

community connection

Oakridge Estate Comes Alive During Successful Fundraiser and Outreach Event

By Chris Sales

The location was a local landmark, the historic 1937 Northridge residence of Barbara Stanwyck, later occupied by well-known character actor Jack Oakie. The occasion was an afternoon with author Victoria Wilson, signing her new book "A Life of Barbara Stanwyck, Steel -True 1907-1940". The event was to be a major effort by the Friends of Oakridge to showcase the historic home, as well as celebrate the beginnings of its refurbishment as an historic property and community resource.

Victoria Wilson, Senior Editor at Alfred Knopf spent many years working on her book on the life of Barbara Stanwyck. Chronicling her years from her birth to 1940, the book makes many references to Marwyck Ranch, Oakridge's original name and the brainchild of Stanwyck and her neighbors Marion and Zeppo Marx. The ranch was a working thoroughbred horse breeding ranch and stables from the late 1930s through the 1940s. Author Wilson used the image of Marwyck as an important one to the story of Barbara Stanwyck and this period of her life. Interviewed for the event by film theorist, writer and critic Foster Hirsch, Wilson shared with a large and appreciative audience many details of Stanwyck's life at Oakridge as well as the stars and personalities that visited her at her ranch and home.

In the audience were many with direct associations to Oakridge and Marwick Ranch, including Karen Hudson, the granddaughter of famed African American Architect Paul R. Williams, who designed the Oakridge house for Stanwyck. Ms. Hudson thanked the Friends of Oakridge, as well as former and current CD12 Councilmen Greig Smith and Mitch Englander for their hard work to purchase and then rehabilitate the Oakridge Estate property, saving it from destruction. Among the other guests singled out by Ms. Wilson were Brenda Feigen, noted entertainment and anti-discrimination attorney, Kate Edelman Johnson, daughter of motion picture producer Louis Edelman, as well as Joanne Parrent, great-niece of Barbara Stanwyck. Also included in the audience, as guests of Ms. Wilson were the actors Stefani Powers and David Hedison.

Nearly 250 guests, planning committee members and volunteers, attended the event. Light refreshments were served and copies of Victoria Wilson's book were available for sale before the book signing. Self-guided tours were available of the ground floor rooms of the house, providing first time access to many of those invited.

Recent meetings of the city mandated LVNOC committee, tasked with the distribution of over 850,000 dollars of



Among the guests and luminaries at the Friends of Oakridge book signing event were, left to right, Joanne Parrent, Brenda Feigen, Victoria Wilson, Stefani Powers, Karen Hudson, David Hedison, and Kate Edelman

Proposition K funds, has guaranteed that improvements to the property, including hiking trails through the nearly 9 acre meadow space, a children's play area, and a first phase, gravel graded parking area for 40 vehicles, including a path to the house, will be part of the construction to commence in 2015.

Among the many making this event possible, the Friends of Oakridge wish to thank the Rec and Parks Maintenance staff; Vicky Israel, Assistant General Manager of Rec and Parks; the staff of CD12, most notably Megan Cottier, CD12 District Director, for all her good work on the LVNOC committee; as well as the boards of Northridge East, West and Porter Ranch Neighborhood Councils. The Friends also wish to thank Pat LoPresti, Debra Farra and Steve Harris for making this event possible. Special thanks goes to the many local businesses that helped make the event a success, especially Corner Bakery, Larry Edmunds Bookshop and All Valley Party rentals.

The Oakridge Estate represents continuity with a time when Northridge was rural and idyllic, and when life was much less frenetic. The rescue of the nine acres of the Oakridge Estate from the developers bulldozer has saved a piece of that time for the citizens of Northridge and the North Valley to savor and enjoy for years to come.

If you would like to know more about the work of the Friends of Oakridge, possibly give of your time to their important project, or make a donation to their efforts, you can contact them through their website at www.oakridgeestate.org or at 818-739-0292.