

Spring Picnic and Member Meeting Coming Up!



Nerl and Rob are BBQing again – You won't want to miss this!

Sunday April 19 from 11:30-2 in the Firehouse Museum Parking Lot

Guests Welcome

Come have a delicious Keedy Burger (or hot dog) with all the sides, and cold drinks

Opportunity Drawing - Street Parking

RSVP to the Firehouse at 760-346-6588 and leave a message with the number of attendees

Members \$15 – Guests \$20

Calendar through the End of the Season

Friday Night Lectures from 5:30-6:30, Palm Desert Library Community Room, doors open at 5. RSVP to 760-346-6588, leave a message with number of attendees.

Friday Night Lecture April 17 - Margit F. Chiriaco Rusche - A Life of Service at the Chiriaco Summit and the Patton Museum

Friday Night Lecture May 15 - Naturalist Colin Barrow of the CactusToCloud Institute on Desert Conservation

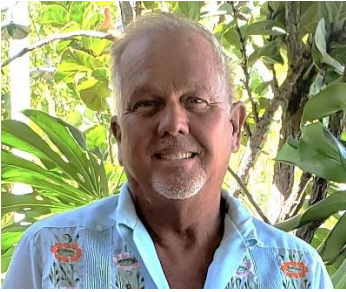


May 26, Museum Closed for the Summer



Watch your emails for the date and location for our Annual Mid-Summer Madness Potluck!

President's Letter



To My HSPD Family,

It seems like summer is already here! This is my final letter to all of you as your HSPD Board President, as my term ends in June. It's been a pleasure moving this organization forward for the last several years. Our vice-president, Beverly James, will be become president. We look forward to seeing her flourish in this role.

We currently have vacancies on our board, so if any members want to make a difference, this is your time to step up!

We were very fortunate to receive an influx of dollars with the dissolution of the Palm Desert Sister City organization. We were gifted over \$16,000 as they closed their books. These funds will be used to further the mission of the Historical Society. We will also create a display in the museum and on our website honoring the Sister City organization's accomplishments in New Zealand and Mexico. These new additions will be unveiled in October at our season opening.

We just wrapped up our Mini-Muster season with the 3rd grade students in Palm Desert elementary schools. In cooperation with the City of Palm Desert, the Fire Department, the schools and Rotary, it was a huge success. As you all know, we moved this project from the fall to the spring when the weather is somewhat cooler and the fire department is more available.

We are all looking forward to our Spring Picnic at the museum on Sunday, April 19th. It will be a BBQ in the back parking lot at the museum, featuring the famous "Keedy Burger" as well as hot dogs and sides. There will be a short business meeting, lots of good food and an opportunity drawing. Watch your email for more details.

We are currently working on plans for our Mid-Summer Madness potluck this summer. Again, watch your email for details and dates. We had a blast last year - such good food!

My final project as president is to oversee the installation of a shade structure in our back parking lot along with the resurfacing of the parking lot. This will be a huge benefit to us for our museum visitors and functions, and it's going to look stunning.

It's been a pleasure working with all of you. Special thanks to all our volunteers, and keep up the good work.

David Toltzmann

**HSPD MISSION STATEMENT
TO COLLECT, PRESERVE AND RECORD THE
HISTORY OF OUR CITY AND COMMUNITIES, AND
TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE SOCIETY'S ARCHIVES
AND ARTIFACTS THROUGH EXHIBITS,
PUBLICATIONS, PROGRAMS AND EVENTS**

HSPD Board

Officers: David Toltzmann, President, Beverly James, Vice President, Merilee Colton, Secretary, Tracey MacDonald, Treasurer

Directors

Linda Holden Clode, Nerl Porras, Erika Sharp, JoEllen Hughes, Christel Prokay, Charlie Franks, Barbara Keedy-Eastes, Leslie Roth, Laine Floan

30+ Years of Mini-Muster — Learning That Saves Lives

This year the Historical Society of Palm Desert proudly celebrates 32 years of Mini-Muster — a one-of-a-kind, hands-on fire safety experience that makes learning both fun and unforgettable for Palm Desert third graders.

Working alongside CalFire/Riverside County Fire Department, Desert Sands Unified School District, Rotary Club - Palm Desert, and dedicated HSPD board members and volunteers, we strengthened the program and secured grant support for new equipment from the City of Palm Desert. To better support students and first responders, Mini-Muster was moved to the spring, while fire safety assemblies continue each October during Fire Prevention Week.

Despite triple-digit temperatures, nearly 750 third graders showed up ready to learn — and loved every minute of it. From getting safely doused by fire hoses to rotating through high-energy, hands-on stations, students gained critical, life-saving skills in an environment they won't forget.



It's loud, it's active, it's unforgettable — and most importantly, it helps keep our children safe.



Special thanks to the firefighters, Maryalice Alberg, and Nerl Porras and JoEllen Hughes of the Historical Society Mini Muster Committee, and to all who helped make this such a memorable day.



To see a clip from the locally-televised event, paste this in your browser:



<https://www.nbcpalmsprings.com/2026/03/27/minimuster-program-teaches-fire-safety-to-palm-desert-students>

Tracey MacDonald

Modernism Week at the Historical Society's Breeze Block Garden

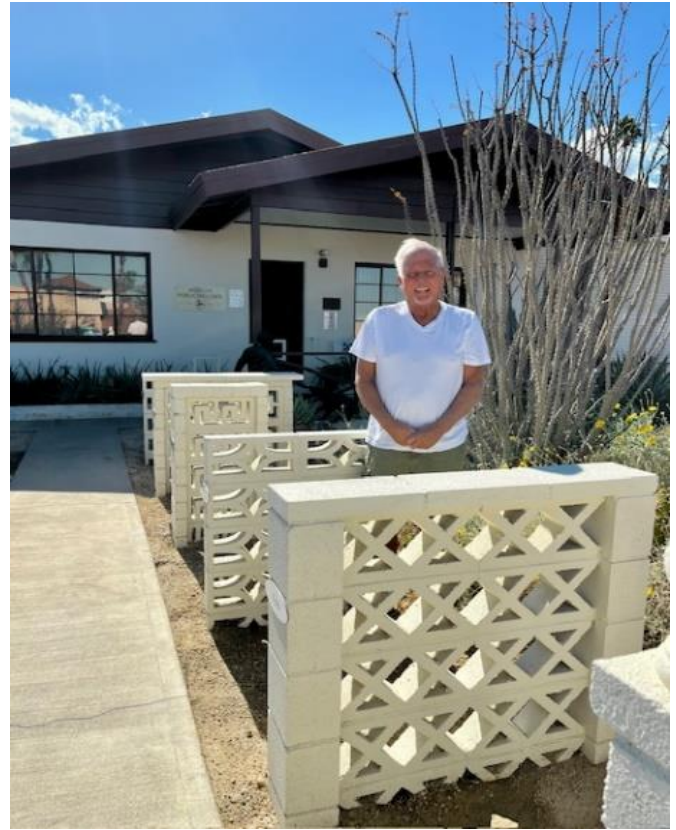
Modernism Week 2026 came to the Firehouse Museum in February with a garden tour on the MW schedule. In spite of the cold, wind and sometimes rain, a record number of Modernism Week attendees came to see the HSPD's own *Breeze Block Garden*. The weather encouraged visitors to come inside the museum as well, and many were delightfully surprised at the number and quality of the exhibits featuring Palm Desert's history and the famous and talented people who worked and lived here.



An outside display illustrated the many styles of Breeze Block to be found in the area, and the Tesselle Company of Riverside, who generously donated much of the block to the museum, set up a table inside. The breeze block installations each had a didactic with the name of the block design (see photo of a visitor scanning the didactic url).



Special thanks to HSPD Board President David Toltzmann, whose inspiration created the Breeze Block Garden, a permanent display that has been a featured tour of Modernism Week for the last two years.



Archivist's Corner



Every summer when the museum closes it gives the Archives volunteers time to spread out and work on big projects. We are starting early on two new and very special projects.

HSPD Family Memories Preservation Center

Our goal is to set up a scanning work area so that our members can come in and scan their family photos and papers. Of course, if members decide to donate copies of their "historic" images, we will gladly accept such donations. If anyone is interested in helping us 1) set up the scanning work area, 2) test the equipment and 3) help us write and test equipment instructions, we'd love the assistance. If you're interested in seeing how a successful Memories Center works, take a look at <https://www.familysearch.org/en/library/family-memories-preservation-center>

HSPD Digital Photo Collection Online

We have digitized a huge portion of our photo collection. Now it's time to get the photos ready to be uploaded to an online repository. We're giving the photos standardized file names and adding "who, what, where, when" descriptions. If you'd like to help with either of these important efforts now or during the summer, contact the archives directly via email at archivist@gmail.com.

Rochelle McCune, HSPD Archivist

Marrakesh Gets Historic Designation

Mayor Evan Trubee assisted in the celebratory ribbon-cutting for Marrakesh Country Club's October 2025 designation as a historic district by the Palm Desert City Council, making the 364-condo community the city's largest historic district, and likely the largest in the Coachella Valley.

Pictured L-R are Trubee, Marni Mitzi, Vice President of the Marrakesh HOA, Luke Leuschner, local historian who prepared the application and Eula Robertson (cutting the ribbon), Marrakesh resident who worked on the project.

The homes' Hollywood Regency style was designed by John Elgin Woolf, with uniform pink and white color palettes, wrought-iron gates, Mansard roofs, Pullman doors, full-height windows and a grand entryway. Woolf designed homes for Hollywood stars such as Cary Grant, Joan Crawford and Bob Hope.

Marrakesh Country Club was developed by Johnny Dawson, famed golfer and developer of other notable country clubs in the desert. Among the most well-known residents was Dawson's wife Velma, a puppeteer known for building the "Howdy Doody" marionette for the iconic 1950's children's TV program. She also oversaw the initial interior design of the clubhouse at Marrakesh. Velma Dawson and Howdy Doody are featured in a special exhibit at the Firehouse Museum.



Palm Desert Sister Cities Program Closes A Chapter

The Historical Society will soon have a new display, featuring Palm Desert Sister Cities.

In 1956 President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the Sister City Program to promote sharing ideas and cultures, learning about how other people live, and helping us all to better understand people from around the world. Over the past several decades, Palm Desert's sister cities in Gisborne, New Zealand and Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Mexico have participated in several award-winning programs that were developed by the Palm Desert Sister Cities Foundation.

For example, the McCallum Theatre invited teachers from both Gisborne, New Zealand and Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Mexico to attend their Aesthetic Education Program (AEP). In total, 54 teachers attended over a 17-year period. In 2003, Sister Cities International awarded Palm Desert an Innovation Award in recognition of this program's success.

The Bombero Program, initiated in 2003, focused on public safety and education. Over the course of several years, the Foundation partnered with the Palm Desert Fire Department, Riverside County Fire Department, the City of Palm Desert, and Eisenhower Health to acquire and ship public safety emergency vehicles (three fire engines and four ambulances), firefighting equipment and vehicle spare parts, and medical equipment. This program also received a Sister Cities International award. For several years, local firefighters took personal time off to travel to Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo to train their firefighters, resulting in over 1500 Mexican firemen from twelve Mexican states obtaining their course certification.

Other Sister Cities programs have included community and city staff exchanges, youth education programs, community involvement and enrichment, and partnership and collaboration in the areas of art and culture, tourism and sports, economic development, and humanitarian, environmental and health efforts.

Although the Palm Desert Sister Cities 501(c)3 non-profit Foundation dissolved this year, the two Sister Cities Agreements with Gisborne, New Zealand and Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Mexico are still active. These programs were established by the City Council. The Palm Desert City Council will be in charge of future programs and focus.

Oral History Project Needs You!

We are looking for residents who would like to participate in our Oral History Project by being interviewed. Have you lived in Palm Desert for years? Do you have a few good stories? We would be honored to interview you – or perhaps you can suggest such a person. It's fun, and after the interview is edited, you will receive a free e-copy to share with family and friends. Contact Historical Society interviewer Leslie Roth at lesliedeane@usa.net .

THESE BUSINESSES SUPPORT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY – LET’S SUPPORT THEM!

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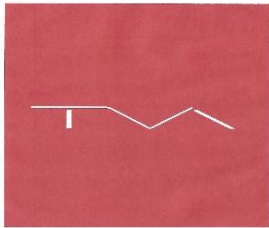
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Business members (\$100 yearly) receive a free business card-sized ad in every issue of the newsletter, and the opportunity to place business cards and brochures in the museum. Larger display ads in the newsletter are available. Call the office at 760-346-6588 to find out more.

Would you like to be a member? Would you like to gift a membership?
*Fill out the information below and mail along with credit card information or a check payable to **Historical Society of Palm Desert** to:*
HSPD, P.O. Box 77, Palm Desert, CA 92261-0077

OR

Join or renew on our website: visit www.hspd.org and go to Get Involved/Become A Member

Name _____

Membership Level - July 1 to June 30 yearly

- Individual \$50
- Family \$60
- Business \$100
- Patron \$250
- Lifetime \$1000

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