boulevard is going to have an artistic expression to it," Parris said.

"It's a signature building -it's different, pretty. I like that we have more than a two-story building downtown. This museum is a constant reminder to people to walk in and see the art, see what we have to offer on the boulevard."

Parris said Valley residents have been waiting for a premier museum such as MOAH, which

will offer world-class exhibits from around the globe as well as featuring local artists whenever possible along with a rotation of the permanent collection formerly housed at the now closed Lancaster Museum/Art Gallery that opened in January 1986.

"Every place I've been that was a place I'd like to have a home, there is a vibrant art community that transfers to every aspect of the community," Parris said.

"Why? I don't know the answer. I do know art is a vital part of having a vibrant city."

The starkly white-, chrome-and-glass decor of the towering rooms provides the perfect background to ensure the art is the focal point of every exhibit, said Andi Campognone, museum curator and executive director.

The main gallery is on the ground floor and the mezzanine level above includes smaller galleries and a hall overlooking the main floor.

MOAH will open on Saturday with three main exhibitions celebrating Lancaster and the rest of the Antelope Valley, officials said.

"Smooth Operations: Substance and Surface in Southern California Art," "Indians, Gold Miners and Gunslingers: A Look Back at Lancaster in the Old West" and "The Painted Desert."

A side exhibit will showcase the work of local artist Stevie Love in the ground floor Vault Gallery.

Co-curated by Andi Campognone and Peter Frank, "Smooth Operations: Substance and Surface in Southern California Art" looks at the use of new and nontraditional materials in

the fabrication of art objects, many of which came directly from the aerospace industry.

"Smooth Operations" concentrates on the postwar years in and around Los Angeles, when experimentation with unorthodox even radical materials and qualities led to the emergence

of movements such as "finish/fetish" and "light-and-space."

Among the artists featured are Larry Bell, DeWain Valentine, Ronald Davis, Craig Kauffman, Judy Chicago, Roland Reiss, Norman Zammitt, Fred Eversley and Jerome Mahoney.

The work of younger artists who investigate the qualities of synthetic materials, including Eric Johnson, Lisa Bartleson, Andy Moses and Eric Zammitt, will augment the main portion of the exhibition, gifted to the museum by collectors Steve Eglash and Gisela Colon.

"Indians, Gold Miners and Gunslingers: A Look Back at Lancaster in the Old West," curated by museum staff member Dr. Laurie Solis, is a visual timeline of the history of Lancaster utilizing artifacts and historic photographs from the museum's permanent collection.

This exhibition marks the first in a series of historical exhibitions highlighting the high desert communities, officials said.

"The Painted Desert" exhibit curated by Campognone is in a second-floor gallery and features about 20 local artists as well as works by another 20 or so artists from Southern California, the curator said, comprising more than 40 pieces in a wide range of media.

"We have everything from traditional landscapes to unique interpretations of (desert) icons in the abstract," Campognone said, adding two paintings are particularly unique.

"Not a lot of people paint the desert at night," she said, speaking of the works by Dennis Calaba, a NASA graphic artist by day and fine art painter in his spare time.

MOAH offers a designated educational room where students of all ages may experience the process of art first-hand with projects and workshops on painting and sculpting.

The educational room will be used for lectures and presentations as well.

"Some people already know art, understand it; others don't know what their missing until they see it," Parris said.

"As human beings we have an attraction to artistic expression.

The rooftop terrace features a glass-enclosed lantern room that can be used for special events or be rented out for private parties.

MOAH houses the museum's permanent collection, which includes numerous exhibitions that are especially relevant to the Valley, officials said, with shows on aircraft and space travel as well as displays on the industries and natural resources that were crucial to the area's development along with historical newspapers, documents, photographs and glass plate

negatives.

The upgraded storage will also help protect the museum's own precious artifacts and pieces.

Future plans for the downtown district include renovating the Cedar Center and the Western Hotel/Museum.

Cedar Center, built before and during the Great Depression, was the Antelope Valley's civic center from the 1920s into the early 1960s, housing its courthouse, public health center, sheriff's station, library and auditorium.

The Western Hotel/Museum is Lancaster's oldest surviving building. The building's exact age is uncertain, but it was probably built in 1888, four years after the creation of Lancaster as a townsite during Southern California's first real estate boom.

"This is just the beginning," Parris said. "People are going to see some incredible art shows - many with an educational component.

"Being able to provide world-class art right here in Lancaster is integral to our vision of the city."

MOAH will have a grand-opening at 11 a.m. on Saturday.

Free opening day festivities will include a ribbon-cutting at 11 a.m., docent-led tours of the museum, musical performances and hands-on art-making activities designed for all ages.

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