

# History Comes Alive!

Tales From the City Archives



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At the ceremony where the Hollywood sign area was saved from developers.

Photos courtesy the Trust for Public Land.

“An advertising billboard on Mt. Lee, in the hills overlooking the film capital, [was] erected in 1923. The sign is 50 feet high, 450 feet long, weighs 480,000 pounds, and cost \$21,000 to construct. It was designed to promote Harry Chandler’s real estate development named Hollywoodland (the sign’s original wording).... It was lit by 4,000 20-watt bulbs.... The last four letters were removed by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce in 1945.” Pitt, Leonard and Dale. *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County*. 1997. Page 207.

In February 2010, Councilman Tom LaBonge and officials from the Trust for Public Land (TPL) announced the launching of a \$12.5 million fundraising campaign to preserve the view of the Hollywood sign, expand Griffith Park and save 138 precious, pristine acres from residential development. The TPL had an agreement to purchase the land from the owners for the \$12.5 million due in mid-April to prevent the building of luxury estates next to the sign. This new project became known as the “Save Cahuenga Peak.”

Since 2001, Tom LaBonge had been working on this project to acquire the land known as Cahuenga Peak, which was on the market for private residential development for \$22 million. His intent was to maintain hiking and recreational areas for future generations of Angelenos. Tom enlisted the TPL to raise the money for the acquisition.

The organization had until mid-April 2010, to purchase the land for \$12.5 million under agreement with the owners. About half of the funds were raised by various sources, including the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, which donated \$1 million. To raise public awareness for raising the remaining \$6 million of the asking price, the Hollywood sign was covered with the message ‘SAVE THE PEAK’ for a weekend.

Jay Dean, Chief Marketing Officer of TPL, said at the time, “We are getting support from the Hollywood community and from the Tiffany Foundation, but we need support from anyone who cares about the Hollywood or parks and open space. We only have two months to go.” Michael J. Kowalski, chairman and CEO Tiffany & Co., in reference to the Hollywood sign, said: “[It] is an American icon that holds a unique place in the nation’s collective imagination and the cultural history of Los Angeles.”

In late April 2010, there was a press conference held by TPL President Will Rogers, Chris Baumgart of the Hollywood Sign Trust, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Councilman Tom LaBonge. They announced that a \$900,000 donation came in from Hugh

Hefner of Playboy Enterprises to close the \$12.5 million deal to save the Hollywood sign. At the press conference, it was revealed that the parcel of land would be preserved and annexed to Griffith Park.

Tom LaBonge stated his thanks to the TPL, the Hollywood Sign Trust and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce for their assistance. He gave a special thanks to Gov. Schwarzenegger “to a man, who, like me, loves nature, loves people and provided great strength to bring us to this point.”

## Tom LaBonge and the Hollywood Sign

■ City Councilman and Club Member Tom LaBonge fought to keep the L.A. icon in public hands.



What has not been known by many of the citizens of this City is that as far back as 1978, the Hollywood sign, as it looks today, came about because Hugh Hefner was the one to raise money to rebuild it. As a big fan of the sign, Hefner came forward again in 2010 with his \$900,000 that brought forth the closing of this current dramatic Hollywood sign story.

The fundraising campaign was launched over President’s Day weekend when the Hollywood sign was covered temporarily with a message “Save the Peak.” The two earliest

and largest donors to this effort were Los Angeles philanthropist Aileen Getty and the Tiffany & Co. Foundation. “I thank Hugh Hefner and Aileen Getty for their critical contributions, along with everyone whose generous spirit moved them to join the campaign to save one of America’s most famous urban spaces,” said Michael J. Kowalski, chairman and CEO of Tiffany Co. “The threat to its existence underscores the need for partnerships like ours with TPL who can work together to protect our cultural assets for future gen-



The group celebrating the saving of the Hollywood sign area included Jon Mukri, General Manager, Rec and Parks (far left); Councilman and Club Member Tom LaBonge (third from left); and Hugh Hefner (in hat, center).



A group that was instrumental in saving the Hollywood sign area.

erations.” Ms. Getty, longtime Hollywood resident, said, “I’m proud to have supported TPL’s efforts in conserving this magical place.”

Hollywood leaders donated \$3.2 million, including major donations from (to list a few) the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, CBS Corporation, the Lucasfilm Foundation, NBC Universal, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Steven Spielberg, Twentieth Century Fox, Warner Bros., The Walt Disney Company, and others. Some Hollywood individuals gave on their own: Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, and Norman Lear. Many neighborhood groups raised money to donate. Others sold baked goods to donate money. The involvement was incredible.

But the man who initiated and carried the spirit from the onset onward was our very own Tom LaBonge from the Fourth District. Thank you so very, very much for all your enthusiasm and hard work.