Decoding an architectural puzzle

California’s first family

Stargazing in luxury

Orange Coast College
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Irvine artist Richard Kent painted a watercolor of Orange Coast College’s Robert B. Moore Theatre, designed by famed architect Richard Neutra and Robert Alexander. The painting was done for the Costa Mesa Chamber of Commerce.

“This is kind of what we’re doing right now to look back and see if it’s true. Was Richard Neutra a part of this?” — Rich Pagel, vice president of administrative services

To solve the case, a campus team is conducting a search of written contracts between the college and original architects to discover the true designers who turned the one-time Santa Ana Air Base into Coast’s first campus.

The planetarium, the math and business wings, the Robert B. Moore Theatre and the Harry R. LeBard Stadium, built in the 1950s, have all been linked with the famous modernist architect Neutra, conflicting with building historians who don’t support OCC’s intent to destroy the math and business wings and the planetarium to make room for newer, up-to-date structures.

OCC’s Vice President of Administrative Services Rich Pagel, though, suggests that written contracts discovered so far indicate that Coast’s campus may not be as synonymous with Neutra as people think.

“I go back to the actual contract we have here established,” Pagel said while picking up a document dating back to 1949, “and it doesn’t mention Richard Neutra. This is kind of what we’re doing right now to look back and see if it’s true. Was Richard Neutra a part of this?”

The main architect suggested by Pagel, and revealed in a contract, is Robert E. Alexander. Alexander, also a well-known architect, created a partnership with Neutra in 1949 that lasted through 1958.

“Other architects are named in those documents,” Pagel said. “So, Neutra maybe didn’t design those buildings.”

OCC architecture professor Rose Anne Kings admits that the case surrounding Coast’s buildings is a sensitive subject.

“The general understanding is that he had a part in all of the campus plans, the stadium, as well as the Neutra classrooms and the Robert B. Moore Theatre, which isn’t slated for demolition. Neutra’s participation in the theater, Pagel said, is why he is credited with the design of other buildings. Pagel said that since it was true, on paper, that Neutra was involved in the theater, the word got around that he was responsible for ‘maybe other buildings. He designed the stadium, the Forum, the Science Lecture Hall.”

“...But when you dig down through the paper work a little bit, you realize, other architects are named in those documents,” Pagel said. “So, Neutra maybe didn’t design those buildings.”

Architect Barbara Lamprecht, a modern building historian, it is crucial that everyone knows it was a commission done between the two architects.

“We know that the overall original campus was designed with Neutra and Alexander,” Lamprecht said. “It’s really important that the partnership’s name is Neutra and Alexander.”

According to Lamprecht, OCC’s modernism style fell off the radar as time went by.

Between the late 1960s and 1980s, modern architecture was supplanted by newer postmodern architecture and several other architectural styles.

One of the qualifications for whether the buildings will be replaced, and most important in OCC’s case, is whether the buildings have historical value. According to architectural historians, they indeed do. But, with Pagel and his team digging up documents, the only credit Neutra receives is for work on the Robert B. Moore Theatre, which isn’t slated for demolition.

Famed architect Richard Neutra may have had less to do with OCC’s post-modernist design than originally thought.

Architect please stand up?

By Ignacio Cervantes Jr.

Orange Coast College’s past may not be all it was cracked up to be.

The sightseers who come to the campus regularly, in fact, may be in for a surprise if an investigation into the design of the original campus confirms what some administrators suspect.

Rather than being the brainchild of one of architecture’s most beloved post-modernists, Richard Neutra, it may actually have been designed by an underling — a lesser known Los Angeles architect.

To solve the case, a campus team is conducting a search of written contracts between the college and original architects to discover the true designers who turned the one-time Santa Ana Air Base into Coast’s first campus.

Famed architect Richard Neutra was long thought to be the architect of much of Orange Coast.

— Rich Pagel
A controversial Irvine house has a history of lawsuits, loans, conflicts and even strippers.

By Miles White

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Stargazing 101

OCC’s old, worn out planetarium will be replaced by a state of the art facility just right for the 21st century.

By Miles White

The small auditorium inside the planetarium was packed with students after another night of star gazing on campus. The Orange Coast College astronomy class had just finished finding Jupiter through the class telescopes. The class was packed into the domed room anxiously awaiting the professors’ last words before dismissing them for the evening. The walls were covered with a mossy blue foam that would have looked like it had been primarily used as a lecture hall for astronomy lectures.

While the obvious signs of aging, there is still a quaint hominess to its interior. Three life-sized aliens, all rubber, sit propped against the wall in the back of the small lecture hall. One is wearing a pink dress as if at a tea party. The smeared residue of old chalk dust litters the green chalkboard wrapping the front half of the room, hardening back to a time before whiteboards.

As one of the oldest buildings on campus, the planetarium is also among the smallest. It was built in 1958, seating 35 people and initially cost less than $100,000 to create.

“The same amount of money couldn’t even afford you a decent telescope today,” Contopoulos said. “The club has done a lot of great work.”

Many use their club membership as a stepping stone toward a broader career in astronomy. With plenty of experience working telescopes like the one at Griffith Park on campus, the planetarium houses. Weekly Thursday meetings from the campus Astronomy Club are also held in the same room.

The club was founded by Contopoulos in 1991 to give students a place to talk and learn about astronomy outside a classroom setting. They raise money to go traveling to various planetariums and use their telescopes. Funds are also used to support planetariums in financial need.

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“It’s nearly midnight on Tuesday when Zach Baldwin begins to pack up after a show at La Cave, and heads back to what he calls home. He opens a garage door three quarters of the way, plops down on a mattress inches above the cement, and lights up a cigarette.

With an exhalé of smoke, Baldwin expresses that contrary to popular belief, the everyday life of an up-and-coming musician is anything but glamorous. His day-to-day life is a constant struggle to balance band practices and recording sessions with his full-time management position at the sub shop Jersey Mike’s.

“Sure, I’m a musician. But first, I am a human,” Baldwin said. “Music hasn’t paid a single bill yet, but fortunately sandwiches do.”

The 22-year-old Costa Mesa native began playing music at age 5 and since then has used his psychedelic music style and intricate song writing to take over the Orange County indie-rock music scene.

“I started with the trumpet, went on to the saxophone and eventually learned the drums, piano, bass and finally guitar. Somewhere along the line figured I could sing too. It always just came easy to me, like second nature,” Baldwin said.

After a few other failed musical projects, Baldwin formed The Bluffs in 2011 with his then-roommate Nate Bennett and Bennett’s younger brother, Nick. The band went through three drummers their first year before finding current drummer Sean Murray, who was the drummer for a band they played with in 2012.

Through much local success, The Bluffs have had the opportunity to play venues all over Southern California, including the famous House of Blues. However, Baldwin always takes every opportunity to come back and represent the band’s home town of Costa Mesa.

“I have been supporting The Bluffs since the beginning and it is always good to get to watch them locally, they
I haven’t decided if it’s arrogance or laziness that causes me to tell people they simply Google it when I ask a casual question about my family. Either way, I earn quick kudos once they actually ask.

Be honest, if your family was heavily involved in royal relations, you would probably do the same.

“The Picos were examples of the most politically powerful families of California while it was still a Mexican province,” said PBS Frontline writer Mario de Valdés in his article “Famous Families” about my royal relations.

Growing up as a direct descendant of Pio Pico, the last Mexican governor of California, doesn’t give me instant recognition — aside from my fourth grade social studies teacher and a history major I once met at a concert — however I did grow up in a proud family rich in culture.

Seeing my name on street signs in nearly every town throughout southern California is pretty awesome too. The irony of my family’s history is that what was once California’s richest family, both in wealth and culture, is now a melting pot of middle-class white folks who get together and talk about when we were Mexican.

Despite my family understanding that Pio Pico was taken advantage of by Caucasian Californians in the 1800s, we are also extremely proudful and he has always been described as a very kind man with optimism. Some see Pio Pico as naïve — a man with trust in people who would stab him in the back and, u

White movies, for a horse and silver saddle.

“Back in the day, Pio had gotten the better of the deal. Looking back now, not so much,” my cousin Phil Pico says with a laugh.

I can also recall a number of heated conversations around the time the Pio Pico Historical State Park in Whittier was scheduled to be closed because of the state’s financial troubles. The park includes the grounds and the mansion Pio Pico lived in. To say my family was outraged would be an understatement. At the time, they were informed our forefather’s past home was one of seven parks scheduled to be closed in the summer of 2012.

I remember standing, along with my cousins and many people, in front of the mansion with signs demanding the mansion be saved. The park honored not only my forefather, but a man who is called the quintessential Californian. The state appreciated that. In the end, with the help of many volunteer groups, we won the fight to keep the mansion open.

The mansion is within spitting distance of my grandmother’s house in Whittier, which I grew up going to every weekend. Although my grandmother is the only Pico left living in Whittier today, our family still gathers at the mansion for annual reunions, weddings and other festivities.

In 2003, the Pio Pico State Historic Park hosted a huge party honoring the newly renovated mansion and our family. I remember it was the most people I had ever seen on the property. That was when I realized that this was not just a place important to me, but to the entire community.

There was live music at every corner, a man making tacos and these awesome blue quilted things (oh the important things you remember when you’re 10) and as a family member I did not have to pay for any of the carnival style games they offered.

As I write this, my family highly anticipates the next event to take place at the park — my great-uncle’s wedding in early May. I can envision it now, walking along the dirt pathway that leads under the high, beautiful arbors, eventually taking us into a vineyard on the backside of the mansion. For me, the air just breathes easier here — pure tranquility.

To what most people is merely a historic landmark they pass on their drive down the 605 freeway is my great-great-great-grandfather’s backyard. And, the Pico House, the large building that stands in the old plaza of Los Angeles, across from the famous Olvera Street as a part of El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Monument, was his most prized business venture. So next time you drive throughout the San Fernando Valley, down Pico Boulevard in Santa Monica or get off of Pico Avenue to head down to the beaches of Santa Clemente, remember whose backyard you’re wandering in.

Pio Pico was born on May 5, 1801 and died in September 1894. Throughout his 93 years under the flags of Spain, Mexico and the United States, he rose from the poverty of the San Gabriel Mission to the highest office in the state of California, earning recognition as one of the most remarkable figures in California history.

He dedicated most of his time to transforming Los Angeles from a remote pueblo into the metropolis we know today. Although he died a poor man, he remained a proud and stately figure and I can assure you that his legacy will live on for generations to come and stay a topic of conversation at Pico family barbecues.
and I spent summers netting tadpoles was a small spring-fed lake below the old rise in the local topography. There discovered what we called the secret hills against a rise in the local topography. There discovered what we called the secret hills.

By John Hazelton

Long ago, when Orange County contained dairy lands, orchards and farms, developers acquired a piece of land that, during the time of America’s effort to reach the moon, became part of the county’s housing boom.

Aerospace workers found the neighborhood convenient to both work and the entertaining features the county had to offer, including the beaches and Disneyland. I came with my family to this place, and spent my formative years with neighborhood friends.

When we were 10, Jay, Craig, Rich and I spent many of our summer hours trekking across wide open fields. We would tag after older children, and we eventually discovered what we called the secret hills against a rise in the local topography. There was a small spring-fed lake below the old Victorian Newland farmhouse. My friends and I spent summers netting tadpoles and rolling, screeching, down cliff-side dirt paths on bicycles near empty farm buildings.

We shared activities which, over many years, changed. When it became possible to conquer new horizons, we often went together, graduating through tadpoles to girls, and from there to jobs, beer and books.

The duties of life came calling and we gradually separated. We began families and careers in other cities. Or so I assumed. Then I was back. And so were Craig and Jay — back to the old neighborhood.

It can as a mild shock to rediscover old schoolsmates when returning home, decades later. What should one say to reestablish bonds — we were past chasing frogs.

In the rediscovery of old friends there are some very basic curiosities. To accept one another as in the past the social gaps must be filled in. We want to know what they did to get back again.

I am now one such old-new person. I came to the coast from a north Orange County lakeside community in the hills. I ended up back in the old neighborhood because I received a call from my 90-year-old mom’s doctor, telling me that she had suffered a temporal stroke and she would need help occasionally. So she requested my aid. Mom had lived independently since her husband died five years earlier. My wife and I then left our 16-year-residence in the hills. We brought ourselves to the Huntington Beach home and between doctor visits to mom’s medical specialists, I had some time to explore.

In walking the neighborhood and inspecting this old-new situation, it was a bit of a joy to find one landmark that remains sharply etched in my memory — a particular 7-Eleven store in the neighborhood frequented by kids. Everything else seemed almost unrecognizable except street names and house numbers, but the corner store is identical to what it was in the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s.

A few neighborhood houses remained familiar too. An old friend who shared in some of my early frog catching afternoons now lives in a house once owned by another close neighbor. Jay Cook, 56, a manager at a large development company, acquired a piece of land that, after the family sold it to another family, we found to be identical to what it was in the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s.

From Page 7

BAND: Zach Baldwin writes poetic lyrics for his indie rock band The Bluffs.

connected to the people in this town,” Baldwin’s close friend Pearson Castner said. “They know it is because of their fans that they are where they are today, and the appreciation just comes through their performances here. Zach is beyond humble.

Two flights of stairs below ground, an incendiary sound engulfs the small cabaret bar La Cave. Through a packed room of wildly dancing 20-somethings, Baldwin’s presence stands out as he’s framed between his band mates.

A pastel, paisley-printed button-down shirt gleamed by beads of sweat and his feet bare as usual, he toses aside his dripping shirt black hair that hangs down just past his brow and screams out into the crowd, nearly hypnotizing his audience into moving their bodies as he does.

Tonight The Bluffs came to finally promote the EP “Zoo Boots” which was two years in the making. The discs were laid out on the edge of the stage free for the taking.

“The fans already paid for ‘Zoo Boots,’ it would be wrong to charge them twice,” Baldwin said. “It took us two years to produce ‘Zoo Boots’ because of our budget, but every large profit we got from a show went toward the recording sessions. Basically we owe it to our fans.”

“Zoo Boots” is a collection of the fan’s favorite compositions, most of which were written by Baldwin, who said he pulls his inspiration for lyrics from inner experiences to historical scandals such as Jonestown and his six-year romance.

[Baldwin] writes the deepest and most poetic lyrics of any up and coming indie-rock group I’ve heard. He is more of a poet than a song writer, like a modern-day Jim Morrison,” Castner said.

Back in his garage turned apartment, Baldwin pops off to the top of a Sierra Nevada and reaches for the pack of American Spirits that sits on the concrete ground. He sticks another cigarette into the corner of his mouth but before lighting up validates his living situation.

“Sure most people don’t see this as ideal, I didn’t either at first, but now, to me this is paradise,” Baldwin said as he spread out his arms embracing his surroundings. “These are the best people I know and as long as I’m living with them it’s all worth it.”

Baldwin said, he holds up the glass beer bottle as a cheer, his infectious laugh spreading throughout the room like a wild fire. The people sitting in front of him idolize him for his free spirited ideology.

Tonight, Baldwin was a local icon, but tomorrow he will return to being a sandwich shop manager, a boyfriend and a roommate.

“John Lennon said it,” Baldwin said, pointing to his tattooed upper bicep. “Whatever gets you through the night, it’s alright.”

HOME: Well past the days of catching frogs on summer days, a student goes home.

merchandising outlet is now in the house, one block away from his childhood home.

Cook opened the daughter of the original owners and as he lived and raised a child, the owners died and more sadly, he became a widow. Thus, Cook became the owner. It was not as mysterious as I had imagined. But, I came for a visit and to seize the chance to chat about our friendship’s

From Page 10

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Perhaps my initial shock
A new way to see the cosmos.

From Page 6

“Just participate in the events,” Contopoulos said. “I like to take a hands-off approach with the club when they raise money and travel to the night sky. But, Kings assured, until they go back and find who actually paid him and the relationship and the contract was almost never painless. It has to begin by meeting my neighbor as an adult, there was a momentary overlay between past and present. I clarified my expectations. Struggling to control a sense of shock at unearthing one’s life is natural but it had to begin somewhere. By meeting my neighbor as an adult, there was a momentary overlay between decades-old memories and the new main actors. I clarified my expectations. Struggling to control a sense of shock at unearthing one’s life is natural but it had to begin somewhere. By meeting my neighbor as an adult, there was a momentary overlay between decades-old memories and the new main actors. Struggling to control a sense of shock at unearthing one’s life is natural but it had to begin somewhere.

The existing planetarium was a good addition to OCC when it was opened in the mid-1950s, Bennett said; “but it is no longer functional and would be expensive and difficult to retrofit. And, given its small size, it would still be of limited use.”

The buildings, allegedly designed by the late architect Richard Neutra, will be demolished for the project, and are more than half a century old. Relocating oneself and family is not exactly easy and is almost never painless. It has been measured in the census that two-thirds of all movers are between 18 and 29, with more than 40 percent of them moving on again within five years. I now fall well outside that demographic, and I fervently hope I never have to move again.

Sometimes, securing a home at all is a challenge. When a mover is confronted with the logic of choices, a known neighborhood can shine in the advantage of holding fewer surprises. You can try to name something better, but there is an indisputable comfort in living with the familiar — and recalling where to catch frogs.

Several of the original campus buildings could be razed to make room for upgrades but purists are leery of the progress. It takes up. There will be a lobby exhibit hall outside the dome and a courtyard with a ticket booth for presentations inside the dome. The whole project will cost an estimated $16 million.

The new dome will also double as an exhibit hall just as the current one barely does. Classes like anatomy, chemistry, physiology, and marine science will be able to use the screen within the dome for their lectures. The “existing planetarium was a good addition to OCC when it was opened in the mid-1950s,” Bennett said, “but it is no longer functional and would be expensive and difficult to retrofit. And, given its small size, it would still be of limited use.”

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The Coast Community College District Board of Trustees has final say in whether the buildings will be replaced, regardless of the historic background, according to Pagel. It is a process which asks questions on whether the current buildings are qualified to stay or if it’s best to replace them with newer, more modernized buildings.

“We have to build with taxpayer money. Are we going to use taxpayer money to save those mediocre Richard Neutra buildings and try to restore them into something useful when really it would be cheaper to tear them down and build new,” Kings said. “It’s a real struggle because I see it from both sides.”

According to Kings, Neutra was one of the most important mid-century modernist architects in California. He’s important to the relationship and the contract he had or if he took a payment from someone, no one knows for certain what his role was.

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A Student Publication
By members of the Journalism 115 class