



Key Notes

Volume XLVIII • Fall 2014

Phi Beta Kappa Alumni in Southern California
Alpha Association

Message from Alpha Association President

Stefan Kirchanski

I'm very pleased as well as honored to be the most recent President of this organization which is now more than 95 years old (I won't reveal my own age, but it is somewhat less than 95). Being primarily a scientist, I really didn't know much about Phi Beta Kappa as an undergraduate until I was elected. I think I mostly knew about PBK because when I was a freshman in college, there was a shortlived TV show (I think it was called "Hank") about a young man who couldn't afford to go to college so he was sneaking in to all the classes at some small liberal arts college to "steal knowledge." In retrospect that is a charming thought. I do wish that all we had to worry about were people trying to "steal knowledge." In any case the theme song for the program went something like: "He'll get his degree, his Phi Beta key, and he'll get them all for free . . ."

At that point in my life I didn't realize how many brilliant young minds are denied the opportunity to get their "Phi Beta key." So after being a member for over 40 years and never doing much to help the Society (apart from the occasional donation), I was delighted to join the Board of this organization when my graduate school friend Darlene DeMason proposed the idea.

Now, only a year or so later I've stepped in as President because our Immediate Past President Deb Festa is way too busy helping her clients to continue her excellent work as President, and Vice-President DeMason is currently too involved with other groups to become President at this time.

(Continued on Page 2)

DR. THOM DAVID MASON

Sing a Song of Ella: The life and music of Ella Fitzgerald

COMING UP IN NOVEMBER!

**Dr. Thom Mason, Professor of Jazz Studies
and Founder of the Jazz Studies Department,
Thornton School of Music, USC
will speak on Sunday, November 23rd.**

*Luncheon Program at 12:00 Noon, Sports-
men's Lodge, 12833 Ventura Blvd., Studio City*



Dr. Thom Mason will give an engaging multimedia presentation on the life and music of Ella Fitzgerald, with rare photos, videos and interviews provided by the Ella Fitzgerald Foundation. He includes humorous stories and live demonstrations sure to stimulate, educate, and entertain fans and non-fans alike!

In addition to his work at USC, Dr. Mason is an artist/clinician providing jazz workshops at schools around the country. He has performed across the United States and abroad, and has written several text books on music ear training, as well as numerous articles on jazz education. Dr. Mason has worked with many celebrated artists, including Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Mel Tormé, and Sammy Davis Jr., to name a few. He has also performed with a number of big bands such as the Louie Bellson Jazz Orchestra and the Tex Beneke Orchestra.

In 1996, he received the Jazz Educator of the Year Award from the Los Angeles Jazz Society and in 2013, he received the Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching from USC's Thornton School of Music. Additionally, he directs the Jazz Arts Foundation, a non-profit devoted to helping inner-city students learn about jazz, and serves as an advisor to the Kids Helping Kids Program at Washington Prep High School in South Los Angeles. To learn more about Dr. Mason's work, visit his website: www.masonmusic.com.

Watch for your invitation in the mail. Be sure to sign up right away as space is limited. Questions may be directed to Bette Harris at bnapharris@aol.com or 310-447-5788.

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President

Stefan J. Kirchanski, PhD, JD

Earned a BA and PhD from the University of California at Berkeley in Botany and his JD from the Loyola Law School of Los Angeles. He is a patent attorney and partner at the Los Angeles office of Venable, LLP. (stefank1@mac.com)



Vice President

Darleen DeMason, PhD

Earned a BS in Biology from the University of Michigan and a PhD in Botany from the University of California, Berkeley. She is Professor Emeritus of Botany and Plant Morphologist, College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Botany & Plant Sciences, University of California, Riverside.



Recording Secretary

B. Loraine Reed, PhD

Earned an AB from Hollins College and an MA and Ph.D. from Indiana University. She is Senior Lecturer Emerita at University of California, Irvine, where she was a founding member of the PBK Chapter.



Treasurer

Hermann Muennichow, CPA

Earned a BBA at the University of Wisconsin. He is a CPA and principal of Muennichow & Associates., Certified Public Accountants, with offices in North Hollywood.



Immediate Past President

Deborah McInnes Festa, Esq.

Earned a dual BA from the University of California at Los Angeles in Philosophy and French Literature. and her JD from the University of California at Berkeley. She is a partner in the corporate department of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP's Los Angeles and New York offices.

President's Message (continued)

My goals as president are modest; I just want to help this organization to continue and even expand its support of higher education for disadvantaged students. To that end we need to increase membership and get more of you involved in the operation of this organization. We plan to upgrade and improve our web site and the ways we interact with our membership. Unfortunately, I'm not off to the best start; those of you who tried to read this Newsletter in early October probably ran into various web site glitches that were partly caused by someone (me) clicking the wrong button. But I do promise things will get better. Meanwhile those of you with more internet expertise than I (virtually everyone) are welcome to contact me and pitch in.

Programs *in* Review

September 29, 2013--- Alpha's 95th Anniversary Celebration
California State Librarian Emeritus, Award-Winning Author, Historian, and Educator
Kevin O. Starr: *California Lost and Found: Recovering Faith in the Future*

To celebrate this historic milestone, Alpha Association and Epsilon Chapter of the University of Southern California presented a reception featuring eminent University Professor Kevin Starr at the historic Doheny Memorial Library on the USC campus. Starr, who was awarded the prestigious National Humanities Medal in 2006 by President George W. Bush has written extensively on the history of California. His *Americans and the California Dream* series captures the enigmatic blend of dreams and hardscrabble reality that defines California. His books uncover how the Golden State emerged from the Gold Rush, absorbed the shocks of the Great Depression, and was transformed by the sweeping events of World War II, and then went on to the intellectual, commercial, and artistic achievements California is known for today.

January 26, 2014 --- Dr. Joy Crisp, Deputy Project Scientist
for the Mars Science Laboratory Project, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory
Exploring Mars with the Curiosity Rover

Presented in conjunction with the Phi Beta Kappa Chapter at Occidental College

The world held its breath for the amazingly successful landing of the Curiosity Rover in Gale Crater, Mars, in early August, 2012. Dr. Joy Crisp gave an overview of the objectives and capabilities of this awesome Rover mission, the challenges in operating it, and how the science team has been using the Rover to address important questions about Mars.

Dr. Crisp received a Bachelor's degree in Geology from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota and a PhD in Geology from Princeton. Her scientific expertise is in the mineralogy and formation of volcanic rocks on Earth and Mars. She has been a scientist at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory since 1987, carrying out NASA-funded research on lava flows and volcanic eruption clouds. For the Mars Pathfinder project she was the Assistant Rover Scientist and Alpha Proton X-ray Spectrometer Investigation Scientist. She was the Mars Exploration Rover (Spirit and Opportunity) Project Scientist for six years. Since 2005 she has been a Mars Science Laboratory Deputy Project Scientist working to maintain the science integrity of the mission and to facilitate operations for a team of over 450 scientists from around the world.

May 18, 2014 – Annual Meeting and Spring Program
L.A. Law: Life as a Superior Court Judge

Judge Anthony J. Mohr moderated a panel discussion with other Superior Court judges regarding the Los Angeles court system and the issues that impact the courts today. They addressed their own particular areas of expertise, interesting courtroom experiences and career paths that led to the judiciary.

Programs in Review

L.A. Law: Life as a Superior Court Judge

(continued from page 3)

Moderator: Judge Anthony J. Mohr - civil courts, complex litigation and personal injury cases.

Judge Michelle Williams Court - family law courts.

Judge Gail Ruderman Feuer - criminal law courts.

Judge Elaine Mandel - mental health/competency to stand trial.

Judge D. Zeke Zeidler - juvenile and dependency courts.

One couple who drove from Orange County to attend this program remarked:

It was stimulating, educational, and engaging. The participating judges were knowledgeable and articulate, and we learned much about the ins and outs of the various courts they represented. We could not stop talking about it all the way home.

HIGH SCHOOL ALPHA AWARD WINNERS:

Alpha Association Honors Roosevelt High School Scholars

“Believe you can and you’re halfway there,” wise words spoken by our nation’s twenty-sixth President and an attitude exemplified by the four Theodore Roosevelt High School students who received this year’s Alpha Award. Councilmember Bette Harris honored these students at the school’s Senior Awards Night last May. The selection was based on academic record, standardized test scores (SAT/ACT), and writing samples. The award comes with a \$500 prize to defray the expense of college application and Advanced Placement test fees. Senior class president Christian Juarez is headed for Georgetown University, Martha Hernandez –UCLA, Nathalie Maldonado - UC Riverside, and Karen Yanes - UC San Diego.

A festive reception with jazz and mariachi entertainment provided by the school band preceded the ceremony. The school’s JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corp) presented the “Colors” and a RHS graduate now attending Columbia University (’17) delivered an inspiring talk. Spirits were high as students enthusiastically cheered on fellow students, teachers and administrators. Regard for this Boyle Heights institution was evident as numerous scholarships were given by local entrepreneurs, civic organizations, and the community’s City Councilmember. Alumni returned to present awards on behalf of their respective graduating classes, with frequent shout-outs for their beloved Rough Riders. Many of the graduates will attend schools in the University of California and California State University systems, Yale, Georgetown, and other fine institutions.

For nearly twenty years, Alpha Association has given awards to deserving graduating seniors at Roosevelt and other Los Angeles high schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Below are excerpts from each of the scholars’ essays on the topic,

What a College Education Means to Me.

My sole aspiration is to become a teacher at Roosevelt. Although I am aware of the modest pay it is my greatest goal. A college education will enable me to not only have a career to educate others but to expand my own knowledge... Teachers chose to work at Roosevelt for a fraction of the money they would have earned in a privileged school. They cared about students like me and I am convinced that earning my degree will lead me to inspire others.

...I do believe that everyone has the ability to choose what path they want to take, but it all depends on one’s capability to override their obstacles. I am the first in my family to want to pursue any form of higher level education and I am willing to work hard to achieve my goals. I have goals of diminishing social alienation for all by establishing equity amongst the marginalized groups of society. I hope to one day extinguish the term “minority” and be able to live in a society that acknowledges every ethnicity and culture for its wealth, and not for their so called “incompetence.” I believe I have the determination to make my dreams a reality, but none of my goals can be accomplished without attaining a college education...

What a College Education Means to Me.

...I know a higher education expands the horizon of opportunities, but for me it will enable me to give back. As of now, my intention is to study Psychology. I believe people act a certain way based on their knowledge and experiences. I want to understand why the brain makes a person act in that manner. Even so, I would like to understand how certain circumstances affect a person's actions... Often times, traumatized people will do things to hurt themselves and, in some cases, hurt others. So in studying Psychology I will be able to provide help and lend an ear to help those on a steady path to recovery.

Living Poetry in Prague with James Ragan

by Bette Napoli Harris



From an early age, Alpha Councilor and internationally renowned poet, playwright, and screenwriter James Ragan has had a strong sense of his Central European heritage. Born in Pittsburgh, PA, the twelfth of thirteen children of immigrant parents from Slovakia, Ragan grew up speaking their native language until he learned English after the fourth grade. He developed an appreciation for the art, music, and literature of their homeland and as a young man visited relatives in Central Europe on various occasions. One of his visits to Prague in 1968 coincided with the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, and Ragan was detained under house arrest for no apparent reason. His own experience and observations of political oppression under Communism provided material for his poems protesting such tyranny and honoring courageous dissidents. For this reason, his poems were censored and his travel monitored. On one occasion, a librarian in his presence scissored out poems from his banned book, *In the Talking Hours*, which was critical of the Prague Communist regime.

Fast forward to 1991, at which time Professor Ragan was Director of the Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California. He was invited to meet the newly elected Czech president Vaclav Havel, who was visiting Los Angeles to speak at UCLA. Havel, a playwright whose works had been banned and who had endured imprisonment at the hands of the Communists for his political activism, was aware of Ragan's background and the common ground they shared. Upon meeting Ragan, Havel extended his hand and said, "We are colleagues," then asked him to return as a "true Czech-Slovak" and contribute something back to the new democracy – to be of service in some way. Ragan accepted the invitation and has "given back" every year since 1993 to teach as a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Poetry and Film at Charles University in Prague. During his stay, he resides in Havel's childhood home.

While his course, Living Poetry in Prague, draws students from around the world, the majority are from the United States and the Czech Republic. The program offers a unique opportunity to study poetry and screenwriting with a world class writer in a charming city while becoming immersed in Czech culture. Ragan arranges outings to the ballet, concerts, and the opera, and acquaints his students with historic sites, political events, and Prague's acclaimed artists, composers, and writers.



Arinafilms of Slovakia has produced *Flowers and Roots*, a 2014 documentary film on Ragan's life and career in the arts. We look forward to its release in the U.S.

(Professor Ragan serves on Alpha's Board of Councilors and has spoken at Phi Beta Kappa programs on several occasions. Fellow Councilor Bette Napoli Harris had the pleasure and privilege of "living poetry in Prague" this past summer. To learn more about the course, e-mail Professor Ragan at jjragan@yahoo.com.)

In Remembrance

E. Eric "Ric" Johnson

1927-2013

E. Eric "Ric" Johnson, who served as President of Alpha Association from 1976 to 1978, and as Treasurer from 1970 to 1974 passed away on December 5, 2013 at the age of 86 at his home in Pacific Palisades, CA.

According to the Los Angeles Times (12/15/13), Ric joined the V-12 Naval Officer Candidate Program, attended USC and the California Institute of Technology before enrolling at Stanford University in 1946 with a major in Economics. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Stanford in 1948, then entered Stanford Law School. After five years at Equitable Life as a pension consultant, he moved to Los Angeles in 1956 where he spent another four years as a Southern California regional group manager. Ric joined Johnson & Higgins in 1960, as an employee benefits consultant, was elected Vice President in 1962, Employee Benefits Department Manager in 1965 and partner in 1968, joining J&H's Board of Directors as an Executive Vice President and co-managing the Los Angeles office for eighteen years. Following Ric's retirement from J&H in 1987, he joined TBG Financial as Chairman. The eventual sale of the firm marked the end of his nearly sixty years in the insurance industry. His interests included contemporary art, travel, jazz, and golf.

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In 2013-20134 the following members have made contributions to the Phi Beta Kappa Scholarship funds in excess of membership dues.

500 and Over

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Deborah McInnes Festa
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