

University Oaks Newsletter

December 2002

The next meeting of the University Oaks Civic Club will be **Wednesday, December 11th at 4353 N. MacGregor, at 7:30 P.M.**

Hello and Holiday Greetings:

As Larry Bahn is out of town, I took the liberty of writing this month's "message."

It's actually a unique opportunity to publicly thank Larry for all of his efforts to maintain and improve upon the quality and integrity of University Oaks. Our entire neighborhood owes him a debt of gratitude, to be sure.

Did you know that he regularly attends numerous meetings concerning our greater neighborhood, the Third Ward and Old Spanish Trail? He's also been persistent with the City of a Houston about the need for improved commercial development along Scott and OST. He recently gave a personal tour to a representative of Council Member Ada Edwards, and pointed out several areas in need of maintenance and improvement, such as along the bayou. This is all in addition to the time Larry has given as President and in making his own home into one of University Oaks' finest. I could go on, but I just wanted to briefly acknowledge Larry's contributions of time and talent. Thanks, Larry, for your hard work and initiative on behalf of our neighborhood.

Onto other matters: I'm sure everyone who's been affected by the street reconstruction is looking for a light at the end of the tunnel. I can't tell you when the streets will be finished, so all we can do is be patient. As I write this, half of University Oaks Blvd. is very near completion, with the other half to follow. Work on Varsity is moving along as well.

With the holidays upon us, there was some discussion about canceling the *Luminarios* this year due to the street work, but in the end we decided on a smaller effort so that each house can be illuminated on Christmas Eve. As in the past, bags of sand with candles will be placed out on the 24th, but instead of lining the streets, there will be two bags per household, to be placed at the end of sidewalks of driveways. For details, or to volunteer, please contact Pat Wycliff or Tom Whitaker. Bags will be filled at 4516 Rockwood Dr., Saturday December 14th at 11am. Also, see Pat Wycliff's article regarding Caroling (below).

Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or however you may enjoy this time of year, HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Sincerely,

Tom Burton, Vice President

University Oaks Civic Club

UH's BLAFFER GALLERY

Blaffer Gallery Events

Student Show

Blaffer Gallery will feature student work from the University of Houston Fine Arts department from Dec. 6th to December 15th. Come experience new and upcoming work from these talented young artists. You may encounter the work of the next Picasso or Rodin. Works in a variety of media from interior design to ceramics will be showcased.

Educational opportunities

The Education Department would like to offer the residents of University Oaks and their children a fun and educational arts experience. Tours are free, and art making projects to accompany those tours can be arranged. Gather a group of interested art lovers and contact Paige Hebert, Curator of Education for more details. Paige can be reached at 713-528-1979 or mphebert@mail.uh.edu.

Blaffer Gallery will be closed for the holidays from December 21-January 6th. To find out about upcoming events after the holidays, check out our web site at www.blaffergallery.org

CAROLING IN U.O.!!!!!!

Let's start a tradition...

When: Xmas eve @ 5:30 pm

Meet at 4516 Rockwood Dr.

Call Pat Wycliff or e-mail me at pwycliff@yahoo.com to express an interest or to help organize the event. If you have bells and flash lights, bring them. We will supply the carols. We will return to 4516 Rockwood Dr. for cookies and apple cider.

-- Pat Wycliff

The UOCC NEWSLETTER should be posted online sometime in the new year:
www.neighborhoodlink.com/houston/uocc

under the 'Community Hotlinks' section.

Book Club Meetings

Anyone in the neighborhood interested in sharing discussion of any of these books, please join us.

December: cookie exchange and movie that we discuss. Host is Janice Albright on Varsity. Sat., December 21st at 7 pm.

January 15, book: *Pope Joan* by Donna Cross. Host will be Rosemary Gray.

February 5, book: *The Death of Vishnu* by Mahil Sari, host TBA.

- Contact Robyn Webb for more information.
- Civic Club meeting: 2nd Wednesday of each month. Next meeting is on December 11th at 4353 N. MacGregor, 7:30 p.m.
- Recycling: every other Tuesday (next pickup December 10th)
- Garbage pickup: every Tuesday
- Heavy trash pickup: 2nd Tuesday of each month.

PLEASE DO NOT PLACE HEAVY TRASH ITEMS ON STREET MORE THAN 3 DAYS BEFORE PICKUP (Next pickup December 10th)

President	Larry Bahn	
Vice President	Robyn Webb	
Vice President	Tom Burton	
Secretary	Wilbert Taylor	
Treasurer	Ken Hillstrom	
Director at Large	Pat Wycliff	
Director at Large	Tom Whitaker	

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"Anybody can observe the Sabbath, but making it holy surely takes the rest of the week."

– Alice Walker

Thanks again to all who contributed to this month's epistle, and please don't be shy about sharing your ideas, comments, recipes, gardening tips, whatever... U. Oaks is full of interesting folks.

- Tom Burton

OUR MEDITERRANEAN VACATION

The usually longer fall vacation that Linda suggested for us this year was three days in Rome -- which she'd long wanted to see -- followed by ten days on a Holland-America cruise to various cities on the western side of the Mediterranean. Sounded great to me. For those who have asked about this adventure and others who might be interested, following is a write-up about our experience -- all in all, a delightful one.

Rome: Flew in on Delta via Atlanta. Summary words that describe Rome include hectic and bustling along with the modifiers constantly and sometimes, absurdly. People are moving about at all times both on the sidewalks and on the narrow streets that lead every which way from the main ones. Traffic is ever whizzing in every direction, much of it consisting of the superubiquitous scooters, except during intermittent standstills in traffic tie-ups that quickly elicit cacophonies of horns and occasional shaking fists from driver-s-side windows. But it all works not only amazingly but safely; the city has a very low frequency of vehicle accidents. A lot of grandeur is most everywhere in massive buildings, parkways, statues, and especially fountains ranging from minor to magnificent. Everywhere, too, both the main and side streets are jammed with small shops of every description while above them are three to six or seven floors of mostly living quarters; no single homes in all the city, seemingly, except for ancient manses and castles some of which -- according to one tour guide -- are still used as domiciles. Nearly every block calls for a photo, sometimes two or three, amid the organized chaos. The first two days we took half-day tours to get an overall look at the city, and also walked; on the third we walked and walked for much of the day in touristy sightseeing to and about the Forum, to and inside the Colosseum, to various notable buildings, finally to the Vatican and its peripherals. Twice we got lost in not

reading our map accurately, yet no matter except for extra time it took to get to intended destinations but with the bonus of sights we'd not have encountered otherwise. With both the bus tours and our hours of walking, we saw quite a lot of the city. And practically everywhere both on the tours and afoot was the constant hustle and bustle of people and traffic, as though all of Rome were in steady motion. Surprisingly, many beggars were about, too -- elderly ladies, deformed persons, even children. At one point on our initial stroll I felt a tug on my trousers and looked down into the large brown eyes of a three-year-old waif with an outstretched hand. I later learned this was a ploy used by some pickpockets: while attending to the waif, another person does quick work with deft fingers. It's a problem throughout the Mediterranean: ship personnel and tour guides often warned of it on our visits to subsequent cities, and on at least three occasions we heard about persons being victimized by the sly ones, in one case said to be in the amount of \$1100.00. We were wary and met no difficulty, though I still wonder about that waif who tugged at me.

Florence: A two-hour bus ride from the port of Livorno (better known to Americans as Leghorn) also gave us a good look at the Tuscany countryside on the way to one of Italy's most historic cities. The former was sort of like West Virginia: plots of farmland amid miles of mountains along the horizons together with interspersed towns. Florence proved practically an art museum in itself with its countless statuary including the original plus a copy in a public square of Michelangelo's massive, perfect David along with monuments and fountains and scores of marvelous buildings, the latter including the wonderful Church of Santa Croce and its crypts of such personages as Michelangelo, Galileo, and Machiavelli along with a massive memorial to Dante Alighieri, who is not buried here but was born here. A magnificent city to see, to admire, simply to be in.

Monaco: A shining conglomeration of fancy high-rises along an oval mile or so of steeply rising land is what one sees on approaching the tiny nation on a ship's tender. Ashore, the street floors of most buildings prove to have shop after shop including all the Guccis and Pradas and the like that any millionaire might favor. On the left overlooking the harbor is the prince's palace and its grounds; opposite, to the right, is the famed and hoity-toity Monte Carlo casino. Yet this was something of a disappointment, actually. A 10-Euro fee gained entrance to a large room containing only four roulette tables and a busy large table for a game called 30-40 that was new to me; on one side was a fancy buffet area and on the other a pricey restaurant. Leading left and right from a smaller rear room containing a cashier's cage and a 100-Euro slot machine were large areas with scads of other slot machines. Only two of the roulette tables were in action but fully so, each swarming with players and several tuxedoed attendants. The play was accordingly very slow and also lacked both the liveliness and friendliness of typical American casinos. Further, on inquiring I was informed that my favored blackjack tables did not begin play until 5:00 p.m., some three hours on. I stayed for about two hours, mostly watching though playing some too, but more action and fun in Las Vegas or Biloxi, to me. Monaco itself was interesting indeed for its charm and, of course, evidence of wealth. Among other things on a three-hour or so sauntering, saw one Rolls and two Bentleys, a Ferrari, an Aston-Martin, a stretch Cadillac, a classic Mustang, and perhaps 5000 Mercedes sedans. A standard bottle of J&B Scotch at a medium-sized supermarket cost 98 Euros, or about \$95. A deck of Monte Carlo playing cards was priced nine Euros, which I thought a rip-off and so chose a different souvenir. Also bought a can of French cat food for Max for a more reasonable 524. In meantime, Linda had gone to tour nearby Nice and the Côte d'Azur. Saw quaintness and galloping prices everywhere, she reported. She found especially unique and interesting the hilltop village of Eze.

Barcelona: Also got here years ago when a mariner and thought it one of the most beautiful cities I'd seen. A bus tour followed by a couple of hours of solo wandering did modify my opinion on encountering several less attractive areas of the city, in addition to which Antonio Gaudi's stunning Sagrada Familia (a huge cathedral) was undergoing construction yet again, a process that has continued off and on for over 100 years and hence a mess of cranes and scaffolding cluttered much of the edifice. So perhaps Florence is become my *numero uno bella città* though admittedly we spent most our time there viewing good stuff. All the same, still much to see and enjoy in Barcelona including its lively bustle if not nearly the like of what goes on in Rome.

Majorca: A small island also known to many as the place where Chopin's frail health got worse instead of improving as expected when George Sand arranged a several-month sojourn here for him. Stayed aboard on deciding to get in some reading instead of more sightseeing but Linda took the ship-to-shore bus the three kilometers (some two miles) to Palma, the port city, to stroll for a time. Scenic and pleasant, she said, though without particular distinctions compared with other cities visited and sights seen.

Malta: Stopped for the day at the island's main port of Valletta, an attractive city on a hill and furthermore hilly within itself: in some places one traversed steps up or down the street instead of merely an inclined sidewalk. The island's two languages are Maltese (of Arabic origin, we learned) and English, so it was nice to see shop and other signs we understood. A compact city, it was easy to see quite a bit of it. Had a chance also to visit its art museum in a grand old armory building and for a further indication of the prevalence of art in and about the Mediterranean, though its two floors of paintings and sculptures were mostly by lesser known artists from the 14th century on up, they included works too by such major figures as Tintoretto, Guardi, and Tiepolo. And all this in a relatively small city of something over 100,000 population, about that of Beaumont hereabouts.

Messina, Sicily: A cool drizzle was falling when we docked, the first poor weather after a week of steady sun and pleasant temperatures. It let up some in mid-morning, though, so I ambled for about two hours under an umbrella while Linda saw the city and some adjacent countryside on a tour bus. We both enjoyed our sorties, in my case also poking around for a bit at the campus of the University of Messina. The umbrella was Linda's prize, by the way, for answering the most questions correctly in the quickest time on one of ship library's daily 25-item printed quizzes, this one on the topic of California. She won one of these on our previous Panama Canal cruise, too: a bright lady, she is. In the evening, on the way to Naples the ship passed by the island of Stromboli where the famous volcano put on a dramatic show for the many hundreds of passengers flocked on the starboard side. It's been rumbling and sputtering minor eruptions for centuries and is what the Roman myth of Vulcan is based on, the ship's tourmistress mentioned during her remarks about it as we passed by.

Naples: Because it's much too large to see more than a little of on foot, and the last day of the cruise so we had to pack, too, signed up for a three-hour ANaples Panoramic Tour.® It proved to consist of seeing a great deal including two 20-minute stops for picture-taking and brief wandering with running commentary by a tour guide named Mario who seemed to know everything about Naples beginning with its founding in about 800 B.C. Though not a part of the passing scene, of course, also interesting was seeing driver Tony deftly drive the huge tour bus

on narrow, curving, hilly streets crammed with traffic including the ever-whizzing scooters along with pedestrians everywhere, great numbers of whom were crossing the streets at all times. All in all, got passing looks of perhaps ten miles of the city while Mario pointed out matters of interest or significance. The first of two panoramic views took place at the first of the stops at the very top of a high hill with a viewing platform that also had a large monastery, a larger ancient fort, and a cameo shop once patronized by Hillary and Chelsea Clinton as proudly advertised on heaps of handouts on three of the shop's large counters. Many bought, and so did I although later at a smaller shop with Linda because she would be wearing the thing, not me. She, during this tour, went off of a half-day trip to the ruins of Pompeii, duly reporting what she saw as fascinating and adding that to see them thoroughly would require at least all of three days.

At 8:00 p.m., off to Civitavecchia, the port for Rome from which we'd sailed ten days before. A one-hour bus ride to Rome's Leonardo da Vinci airport followed by nine-plus hours on U. S. Air to Philadelphia, then three-plus hours to Houston Intercontinental. >Twas a grand vacation, but also >twas good to get home.

The Ship: We sailed on Holland America's Noordam, a smaller cruise ship compared with most in carrying about 1200 passengers instead of the more typical 1800 or more. But >twas consequently quicker and easier to get to places: the dining room, the showroom, the library, the sauna, the casino. And NO virus as on other cruises lately. Most folks on the cruise were friendly, easy to talk to. Our dining tablemates were especially enjoyable -- from Long Beach, Tucson, Dallas, and Oklahoma City. As before, the dining was outstanding in quality, variety, and service: choices of four appetizers, three soups, two salads, eight entrees, and several desserts every time following a wide variety of offerings at both breakfast and lunch as well as tasty snacks available at all times. We'll no doubt do it again one day. You would surely enjoy it too.

-- Ken Hillstrom