

# ARTI-FACTS

*The Newsletter of the Award-Winning Idyllwild Area Historical Society*

Preserving the History of Idyllwild and Surrounding Communities  
in the San Jacinto Mountains

WINTER 2015

## HOW AN ARTS EDUCATION DREAM WAS SAVED

*By John Blodgett*

One day in Aug. 1985, William “Bill” Lowman, executive director of Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts (ISOMATA), and Richard Richardson, development director, got into Richardson’s car and started the drive off The Hill. To Lowman, the school’s future — the survival of its founders’ dream — was at stake that day.

They headed for Riverside to meet with Glen Stephens, president of the Idyllwild Arts Foundation (IAF), the school’s governing board, and Richard MacNeal, board member and angel donor. Lowman had been hired to firm up ISOMATA’s financial foundation, and now, eight months into the job, having made some inroads, he still faced a \$300,000 deficit and no means to cover it.

In an office in Stephens’s law firm, MacNeal and the others listened to Lowman’s report. Then MacNeal dropped a bombshell. Having previously gifted the school thousands of dollars, he now said he had almost \$19 million of stock in the software firm he had co-founded, which he was willing to use to support ISOMATA. As Lowman recalls, MacNeal said to “go back out there and figure out what we’re going to do with this place.”

Lowman and Richardson returned to The Hill, stopping along the way to buy a bottle of champagne.

*“It was just crazy.  
But in a certain sense  
it was fantastic.”  
- Bill Lowman*



**Bill Lowman, pictured in November of 1984, in his new role as headmaster.**  
*Courtesy Idyllwild Town Crier*

### **Following a dream — then passing it along**

ISOMATA was opened in 1950, four years after Max Krone, Dean of the University of Southern California (USC) Institute of the Arts, his wife Beatrice, and some backers had incorporated as the IAF. The school’s post-war mission was to unite people through an intensive summer arts program.

In ensuing years the school forged a reputation that attracted committed students and renowned faculty, but the IAF struggled to support the campus year-round. In 1964, eyeing both a \$400,000 operating deficit and the school’s future, Max Krone worked out a deed-of-gift contract in which USC would assume the school’s debt and maintain the summer program in exchange for the 205-acre property and its buildings. The IAF assumed an oversight role, and ISOMATA became USC-Idyllwild.

*See ISOMATA, page 3*

## IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*President:* Marlene Pierce  
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Joan McCullough, Bob Smith,  
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*Board meetings are open to the membership and are held at the museum on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month at 4 p.m..*

### Special Advisors

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### Arti-Facts

*Co-Editors:* Adele & Bob Smith  
*Layout:* Halie Wilson  
*Feature Writer:* John Blodgett

## NEWEST BOARD MEMBER



**Suzy Bowman**

*(Bob Smith photos)*

We welcome our newest board member, Suzy Bowman. Born in New York City, she moved with her family to California when she was 12. She first attended the College of the Desert, then University of California, San Francisco, where she earned her nursing degree.

Idyllwild became her home later when her husband, a photographer, began working with Idyllwild photographer Bob Gray. She now lives in a historic Selden Belden house.

Suzy is one of our longest-serving museum docents. She has taken on the responsibility of overseeing the museum and its operation for the board.



Winners of the quilt and Pinecraft bed offered in our 2014 raffle were IAHS Founders Circle members Suzy and Pete Capparelli."

*Courtesy of Linda & Larry Turner.*

*“If a solution could not be found that spring, USC would close USC-Idyllwild after that summer’s classes.”*

ISOMATA ... (continued from page 1)

Institutions of higher education typically operate at losses, requiring offsetting endowments, gifts and other revenue sources beyond tuition; USC-Idyllwild’s operating losses were compounded by its summer-only schedule. Conferences and Elderhostel provided some off-season income, but not enough. Over the years, USC-Idyllwild’s deficits remained.

### **Reclaiming the dream — with an angel’s help**

In Jan. 1983, after months of talks with the IAF on how USC-Idyllwild could increase revenues, USC made a dramatic move. Weeks before its next Board of Trustees meeting, it released a draft resolution notifying the IAF that unless USC-Idyllwild becomes more self-supporting, USC would either substantially reduce its funding or seek a new contract with the IAF. If a solution could not be found that spring, USC would close USC-Idyllwild after that summer’s classes.

After USC trustees passed the resolution on Feb. 2 the pressure to act was on the IAF. Stephens would later tell the Los Angeles Times that “the board just didn’t like to have the gun at [its] head,” but the IAF held the trump card and both it and USC knew it. Max Krone’s contract with USC required it to give the IAF one year’s notice of any intent to modify the program or to sell more than 20 acres of the campus; if the IAF didn’t approve, it could repurchase the campus.

As if the resolution didn’t made it clear enough that the contract had become a liability to USC, a university official told the Town Crier “it is rather an unfortunate contract situation...that has brought us to this.” The IAF could see USC was angling to gain



The first embodiment of Max Krone’s dream was this first class offered by ISOMATA in 1950.

*IAHS Archive*

full control of USC-Idyllwild even before USC, in a June 16 letter to Stephens, stated that under the terms of a new contract USC would “not agree to sell the property back to the Foundation.”

But by then the IAF had signaled its intent to repurchase the campus and its buildings and regain control of the program. The existing contract stipulated attractive repayment terms of twenty years at an annual percentage rate of 6 percent with no down payment. What remained to be settled was the price, contractually dictated to be the original \$400,000 debt assumed by USC, plus any capital improvements made by USC, minus depreciation of those improvements.

Eventually, in late summer 1983, the IAF signed a promissory note for \$537,000. It was a bargain – some estimates put the market value at around \$2 million – but the first payment of \$47,000 was due Oct. 1 and the IAF didn’t have the money to pay it.

Enter Richard MacNeal. A part-time resident of Garner Valley, he had seen the software company

he co-founded go public in 1983 and wanted to do something useful with his new-found wealth. Having read about USC and the IAF parting ways, he donated \$50,000 to “provide strength and courage to the board and the administration of ISOMATA.”

“He became our first angel,” says Stephens, who is still a trustee. “We promptly elected him to the board.”

On Oct. 1, 1983, thanks to MacNeal’s generosity, the IAF was able to make the first payment. (Within a few years, MacNeal would pay off the balance of the promissory note.)

Also on that day, USC-Idyllwild once again became known as ISOMATA.

### **Maintaining the dream on life support**

Independent again, ISOMATA had to find its financial footing and fast. Stephens had told the Town Crier that the school had the resources to support itself for “about a year, maybe even a little longer” after the transfer. With no time to lose, the IAF had started exploring other funding options months before USC handed over control of the campus.

The most promising possibility involved California State University, but those talks would end by Oct. 1984, when CSU sought to assume ISOMATA’s management and operations but not its financial obligations. There were also talks with Mt. San Jacinto College about programming and with the U.S. Forest Service about a land swap to open up land for commercial development and profit. These too would go nowhere.

Meanwhile, faculty and staff had the 1984 summer program to run. It would prove to be successful, serving over 2,650 students and providing for good press. But before it was even over alarms rang when the IAF announced staff and program cutbacks for the following fall, winter and spring so it could focus on fundraising, a five-year plan and the next summer’s program. As Stephens told about 70 ISOMATA associates at an Oct. 17 meeting: “[We’re]

taking a cold hard look at things...Next summer will be a learning experience. It may be a final learning experience.”

Adding to the uncertainty, in mid-Nov. 1984, days after the annual IAF meeting, ISOMATA director Patricia Clark submitted her resignation. She cited “recent board actions which do not encompass my educational interests or personal professional purpose” as the “major reasons for my decision.”

Two weeks later, the board announced Lowman as her replacement.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Las Vegas, Lowman was no stranger to the IAF. He had studied singing at USC-Idyllwild during the summers of 1965 and 1966, then returned the following nine summers for a succession of staff and administrative



**Before ISOMATA had buildings, students’ dreams materialized in the forest.**  
*IAHS Archive*

positions that culminated with his serving as assistant director for three seasons.

That connection to the program was important to the IAF, but it’s what Lowman did after leaving in 1976 that mattered most. He had founded and directed the Nevada School of the Arts in Las Vegas. In less than a decade, he built the school from a three-week summer program serving 150 children to a year-round facility with an expanded summer program, a school-year conservatory and an enrollment of over 1,100 students. Perhaps he could somehow apply that template to ISOMATA.

A few weeks before reporting to work on Jan. 2, 1985, Lowman told the Town Crier, “I decided to give up an awful lot in Las Vegas...because I

*See ISOMATA, page 5*

## ISOMATA ... (continued from page 4)

believe ISOMATA can be a cultural force in Southern California.”

### **Saving the dream**

Lowman hit the ground running. Planning for that summer’s program was months behind schedule, and enrollment figures were alarmingly low. Lowman attributes the latter to Los Angeles Times reports on USC’s departure that “predicted doom” for ISOMATA, a “critical blow” because most summer program students came from the Los Angeles area.

While Lowman was hurriedly assembling the summer program, he was also looking beyond. “There was an urgent need to decide what we were going to do with the place come winter,” he says. ISOMATA needed a more lasting solution for generating income than hosting conferences or Elderhostel.

Lowman started visiting with various schools and organizations to see what he could do. He reopened talks with Cal State; he met with Claremont McKenna College and the University of Redlands; when he heard the California State Legislature was thinking of establishing a state school for the arts he flew to Sacramento in an attempt to get them to work with ISOMATA rather than start something from scratch. None of these panned out.

However ISOMATA was to expand, it had to mesh with the Krones’ founding vision. “Our strength was not to become a business conference center, an athletic camp or any number of things” that could have made money but would have fallen outside the mission, explains Lowman.

There was one promising possibility. Before hiring Lowman the IAF had begun informally exploring a school-year partnership with The Elliott-Pope Preparatory School (TEPPS), newly renamed but a long-time Idyllwild fixture as the Desert Sun School. With Lowman in the director’s chair these talks became more formal and urgent.

Partnering with TEPPS would mesh with Lowman’s vision for a school-year academy. Rather than invest in a “real school from scratch,” Lowman says he wanted to use the combined ISOMATA and TEPPS facilities “as long as we could make it work.”

### **Hope, hesitation and a Hail Mary**

The two school boards determined that a market existed for what would be the first boarding school

for the arts west of the Mississippi River and one of only three in the country. A proposed relationship took shape: TEPPS would provide college prep courses to ISOMATA students; ISOMATA would provide arts courses to TEPPS students; students would be bused between the two campuses; and at graduation TEPPS would hand out the diplomas.

Amidst the TEPPS negotiations and other funding explorations, Lowman still had to contend with the struggling 1985 summer program. He did pull it off, and though enrollment was down considerably he was able to break even for the summer -- yet ISOMATA still faced a \$300,000 deficit.

It was around this time that MacNeal made his roughly \$19 million offer. Soon after Lowman and Richardson’s champagne celebration, however, TEPPS officials began to hesitate. According to Lowman and Stephens, they had second thoughts about how well the two student bodies would mix. While the TEPPS board balked, the IAF board voted to approve the plan between the two schools. At that meeting, ISOMATA staff asked for two years to prepare the campus and the program and complete the negotiations with TEPPS. MacNeal then offered to cover all start-up costs -- if they could open the school in one year.

With a renewed sense of urgency, Lowman decided to take a calculated risk. With Stephens and MacNeal’s blessing, on Sept. 21, at the annual dinner of the Associates of ISOMATA, Lowman announced the two schools’ agreement; all that remained, he stressed, was formal approval by the TEPPS board.

Lowman’s gambit worked, kicking TEPPS into gear before the news made the front page of the Town Crier. The TEPPS board approved the agreement in a “special” session on Oct. 4; by month’s end both schools’ boards had ratified the agreement.

Lowman says he was chastised by the TEPPS board for jumping the gun, “which I was prepared for,” but quickly got to work. He and his staff “had to run for nine months” to rebuild summer enrollment while marketing the high school, hiring faculty and staff, and producing materials. The night before opening found them arranging desks and sweeping floors.

On Thursday, Sept. 11, 1986, right on MacNeal’s schedule, 75 ISOMATA students began high school.

“That’s how Idyllwild Arts Academy started,” says Lowman, who would remain in charge until his retirement on June 30, 2011. “It was just crazy. But in a certain sense it was fantastic.” 🐦

**THE COMPANY WE KEEP**  
**New and Renewing Members – October through December 2014**

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Carole Herman  
 Leona & Carl Rice

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Paul Nuss  
 Dan Zacks

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 Idyllwild  
 Idyllwild  
 Mountain Center  
 Santa Ana  
 Idyllwild  
 Eureka  
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**OUR GENEROUS MEMBERS AND FRIENDS**

Our archive collection and on-line resources continue to grow thanks to thoughtful members and friends who think of us first when they have historic items to pass on. During the past six months they include the following donors of artifacts: local residents **John Blodgett, Laura Caster, Sara Clayton, Diane & Nick D'Amico, Roger Dutton, Carol Everhart, Richard Johnson & Linda Devore, Pat Litfin, Carl & Dottie Vince, and Adele Voell**; **Terry Bauman** of San Diego, **Jane Marstell** of Harvey Lake PA; **Marilyn Miller** of Ojai; **Eugene Mossey** of Whittier, and Desert Sun reunion visitor **Ellie Livingston**.

We've also received substantial cash donations from several Founders Circle life members, including **Charles & Charlotte Bird, Carolyn & Richard Levitski, Betty & Walter Parks, and Bob & Adele Smith**.

# THE YEAR JUST PAST

Annual recaps can be dreary, but we want our members to know what their dues and donated time accomplish toward fulfilling our dual mission of preserving and sharing mountain history.

## Preserving History

During 2014 we received 44 donations containing 248 artifacts plus hundreds of documents pertaining to the history of the Saunders Meadow neighborhood. We spent \$467 to buy 24 historic documents (postcards, photos, matchbooks, maps, etc.) carefully selected to enrich our archive. We continued to review and document hundreds of items in our collection for research use. And we equipped the archive building with a hanging system to protect and access framed artworks.

## Sharing History

Our educational mission includes operating a museum, carrying out research, and publishing the results.

The museum is our public face. In fact, IAHS's founders made it their first goal to acquire property and create a museum. They realized that lack of public visibility was a major reason an earlier historical society in Idyllwild had failed during the 1980s.

Now 11 years old, the IAHS Museum was open 125 days last year and welcomed 3,901 visitors. Their donations, purchases, and memberships contributed \$5,886 to our general fund. New board member Suzy Bowman recently agreed to oversee the museum, to insure that it remains a vital window

into the Idyllwild area's past.

We couldn't manage without a faithful corps of museum docents. So the Board of Directors recognizes and thanks all these volunteers who docented during the year: Nancy Borchers, Maureen Boren, Suzy Bowman, Corrinne Brown, Dan & Sharla Carpenter, Diann Coate, Morry Copeland & Dick Dorisse, Susan Cowper, Jon Engel, Nancy Freeland, Katie Grigsby, Charlotte & George Groty, Leann Gudmundson, Lynnda Hart, Barbara Jones, Doris Lombard & Ron Perry, Renee Lodge, Virginia Lumb, Art Mason, Sheri McClain, Judi Milin, Marlene Pierce, Bob Smith, Linda & Larry Turner, Adele Voell, Elaine Weiler, Betty Wilcox, and Barbara Wilke.

To support these docents, operate the museum, and keep the Museum Shop stocked we spent \$2,867.

By way of research, we fielded 33 inquiries and were able to fully or partially answer 2/3 of them, sometimes only after extensive investigation. Four major projects stand out: reconstructing the history of the former Epicurean resort and shop on North Circle Drive; identifying work of renowned photographer and frequent Idyllwild visitor Stephen Willard; compiling a history of Desert Sun School on Saunders Meadow; and sleuthing out the locations of some 19th-century sawmills.

During the year we produced four historical features in Arti-Facts and 15 newspaper and magazine articles on historical topics. The Facebook page we launched in August extends our museum to hundreds of viewers who see illustrated historical vignettes each week.

Finally, we supplied the Fern Valley and Idyllwild water

*See Past Year, page 8*

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual (\$15) \_\_\_\_\_ Contributor (\$35) \_\_\_\_\_ Benefactor (\$250) \_\_\_\_\_ Business (\$35)

\_\_\_\_\_ Family (\$25) \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor (\$100) \_\_\_\_\_ Patron (\$500) \_\_\_\_\_ Corporate (\$750)

*(Please make your tax-deductible dues check to IAHS & mail to PO Box 3320, Idyllwild, CA 92549)*

**If a gift membership, please enter donor's name and address:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Museum Hours:

11 am - 4 pm

Winter Schedule (Sept. 6-June 14):

Saturdays & Sundays, also

Friday, Nov. 28

Friday, Dec. 26-Thursday, Jan. 1

Monday, Jan. 19

Monday, Feb. 16

Monday, May 25

## **Keep up with us on Facebook:**

<https://www.facebook.com/IdyllwildAreaHistoricalSociety>

## **Visit our website:**

[www.idyllwildhistory.org](http://www.idyllwildhistory.org)

**For special tours and other business,**

**call (951) 659-2717 or**

**e-mail to [info@idyllwildhistory.org](mailto:info@idyllwildhistory.org)**

## **Admission Free**

## **Donations Welcome**

**PAST YEAR ...** *continue from page 7*

districts, Village Market, Idyology Restaurant, and Idyllwild Bake Shop & Brew with images for display on their premises or websites.

The only cost for all this work by volunteers was newsletter production and mailing (\$1,140).

### **The Financial Picture**

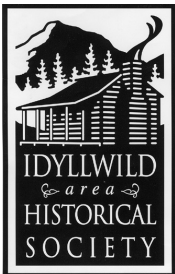
2014 was our 14th straight year in the black. General income was \$28,126. In round numbers, 50% came from fund-raising projects, primarily the immensely successful Home Tour, 25% from member

dues, and 20% from sales and other museum revenue.

From the general fund we spent \$19,742. 46% of that maintained, insured, furnished, and supplied utilities to our grounds and buildings. 22% paid for office and archive supplies, newsletters, events, publicity, and record-keeping. 14% operated the museum, and another 14% underwrote fund-raising projects.

The surplus income allowed us to spend \$5,521 outside the budget for refinishing the exteriors of our older buildings, improving our storage facilities for archived artwork, and adding three more years (1954-56) to the digital collection of early Town Criers now accessible online. ♪

**P O Box 3320  
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