

VALLEY ENTERTAINMENT

The Reel History of the Valley

By Martin M. Cooper

How many nonprofit organizations are there in the San Fernando Valley?

4,300.
That's right: 4,300!

The largest dedicated to making the lives of those who were employed in the motion picture and television industries better as they age is the Motion Picture & Television Fund, located off Mulholland Highway in Woodland Hills.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Fund, a century of entertainment people taking care of those in need in their own professional community. Actress Mary Pickford conceived what was to be named the Motion Picture Relief Fund in 1921; it was created to help colleagues in the entertainment industry who had fallen on hard times.

At its annual Oscar presentations on April 25, 2021, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences presented its coveted Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award to the Fund, marking the first time that honor had been bestowed on an organization. There is an appropriateness in the organization receiving the Award as it was Jean Hersholt, president of the Fund in 1940, who found 48 acres of walnut and orange groves at the far end of the San Fernando Valley for the Fund. The organization paid \$850 an acre for the land...just over \$40,000. Pickford and Hersholt broke the first ground, and the facility was dedicated on Sept. 27, 1942.

While many people may think of the MPTF as residential and hospital facilities for the industries' elderly, it provides much more, including child care, social services, health insurance, mental health services, veterans' services, palliative care, memory care, and more.

The organization itself is pretty good at maximizing its assets. According to its official pictorial history book, *The Heart of Hollywood*, "an added windfall was the sale of a 12-acre parcel of land for a shopping center adjacent to the Country House and Hospital. That land had been purchased for \$19,000 in 1941. The selling price in 1964: \$1,100,000."

Over the years, the Samuel Goldwyn Foundation has been the Fund's biggest funder. Contributions to the Fund come not in \$100 and \$500 donations, but more typically in \$10,000 and \$50,000 – and much more, including major levels of support from the best-known names in the industry.



Above: The entrance to the Wasserman Campus. The names on the sign include industry titans such as: Fran & Ray Stark; Jodie Foster; Jack Skirball; Samuel Goldwyn, Jr.; Frances Goldwyn; Louis B. Mayer and John Ford. At right: MPTF CEO Bob Beitcher accepted the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award on behalf of the organization at the 93rd Annual Academy Awards in April 2021.



According to the organization's pictorial history book, "The chapel was donated by John Ford, who also donated real estate and other bequests which brought his total to more than a quarter-million... Donations of \$50,000 came from Lew Wasserman, George Seaton, the Robert Wise Foundation, Elvis Presley, and the estate of Jean and Don Harvey... Gregory Peck gave \$75,000. A hundred thousand was given by Bob Hope and another \$100,000 by Jules and Doris Stein. Lori Bara willed \$222,000 in the memory of Theda Bara."

But if Hollywood notables make up a large portion of the organization's donors, so does its list of those benefacted by it. Residents of its Wasserman Campus have ranged from the most well-known stars to the most anonymous of craft workers. A partial list of those who have died in residence begins with

Bud Abbott (1897-1974) and concludes with Clara Kimball Young (1890-1960)...So far.

Bob Beitcher, president and CEO of the MPTF, has been at the organization's helm since 2010. He is not unaware of the challenges facing the industry – and the Fund – over the next decade: "Seventy-five thousand industry members will be retiring in the next 10 years; some will move out of state. People we serve may be different as the industry will be different."

According to Beitcher, "We describe ourselves as a democratic community where people who have worked in every facet of the industry can be taken care of. "We know we'll need to provide more services supporting industry members who want to age in place," he says.

Another challenge he says is nurses leaving the industry; nurses, hospitality, and others serving the Fund's beneficiaries

A Century of the MPTF

on the campus date to 1941 and Beitcher sees the need to remodel much of the facility over the next decade.

Throughout its first century, those who have supported, or been supported by, the Motion Picture & Television Fund, comprise an unparalleled roster of "the industry." Of the 4,300 nonprofits in the San Fernando Valley, there isn't one that can boast the star power of supporters of the Motion Picture & Television Fund...or of its beneficiaries.

Martin Cooper, President of Cooper Communications, supervised public relations for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences for 10 years; held executive positions with Disney and Universal Studios; and served as Chairman of the Board of the UCLA Film & Television Archive. He is a Fernando Award Honoree and Past Chairman of VICA. An award-winning author, he has written four books, two of them on the San Fernando Valley.

find it difficult to work in a COVID-19 environment.

Beitcher revealed that the Fund just sold off 20 acres to a developer who is creating a luxury senior community, which might open in 2024.

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