

community connection

Oakridge Estate Tours—A Glimpse of Old Hollywood Glamour in Northridge

By Robin Kellogg

Admirers of historic homes, fans of Hollywood memorabilia, or those curiosity seekers who want to know what lies behind the gated property next to Rydell Chevrolet on Devonshire Street, will get an insider's view on October 26 when the Friends of Oakridge, a nonprofit group involved in fundraising, programming and restoration of the property, host the first quarterly tour of the Oakridge Estate.

Docents and volunteers will lead groups of 20 on one-hour tours of the 6,000 square foot home, a designated Los Angeles Historic Monument, while regaling them with stories of old Hollywood, Barbara Stanwyck (the home's original owner), and comedic actor Jack Oakie, who later purchased the home, as well as updating them on plans for the Oakridge Estate Park.

The 1937 English Tudor-style house, designed by renowned architect Paul Williams, is being restored to reflect its original charm and glamour. The surrounding 9.4 acre yet-to-be developed property has been slated for a "passive park" featuring a play area for children, an outdoor classroom, a hiking and jogging trail, a meadow, and a water feature.

The property was originally part of a sprawling 130-acre ranch co-owned by Stanwyck and her then manager Zeppo Marx and his wife, Marion. Marwyck Ranch/Northridge Farms, as it was known, was an internationally recognized thoroughbred breeding and training facility, home to several horseracing champions.

The Oakridge Estate almost became a footnote in the annals of Hollywood history when it was slated for home development several years back. Luckily, the faltering economy in 2008 halted those plans. Due to the forethought and quick action on the part of then Councilmember Greig Smith, and the Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks, the home and subsequently the surrounding property were secured through the California State Quimby Act, which requires residential developers to set aside parkland and recreational access.

"I saw the property as a last vestige of old Northridge/Chatsworth," explained Smith. "I wanted to save it not only for its historic value but as an opportunity to give the community something that will last forever."



Once the land was secured, the Friends of Oakridge committee was organized by Smith and the Recreation and Parks Department to help maintain the property and promote it as an important part of the Northridge history.

According to Michael A. Shull, General Manager, City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks, "The partnership between Recreation and Parks Department, Council District 12, and the Friends of Oakridge Estate is a model for public-private collaboration to benefit the public. Opening up this historic San Fernando Valley estate for tours is just the beginning of the program to preserve and restore the estate for public education and enjoyment."

Friends of Oakridge Estates spokesperson Steve Harris credits the idea for the docent-led tours to Councilmember Mitchell Englander's office as a way to garner community support and involvement in the preservation of this historic project. Said Councilmember Mitchell Englander, "We are thrilled to partner with the Friends of the Oakridge in order to bring the story of the Oakridge Estate to the community. Opening this extraordinary home up for the public to view reminds people of the rich history of the San Fernando Valley and introduces that history to a new generation."

Reservations for the October 26th tour will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis beginning on Monday, October 6. The entrance fee will be \$10 per person. Visitors will park offsite and will be shuttled to the estate. To make your reservation, go to www.theoakridgeestate.com the tour button or call 818-739-0292, ext. 2. For more information about the Friends of Oakridge, visit www.theoakridgeestate.org.

Quarterly tours of the estate are being scheduled for 2015