



The Branding Iron

DUARTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JAN-MAR 2024



President's Message

I want to thank all of the Docents and volunteers for their devotion to the Duarte Historical Museum. We can't do it without you. You are the face of the Museum to our visitors. Everything you do helps to make the Duarte Museum better. I'm so grateful that you have committed to serving the museum..

I also want to thank Manuel Enriquez and Jeff Risley from the City of Duarte for their assistance.

2023 has been a very eventful year!

The old carpeting was removed and a beautiful, new laminate flooring installed. The Museum looks brand new and greatly improved.



The large storage room has been turned into the Route 66 Room. Thank you to Jim Kirchner, Alan Heller, and Richard Amadori for donating their collections. Soon the room will have the popcorn ceiling removed, new lighting, and a fresh coat of paint.



All the bookcases in the museum library have been replaced with larger, oak bookcases donated by Kerry and Susan Nock, which allows books to be removed from storage boxes for a better visual impact. The Nock's also donated two desks and a credenza to the Duarte Museum office, as well as newer printers. We thank them very much for their generosity.



2024 promises to be just as exciting!

Plans are to install new lighting, remove the popcorn ceiling, to paint the walls, and to remove the current closet to open up the Route 66 room. It will look spectacular when completed. And will give us a chance to test wall color for the rest of the Museum walls.



Once the new, taller oak bookcases are secured to the walls, we will finish rearranging and updating the Museum Library by unpacking even more books from storage and displaying more artifacts to view. The library will be the location for information about Duarte clubs - past and present.

I am looking forward to these next steps in the Duarte Historical Museum's transformation. I'm proud of what has been accomplished, with your help, and look forward to many more achievements and successes.

Each year will be an adventure.

May your New Year overflow with joy and happiness, your troubles be few, and your heart be filled with a sense of PEACE.

It was with a great sense of loss and profound sadness that I share the news that Claudia Heller passed away on December 11, 2023. She was Duarte's historian and community activist about all things Route 66. To say she will be missed is an understatement.

I am sharing the article that was printed in *The Weekly Star*.

By ANISSA RIVERA | anivriv@yahoo.com
PUBLISHED: December 11, 2023 at 7:05 p.m.

Claudia Heller, beloved San Gabriel Valley columnist, explorer, historian, dies at 79
Heller's columns in *The Weekly Star* chronicled local history and life, bringing her unique voice and penchant for the open road to generations of San Gabriel Valley readers.



File photo by Keith Durlinger,
Contributing Photographer.

Above all, she was fun.

Every year, Claudia Heller would lead her family on camping adventures to the beach. She and her husband Alan had one rule: bring food that started with a letter of the alphabet, "A" one year and "B" the next. There were creative choices when they hit "X," served with a hearty helping of laughter.

Claudia Heller, longtime columnist for the Southern California News Group and a local historian steeped in all things Route 66, passed away after a long illness on Dec. 11. She was 79.

Her husband Alan was planning a celebration to mark their milestone 80th birthdays, hers on Dec. 25 and his on the 29th. In an interview a week before her passing, Alan said he loved to tease his wife of 60 years about their four-day age difference. "I'd say, 'You sure were a cougar going after a younger man,'" he said.

Claudia Heller was born and raised in Hollywood and graduated from Los Angeles City College with a degree in journalism. She and Alan met as freshmen at Hollywood High. They moved to Duarte in 1980 and enmeshed themselves in community life. She served as president of the Duarte Historical Society and Duarte Woman's Club, stewarded the city's historical museum and from 1991 to 2022, wrote a column for the Southern California News Group.

She and Alan, a photographer, collaborated on three books, "Life on Route 66," "Duarte Chronicles" and "Curiosities of the California Desert." The Route 66 book came out of the 2,400 mile road trip the couple took when they retired, not accidentally, at age 66.

"People say a picture is worth a thousand words, well I say, yes, I took the pictures, but she always had the perfect thousand words," he said.

Jim and Kathy Kirchner said they have a life-deep appreciation of their best friends. The couples met 40 years ago and raised their children in Duarte, volunteering for everything from sports boosters to the chamber of commerce.

Claudia was a prolific writer about different things, but all of them had a human interest, and her focus was local," Jim Kirchner said. "Everybody who knew her loved her."

From Alan and Claudia, the Kirchners learned to adventure.

"Before we met them, Kathy and I were destination people, you drive from here to there," Kirchner said. "Alan and Claudia would stop along the way and explore. They taught us there's a lot between here and there and you can miss a lot if you don't stop along the way."

Back home, the Hellers were staunch supporters of local history, championing the construction of a statue of Andres Duarte in 2007 and helping with the city's Route 66 parade.

Former Duarte Mayor Lois Gaston nominated Claudia Heller for Volunteer of the Year honors in 2012, an award she received from Rep. Judy Chu.

"She was a woman of very few spoken words, but her written words were life-changing and carried a message of community and love," Gaston said.

"(Through her columns), she made us appreciate community in ways that we wouldn't have thought about, and she and Alan have done a tremendous amount to preserve our history and build pride in our city."

Citing her failing health, Heller retired from writing her column for The Weekly Star in 2022. She had written countless profiles on local newsmakers like the Llama Lady, to missives on the great outdoors, the pros and cons of electricity, and the story of Rock Town, the Latino and African-American enclave that encompassed Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte, or MAD.

It was a body of work that made its mark, even on her editors.

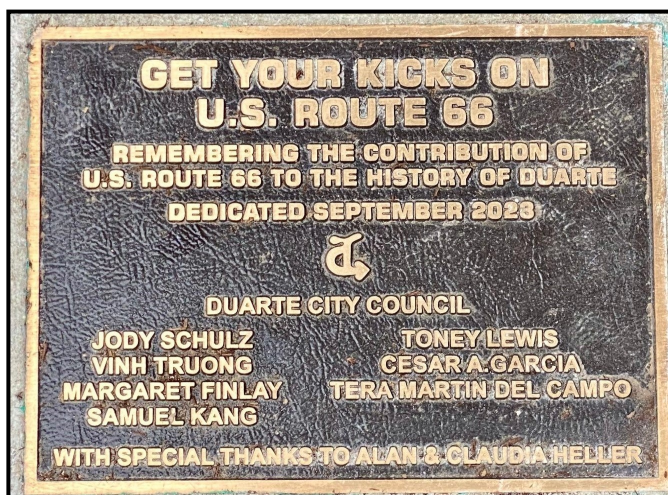
“Claudia Heller was one of a kind,” said Tom Bray, senior editor for the Southern California News Group’s Los Angeles County publications. “Her column in the Weekly Star displayed her love for Duarte and the rest of the San Gabriel Valley with warmth, precision and love. And her readers loved her right back. She was a great storyteller and a truly lovely person. She will be deeply, sincerely missed.”

Duarte City Councilmember Margaret Finlay has been a friend for 35 years. “I admired her most for her wonderful sense of humor and her ability to write amazingly interesting articles about stories that may not have been the easiest subjects to write about. She was a good friend to so many and I always called her ‘Duarte’s Historian.’”

Duarte Mayor Jody Schulz said her passing is a tremendous loss to Duarte. Schulz said she was proud of the newest city monument, the monolithic Route 66 sign on Huntington Drive and Mt. Olive Drive, is dedicated to the couple.

“Thank you, Claudia, for all you have done and written and supported,” she added. “I have a feeling that you are still getting your kicks, now with a better view, watching all of us here, waving from Route 66.”

Heller is survived by her husband, Alan, two surviving children of their three and their families.



LOTS HAPPENING AT THE MUSEUM



For the past few years, the Monrovia-Duarte Black Alumni Assoc. and the Duarte Historical Museum have enjoyed a very special relationship. During Black History month, MDBAA has graced the Museum with programs and displays. This year will be no different.

Monrovia Duarte Black Alumni Association won 2 awards this year. One for their work in educating the community on Race Unity from the Baha'is of Monrovia and the second, the Ruby McKnight Williams Award, from the Pasadena Branch of the NAACP for their Community Work. These awards will be on display at the Duarte Museum from January to March as part of their temporary exhibit.

The theme for Black History Month 2024 is African Americans and the Arts.

Sunday January 14th 2:30pm -4pm

Showing of the film, *100 Days from Mississippi*, the true story of Mamie Lang Kirkland who was born in 1908 in Ellisville, Mississippi

The Kick off for Black History Month

Sunday February 4, 2024 2:30pm-4pm

Speaker: Dr Derik Smith Department of Literature at Claremont McKenna College

Topic: Robert Hayden, First Black Poetic Laureate

March is Women History Month

Sunday March 10th 2:30pm

Speaker: Jouslynn Griffin, Chair of WIN, Women in NAACP

The public is invited to join us for these programs which promise to be inspirational and enlightening.

Bottom Line of Plaque Located at New Route 66 Sign:
“With Special Thanks to Alan & Claudia Heller”

JANUARY IS MEMBERSHIP MONTH

PLEASE SUPPORT THE DUARTE MUSEUM
BY PAYING YOUR 2024 DUES BY JAN 31.

Individual: \$20 Family: \$30
Business/Organization: \$100

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
www.RanchoDeDuarte.org

Use Secure PayPal Payment Process

Or mail a check to

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THANK YOU

Duarte Historical Society & Museum

www.RanchoDeDuarte.org

Open: Wednesdays: 1-3 p.m.

Saturdays: 1-4 p.m.

President: Liz Reilly

Vice President: Sharman Warner

Treasurer: Evette Arcaro

Secretary: open

Membership: Connie Ream

Ellen Worley

Hospitality: Judy Ann Blake

Curator: Dilip Tiwari

Docent Coordinator: Sharman Warner

Exhibit Coordinator: Mark Montgomery

At Large: Yusuf Mansuri

President Emeritus: Claudia Heller

Photographer: Alan Heller

Branding Iron: Liz Reilly

Webmaster: Jim Kirchner

Duarte Historical Society & Museum

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