

**NORTH PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
NOVEMBER 2016 MEETING NOTES**

**DATE: NOVEMBER 17, 2016**

**TIME: 6:30 PM**

The first part of this meeting was a Business Meeting of the North Park Historical Society (NPHS) Board of Directors, and the second part was the activities discussion for the organization. These notes include updates as of December 11, 2016.

The next meeting will be **THURSDAY** January 19, 2017 at 6:30 pm in a second floor meeting room at Grace Lutheran Church, 3967 Park Boulevard. We will not meet in December 2016.

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The following members of the NPHS Board of Directors were present:

Steve Hon	Katherine Hon
Paul Spears	Sharon Turner
Jody Surowiec	Claudia Watts
Randy Sappenfield	Judy Ciampoli
George Franck	Hilda Yoder

The following members of the NPHS Board of Directors were absent:

Michael Thornhill	Bob Bauer
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Member Sue joined us. Welcome!

**2. AGENDA REVIEW AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The latest issue of the Pacific Beach Historical Society newsletter was circulated for viewing. The November 4-17 issue of *Uptown News* featured Katherine's PastMatters column about North Park's Toyland Parade, based on a history George Franck compiled. Update: The December 2-15 issue of *Uptown News* featured a PastMatters column about Olympic Cafe at Texas Street and University Avenue. See scans of the articles at the end of these notes.

**3. MINUTES ACCEPTANCE**

The minutes from the October 20, 2016 NPHS meeting have been posted on the website.

**BUSINESS PORTION OF MEETING**

**4. TREASURER'S REPORT**

The financials were sent to the Board in advance of the meeting. In the period from October 19 to November 14, 2016, one NPHS member renewed for two years. We received \$120 in walking tour fees from the October 1 commercial walking tour with North Park Main Street. The total income in this time period was \$160. The expenses total of \$25 recorded in this time period was for the Toyland Parade entry fee.

Steve noted that he will be developing a draft budget for 2017 next month but we will not meet in December. Sharon moved and Randy seconded a motion to review the draft budget by email. The motion was approved unanimously.

**ACTIVITIES PORTION OF MEETING**

**5. WATER TOWER PUBLIC ART PROJECT UPDATE**

We are still waiting for Christine Jones with the City to arrange a meeting with City engineering staff for us. Paul suggested we also discuss the bronze plaque monument parameters and suggestions for type of installation with the engineers.

## 6. TEE SHIRTS

The list of orders is being completed. The group agreed to also purchase 2 medium, 4 large, and 4 extra-large in the royal blue crew neck Beefy Tee style for extras.

## 7. HISTORY ORGANIZATION FORUM - SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2016

NPBS helped with a first-time forum hosted by the San Diego History Center that focused on audience engagement and fundraising for organizations like ours. About 45 people attended, and the History Center thought it was a very successful event. Steve, Katherine, and Judy attended and we learned a lot about social media and fundraising techniques. The forum was informal and interactive. One of the strategies for outreach mentioned at the forum was using snail mail correspondence and sending an attractive blank card as a small token of thanks for members joining or paying their dues. Katherine showed the photographic "greeting cards" that NPBS had printed years ago through Cafe Press. The cards were never good sellers, but could be useful for thank you's and other correspondence if the Board agreed it was ok to use them and not try to sell them. Jody moved and Claudia seconded we use the cards for correspondence instead of trying to sell them. The motion was approved unanimously.

## 8. TOYLAND PARADE - SATURDAY, DEC. 3, 2016

The Toyland Parade is happening on Saturday, December 3, 2016. **Update:** Robert got the Water Tower fixed and Victor danced again! Michael transported the Water Tower back to Victor's house for storage after the parade was over. Judy, Michael, Claudia, Turner, Steve and Katherine dressed in their favorite decades and marched with Victor, who is undoubtedly the favorite entry in the parade. If anyone snapped a photo of our wonderful dancing Water Tower, please contact [info@northparkhistory.org](mailto:info@northparkhistory.org) or share the picture on our Facebook page.



## 9. PLANNING ISSUES: NORTH PARK COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE/PLAZA DE PANAMA

As noted in last month's minutes, the community plan update was a frustrating and disheartening process. Time will tell if North Park's authentic historic character will survive the developer enticements now embedded in the NPCPU. The group discussed if we should offer to help HRB staff with the historic district processing they have committed to doing, but decided not to, as staff already refused any help at a Planning Committee meeting when Katherine asked that question. We are also sad to report that the despised Plaza de Panama project is back, so look for coming disruption of Balboa Park.

## NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be **THURSDAY** January 19, 2017 at 6:30 pm in a second floor meeting room at Grace Lutheran Church, 3967 Park Boulevard, corner of Park and Lincoln Avenue. We will take December off. Happy Holidays to All!

Prepared by

*Katherine Hon*

Katherine Hon  
Secretary, North Park Historical Society



Queen Kathy and her court in the 1956 Toyland Parade in North Park (Courtesy of North Park Historical Society)

## North Park's Toyland Parade, a community tradition

**PastMatters**  
Katherine Hon

The next Toyland Parade will be held on Saturday, Dec. 3, starting at 11 a.m. In a tradition that has spanned more than 80 years, marching bands, vintage cars, floats, dancers and many community

organizations will travel along University Avenue to kick off the holiday season.

The North Park Historical Society devoted a whole chapter to the Toyland Parade in their book, "Images of America: San Diego's North Park," published by Arcadia Publishing Company in 2014. The following history is based on a summary

written by George Franck, North Park Historical Society vice president.

Christmas festivals in North Park started as far back as 1930, during the early years of the Depression, when the North Park Business Men's Association sponsored the dedication of a Christmas tree at the corner of Kansas Street and Univer-

sity Avenue. On Dec. 11, 1934, a parade of decorated automobiles, theme floats and four bands sponsored by the merchants was viewed by several thousand people at 30th Street and University Avenue. This event initiated a North Park parade tradition.

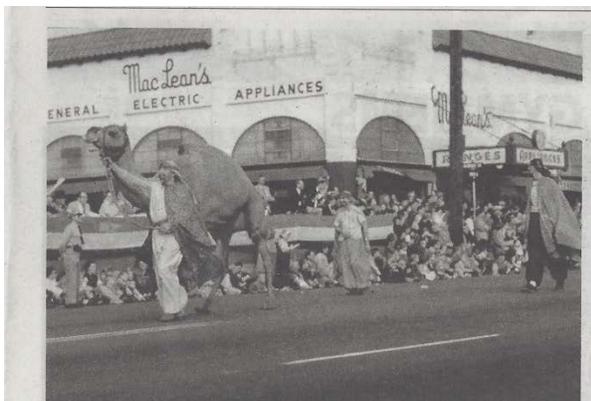
The Dec. 10, 1935 San Diego Union reported that nine divi-

sions with representatives of every major business in the community marched in the 1935 parade, when an estimated 30,000 spectators crowded the sidewalks. Musical groups included the Bonham Brothers Band. This youth marching band was started in 1921 by the brothers who ran the Bonham Brothers Mortuary. The band entertained at concerts, parades and community events for 36 years before playing its last music in 1962.

In 1939, the parade was held on a Friday night. It lasted for more than an hour as entrants marched between 32nd and Texas streets. The 1941 parade, scheduled for the evening of Dec. 12, was cancelled following the attack on Pearl Harbor and was not held for five years during World War II.

Following the war, the parade grew. Inflated balloon figures were part of the 1949 parade. In 1954, an estimated 300,000 people flocked to North Park to watch the parade.

The selection of the Toyland Parade Queen became a major countywide event during the 1950s. In 1956, 15-year-old Kathy Huffman of El Cajon won the competition over 36 final contestants for Queen. Before the 1958 parade, the North Park sign was enhanced to read "Home of the Famous Toyland Parade" on a banner



San Diego Zoo camels in the 1958 Toyland Parade at Kansas Street and University Avenue (Courtesy of Joe Schloss)

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**TOYLAND**

below the neon "North Park." The San Diego Zoo was a regular participant in the Toyland Parade, providing camels and handlers in costumes for the 1958 parade.

The parade stopped for nearly 20 years after 1966, and the North Park sign was removed in 1967. In announcing the cancellation, the San Diego Union identified the parade as San Diego's largest Christmas parade. The Toyland Parade was revived in 1985, and a replica of the North Park sign finally returned to University Avenue in 1993.

After the Toyland Parade was revived, the San Diego Zoo participated in 1986 by bringing an elephant along with the

Zoo's Goodwill Ambassador Joan Embery. Legend has it that when the elephant was unloaded, it suddenly took off and decided to explore North Park, causing some momentary consternation. But photographs verify that Embery successfully rode the elephant in the parade.

Through the years, the North Park Lions Club, North Park Main Street, and now Victoria House Corporation have worked hard to keep the parade as a North Park tradition. Contact Victoria House Corporation at 619-269-7880 if you want to help them with this beloved community event.

—Katherine Hon is the secretary of the North Park Historical Society. Reach her at [info@northparkhistory.org](mailto:info@northparkhistory.org) or 619-294-8990. ♦

# Relocating

North Park institutions Olympic Café and John Kotselas will stay in neighborhood

## PastMatters Katherine Hon

In 1985, John Kotselas decided to open a restaurant featuring his family's delicious recipes. He says, "Greeks stay put," and true to his heritage, he has maintained his restaurant, Olympic Café, in the little shopping center on the northwest corner of Texas Street and University Avenue for 31 years.

Kotselas will soon be leaving that space, but he will not be moving far. He is guiding the creation of an authentic Greek taverna in the building just to the west at 2310 University Ave., which most recently hosted Jersey Joe's Pizzeria.

Although he was born in Greece, Kotselas is essentially a North Park native. He came here with his family in 1967 when he was only 8 years old. His father, Pete, and mother, Evlabia, emigrated to the United States when a group of right-wing colonels seized power in Greece, suppressed civil liberties and dissolved political parties. He says his parents were children during World War II and the Greek civil war that followed in the late 1940s. They did not want to suffer through more violence and upheaval. The family, including John and his two older sisters Niki and Noula, settled on Bancroft Street just north of Thorn Street.

John expounds fondly about growing up in North Park. He attended McKinley Elementary School and Hoover High School when both were still in their beautiful original buildings constructed during the 1920s. He skated at the Palisade Gardens roller skating rink on University Avenue at Utah Street and watched movies at the North Park Theatre. He delivered newspapers when he was 11 years old, riding his bike at 5 in the morning along Texas and Louisiana streets from El Cajon Boulevard south. He played baseball at Morley Field in the 1970s, and is still proud of his home run for his team, the Optimists, in the 1971 Little League game where they won the championship. He played basketball for Hoover High School under his beloved coach, Hal Mitrovich, earning MVP his first year.

Few may know that he has a master's degree in theology and taught philosophy, theology and New Testament Greek at Horizon Bible Institute in San Diego for



Donna and John Kotselas pose with their sons (l to r) Palos, Kostas and Nicholas at a formal church event about 10 years ago. (Courtesy of John Kotselas)

six years. In the early 1980s, when interest rates were skyrocketing and the used-car business was flourishing, he imported cars and sold them at a lot on 16th and C streets Downtown. But he began to feel the car business was too dependent on transitory economic conditions and decided the restaurant business would be more stable.

"Your stomach doesn't ask what the interest rate is when you want to eat," he explains. His sisters, for years, had been

successfully running eight restaurants, including Troy's Greek Restaurant on Friars Road. So in 1985, he brought recipes from his mom and sisters to the corner spot at Texas Street and University Avenue, a location he had ridden by many times on his paper route.

John loves providing an experience where people can forget whatever else is going on, relax, and enjoy eating Greek food made from scratch. His favorite memories include hanging out at the restaurant with local coaches like Hal Mitrovich; Bill Whittaker, a founder of North Park Little League and former baseball coach at Saint Augustine; and Joe Schloss, another founder of North Park Little League and respected coach for 60 years.

He says the restaurant is an extension of his house, and indeed, many customers feel like friends coming over for a visit. When he was writing his book "Socrates in New York" in the late 1990s, he would test

out philosophical theories at the restaurant. He laughs, remembering getting phone calls after midnight from worried families asking if he had seen the person they sent to pick up their take-out hours ago. Yes, they were still engaged in the lively discussion, sacks of food forgotten on the table in front of them.

His fondest memory about the restaurant is meeting Donna, his wife of 25 years, there in 1989. She had recently moved to Hamilton Street and was going to a nearby dry cleaners when he first saw her. After she left, he asked them to tell her to come to the restaurant next time, and a few months later she did. Her degree in food science from UC Davis and cooking skills were the icing on the cake. Appropriately, she makes all the tempting desserts at Olympic Café.

John is looking forward to the new location being open before Christmas. There will be a covered outdoor patio and more indoor space where diners can linger. The hand-scraped floor tile that looks like stone, hand-distressed window frames and hand-forged wrought iron finishes will form an authentic backdrop for the antiques he has collected over the years. He and his long-time employees are very happy to be staying in North Park, a community they love, and the neighborhood can't wait to join them for a leisurely breakfast, lunch or dinner.

—Katherine Hon is the secretary of the North Park Historical Society. Reach her at [info@northparkhistory.org](mailto:info@northparkhistory.org) or 619-294-8990.\*



Olympic Café will move from its current corner location at Texas Street and University Avenue by the end of December. (Photos by Katherine Hon)

Olympic Café will soon inhabit 2310 University Ave., and the blank wall on the right will feature a covered patio open to the street.