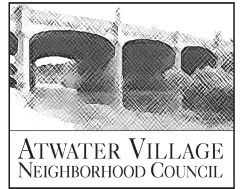


# ATWATER VILLAGE VOICE



*Atwater Village, where progress is a tradition.*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue № 5 – Spring 2009



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## Town Hall Village Meeting Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup>

*This Village Update is a contribution by  
AVNC co-chair Leonora Gershman Pitts.*

The Atwater Village Neighborhood Council is hosting a Town Hall meeting on **Saturday, April 18th, 2009 at 1:00 PM.** Thanks to the continuing generosity of Christ's Church, we will be convening in the Community Room at Christ's Church (3852 Edenhurst Ave).

We are hoping to host members of the AVNC, the Atwater Village-Griffith Park Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Atwater Village, Atwater Village Residents Association, and you, all of our neighbors and stakeholders. We will discuss our hopes and concerns for Atwater Village, upcoming events, and how to continue our outreach to the community.

This will be a much more informal meeting than our regular Board of Governors' meetings. It's an opportunity for you to make your voice heard and for all of us to

gather a consensus on how to move forward and continue to make Atwater Village the best neighborhood in Los Angeles.

We will have food and refreshments too! We look forward to seeing you there.

## An All New atwatervillage.org This Spring

*This Village Update is a contribution by  
AVNC co-chair Leonora Gershman Pitts.*

Your friendly Neighborhood Council has undertaken the large task of revamping our website, [www.atwatervillage.org](http://www.atwatervillage.org). We are working with Steven Schmerler of SASnet Designs, who created the fabulous Echo Park and Silver Lake websites. As a stakeholder of the Hollywood Hills West Neighborhood Council, Mr. Schmerler understands clearly the work of neighborhood councils, and has designed a Content Management System specifically for our work.

With our new website, which we will launch this Spring, the AVNC

will be able to easily update our site with community news, calls for volunteers, meeting agendas and minutes, photos, and announcements. Our beloved forum will still be intact, and will still be the place where neighbors can connect with neighbors about everything from crime and safety to finding a great chimney sweep.

We hope our new website will foment even more involvement from our stakeholders, and will be the online hub of the Village.

If you visit Silver Lake or Echo Park's websites, you'll notice that the graphic design of the site echoes the "vibe" of those neighborhoods. We are hoping to capture Atwater Village's past as well as our exciting future with our design, and we think all of our stakeholders will be thrilled when they see the design we've chosen. It will demonstrate to visitors of the site our wonderful institutions, our true Village feel, our legendary murals, and the balance we are striving to find between our traditions and our progress.

# Griffith Park's Unique Donor

By Mike Eberts, a Los Feliz resident and Professor of Mass Communications at Glendale Community College.



*Griffith Jenkins Griffith was not yet known as the colonel when he posed for this photo as a 22-year-old journalism school graduate.*

*Photo: Van Griffith Papers, UCLA Special Collections*

*Note: This article appeared in the Glendale News-Press on the 75th anniversary of Col. Griffith's death, July 6, 1994.*

Imagine a man who gives over 3,000 acres of land to his adopted hometown for a park, and then donates a fortune to build a popular observatory/planetarium/hall of science and a large open-air theater.

Imagine a man who enrages many of his peers with long years of insufferable pomposity and then shoots his well-regarded high-society wife in a paranoid delusion that she is in league with the Pope to poison him and steal his money.

Imagine if they were the same man.

You've just imagined one of the most unimaginable characters in the history of Los Angeles, Col. Griffith J. Griffith.

## Famous for Giving Griffith Park to the City

Col. Griffith, who died on July 6, 1919, is mostly remembered as donor of 3015 acres that became the core of Griffith Park, and for donating money to build the park's Greek Theatre and Griffith Observatory. But the "colonel" (evidence suggests the only military title he ever held was Major of Riflery Practice with the California National Guard) was a complicated man. He had towering virtues and cavernous faults.

## Immigrant Made Good

Col. Griffith's rise to wealth is like something out of a 19th century storybook. He arrived in New York in 1866 as a 14-year-old Welsh immigrant without money, education or a stable family. He quickly found an elderly couple to take him in, exchanging his labor for room, board and a chance to attend a nearby public school.

In his 20s, his career shot up like a rocket. He began as a reporter covering mines for a San Francisco newspaper. He parlayed this position into a much more lucrative side business preparing confidential mining reports for the nation's richest men. He invested the windfall into mining operations, sometimes losing money, but more often turning large

profits. By 1882 he was rich, and he wanted everybody in Los Angeles--his new home--to know it.

"He was a sensation," wrote a reporter who knew the colonel. "The young women promenading under the hospitable wooden awning of the Baker Block stopped and stared at the colonel. He wore the longest of long cream-colored overcoats in an age when overcoats usually came to the heels, and he carried a gold-headed cane and wore moss agate cuff buttons, big round ones."

## A Unique Personality

But after a while the colonel's personality began to grate on some people's nerves. One acquaintance described him as "a midget egomaniac." Another wrote that the colonel "was a roly-poly, pompous little fellow" who "had an exaggerated strut like a turkey gobbler." It seems everyone who knew him had a Col. Griffith story.

- An officer in one of the city's exclusive men's clubs said the colonel was often allowed to make long-winded addresses to the group because he contributed such large sums that it was hard to say no to him.
- Another story from the same club purports that the colonel confided to other members that he didn't want to run for public office because people would badger him to run for president--not of the club, but of the United States.
- A younger, less prominent acquaintance said the colonel once summoned him to a busy downtown street. The colonel said he wanted to do something for the younger man. When the acquaintance arrived, the colonel linked arms with him and they rather conspicuously strolled down the street. It took a while for the man to recognize the favor: people would see him linked in fellowship with the colonel.

## Midas Touch

Meantime, the colonel retained his Midas touch. He bought the Rancho Los Feliz in 1882--and then sold some of its water rights to the city two years later, recouping his investment. Then, along with other big property holders, he made enormous profits from rampant, feverish land speculation that peaked in 1886-87. And, oh yes, he married into money as well.

Christina Mesmer wasn't just rich, she was also dignified and respected. Somehow she agreed to become Mrs. Griffith. One account claims the colonel hired a hack writer to compose a love poem and then had it published in a local newspaper, but only after protracted negotiations over the advertising rate.

They remained married for 16 years. Then in 1903 things went tragically haywire. Although the colonel was richer and more powerful **Cont'd on Page 3**

**GRIFFITH CONT'D.** than ever, he was also terribly nervous and edgy, his wife later testified. He compulsively bit his nails, his manicurist said. And he was a sneak drinker, his lawyer said, privately putting away two quarts of whiskey a day while publicly aligning himself with the city's strong temperance movement.

### **Vacation Disaster**

In August the Griffiths went to the Arcadia Hotel in Santa Monica. Christina Griffith hoped a month in the Presidential Suite overlooking the palisades would help her husband unwind. But the colonel's strange behavior intensified. Waitresses said he switched his food and drink with his wife's. You never know if someone's trying to poison you, he told them. They chalked it up to a strange sense of humor.

But the last day of the Griffiths' vacation was about as unfunny as things get. Christina Griffith was addressing a few last postcards and beginning to gather her things. Her husband entered the room with a prayer book in one hand and a revolver in the other. Unfortunately, he handed her the prayer book.

She was on her knees when the colonel aimed and fired. Christina Griffith jerked her head at the last minute. That saved her life. She hurled herself out a window, landed on an awning below, and crawled to safety through another window. One author who attended Col. Griffith's trial called Christina Griffith "the society wife who wouldn't die."

### **Colonel Brought to Justice**

The shooting left Christina Griffith disfigured and blind in one eye. Some observers say the colonel was lucky he wasn't lynched. His trial was spectacular and ghastly. Special prosecutors, led by an ex-governor, were called in. The defense was based around a novel idea: alcoholic insanity. Earl Rogers, the colonel's attorney, argued that heavy and steady consumption of alcohol had transformed religious friction in the Griffiths' marriage--he was Protestant, she was Catholic, and they were both devout--into weird murderous delusions.

The defense worked. Col. Griffith was sentenced to two years in prison, with the stipulation that he be treated for his alcoholic insanity.

Whatever it was that snapped in the colonel in 1903 apparently snapped back while he was in prison. From his cell at San Quentin, he asked that he not be given any special treatment. He passed up an opportunity to work in the prison library; instead, he made burlap sacks in the jute mill alongside humbler prisoners. He refused parole as well. One of his few remaining friends, a judge, said the colonel wanted to pay his debt to society as fully as possible.

### **Colonel Rebuilds His Life**

When he got out of prison, the colonel had little--other than the park land he had donated to the city in 1896--to tie him to Los Angeles. Most people around town still hated him and most of the others thought he was crazy. He was divorced. His only child was independent. And he was still rich.

But he returned to Los Angeles and stayed for the remaining 13 years of his life. Sources say he was quieter and less pompous. He lectured on prison reform, advocating rehabilitation over punishment. And he persistently worked at improving his park.

In 1912 he offered the city \$100,000 to build a popular observatory atop Mt. Hollywood (Formerly Mt. Griffith, it had been renamed while he was in prison.). In his letter to the mayor and city council, the colonel waxed expansively about opening up the heavens to the common people, inspiring, educating and uplifting them. "Ambition," he wrote, "must have broad spaces and mighty distances."

If someone else had made the offer, the city might have jumped at it. But, as things stood, the city council jumped the other way, flatly refusing the money. Wrote one prominent citizen in a letter published on the front page of a local newspaper:

On behalf of the rising generation of girls and boys we protest against the acceptance of this bribe . . . This community is neither so poor nor so lost to sense of public decency that it can afford to accept this money.

The colonel, however, pressed on. In 1913 he offered \$50,000 to build a Greek Theater. That project also ground to a standstill. At one point the Park Commission brought suit to force the colonel to stop preparations for construction. The colonel responded by setting up a trust fund to provide money for building the two facilities he had promised after he was gone.

Millions have enjoyed Griffith Park during the nearly 100 years since Col. Griffith donated it to the city. The Greek Theatre has stood for 65 years, the Observatory for 60.

The Griffith Trust has spent some of its remaining funds for a 14-foot bronze monument to Griffith Jenkins Griffith. A drawing of the proposed monument shows a dapper colonel with his trademark gold-headed cane and long overcoat. And yes, the overcoat has plenty of buttons, big round ones.

*Writer's note: This article, one of an occasional series, is part of the Griffith Park History Project, an attempt to chronicle the park's long and remarkable life. What memories do you have of Griffith Park? Suggestions? Questions? Criticisms? E-mail me at [MEberts@glendale.cc.ca.us](mailto:MEberts@glendale.cc.ca.us)*

# Who's Who on the AVNC

*This will be an ongoing column in the AVNC to help you get to know your representatives on the council. This month we introduce you to our newest representative, Ginger, and want to also help you get to know the council co-chairs, Leonora & Roberta.*

## **Ginger Damon, Arts & Education Chair**

Ginger Damon has just moved here to South Atwater Village. She has fallen in love with a new community. "My first month here, I went to the tree lighting ceremony and, was so taken with the turn out and the participation of my new community, I inquired as to how I could get involved." I received an e-mail for the AVNC so I attended. By the next meeting I had a chair position. I am the new Arts and Education Chair on the Neighborhood Council.

Prior to having moved to Atwater Village I resided in The Whitley Heights area of Hollywood. I was instrumental in getting Permit Parking for Whitley Ave. I was involved with our Neighborhood Watch and, enjoyed creating a neighborhood that took care of one another. This was all out of love. I grew up in a strong community and I still value that as something of importance.

I hope to be an asset to Atwater Village, as I see a lot of potential for development especially on the south end of Atwater. There definitely is something special here.

## **Leonora Gershman Pitts, North Atwater Rep, Co-Chair**

I moved to Los Angeles in 2003 after years of living in New York City. After living in West Hollywood for several years, and never really getting over my homesickness for New York, a friend told me I should check out Atwater Village, saying she had a feeling I would love it. I drove through the Village one sunny afternoon and immediately fell in love. Shortly thereafter, I sold my apartment in New York, found a condo in North Atwater, and at that moment, finally felt like Los Angeles was my home.

I was born and raised in Grand Forks, North Dakota. My father is in the liquor retail business and is the president of the Grand Forks City Council, and my mother is a professor of Foundations of Education at the University of North Dakota and is North Dakota's representative for the Kennedy Center's National Board of the Performing Arts.

I've been a performer my entire life, dancing, singing, and acting since I was four. I moved to New York at age eighteen to attend New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where I majored in acting, training with the Atlantic Theater Company Acting School.

Upon my graduation, and while acting full time in theater and television, I was put on Atlantic's faculty, teaching speech to first year NYU students, as well as Atlantic's full time conservatory students.

I moved to Los Angeles to continue my career, and have been blessed to find a wonderful community of actors, writers, directors, and musicians who support each other and create opportunities for each other. Through this amazing artistic collective, whose hub is the production company Drama 3/4, I met and fell in love with Scott Pitts, whom I was lucky enough to marry in October 2008. We look forward to raising a family in Atwater Village, surrounded by our marvelous neighbors, and with the same commitment to public service with which I was raised.

As AVNC's co-chair, my partner Roberta Javier and I hope to involve our stakeholders as much as possible in our work, continuing to make the Village more beautiful, safer, and stronger. We are striving to find a balance between the traditions of Atwater Village and the inevitable progress we are making. As I always say, those of us who moved to the Village more recently need to be mindful and thankful to the people who've lived here for years and generations, since it was those people who made this wonderful neighborhood the type of place where we would want to move and make a life. Atwater Village is clearly the best place to live in all of Los Angeles (no disrespect to our neighboring communities!), a true Village in the heart of a sprawling metropolis.

## **Roberta Javier, Co-Chair**

I was born in Idaho, lived on a reservation in Arizona for a while and, as many of the tribal members relocated to Los Angeles in the 50's, my mother moved and settled in Long Beach. I was the eldest of six removed from her care in 1958. Over the 10 years that followed, I lived in 17 foster homes, a girls' home and an Oklahoma convent before I ran away and married at 16. Two months after my wedding, I graduated high school from Manual Arts in south Los Angeles.

I searched for a "gentle, diverse neighborhood" in 1981 and came upon an empty house at Madera and Tyburn. I called a local realtor for an ownership clue (Frank Long on Glendale, where Hugo's Tacos is now) put me in touch with owners in Hawai'i. We filled it, for 23 years.

I was PTA president while my daughters attended Atwater Ave Elementary School. They went to Irving and then to Marshall. As they took college prep, each of my daughters lettered in sports; Niki played softball, Jo ran cross country and **Cont'd on Page 5**

**WHO'S WHO CONT'D.** Christina was the b-baller. Niki and Christina worked at Chevy Chase Rec Center and they all walked with me in the protests for a park on Glendale Blvd and against a drug house on Valleybrink. Atwater Village (thanks to Barbara Lass's efforts) had its sign on the freeway, I had done the newsletter for AVRA for a couple of years, I had been a part of the first FAV Board and the AVNC formation committee....when Christina finished high school and Niki was near her BA, I decided it was time for me to go back.

I started at LACC in the fall of 2001. I was in the honors program when I graduated in 2003 with an AA and my Human Services Certificate. I was accepted to UC Berkeley and moved (no one believed I would) from Atwater Village to northern California (Emeryville; right down the street from Pixar Studios). I was back in LA every 6 weeks, I missed my kids grandkids. Who knew I would be home sick? I earned my BA in Social Welfare at UC Berkeley in May of 2005 just as I was accepted into the full time, two-year Master's of Social Work program at Cal State LA. I finished the program, walked in 2007. Two months later I moved back to Atwater. Sadly, thesis remains a work in progress -- needing to eat and pay rent a priority; I started my new career.

Hiring into the LA County Department of Children & Family Services' Specialized Programs Unit for Native Americans in the position of Children's Social Worker was a 6 month process. Training was 3 months and probation was a grueling 9 months. I had to be confident a spinal cord injury received in a car accident in 1989 would not interfere. I celebrated one year with DCFS this past January. Downside?...the 45 minute drive each way to the Covina office.

Atwater Village is truly central -- it's half an hour to the ocean, to the mountains and to most of LA's most popular entertainment/education venues. Atwater Village has character and diversity borne by it's population, it's architecture and businesses. I love Atwater Village's promise and hope. No matter where you stand in our village, you sense it breathes, it has life and continues to evolve. Atwater Village underscores hope, as described by a dear colleague -"with one foot in a Capra-esque film and the other in the future." Our Village morphs, not radically, but with grace and style. Who wouldn't want to be a living, breathing, building, forward-moving part of that? I see the mandate of the AVNC as shepherding the Village's community progress and I work, aligned with this AVNC Board's adage; *Atwater Village; where progress is tradition.*

## Dear Atwater Abby,

*This column is a contribution by AVNC co-chair Roberta Javier.*

Atwater Villagers have many questions and with today's hectic schedules, too often a question arises and there's no time to figure out who to ask or where to go to begin the research. Worse, the frustration can impede and make you forget the best ideas.

To introduce this column, the AVNC is initiating it with very generic questions we hope will be of some interest. As the column develops we hope everyone will be informed to some degree. We hope your questions and responses will generate readers' interest and keep you all coming back to see what Atwater Abby has learned.

*Dear Atwater Abby--*

*I need to toss out an old couch, who'll pick it up and when?*

*There's a huge pothole at the corner...*

*They tagged my neighbor's wall again with spray paint, in 5 foot letters...*

*The street light on my corner went out about a year ago...*

*There's a business operating illegally...*

Call 311 -- for ALL City Services. For the couch/ bulky item pick up, call a week before your trash pick up day. Often by the time they arrive, it has already been taken.

The potholes and graffiti are responded too usually with 72 hours, street light replacement may depend on where the light is out. Remember to be prepared to report an exact address or nearest cross streets.

*I heard there's a new CPAB rep in town, what's a CPAB and what does this mean for me?*

CPAB is LAPD's acronym for Community Police Advisory Board. Our CPAB operates through Northeast Division (NOE) which serves Atwater Village and is located on San Fernando Blvd near Fletcher. Each community served by NOE's CPAB have or hope to have at least two representatives and according to their by-laws, each of these reps should have two alternates.

The CPAB reps act as the communities' (NOE also serves the communities of Echo Park, parts of East Hollywood, Silverlake, Eagle Rock and Highland Park) two -way conduit for distribution of information. They talk to and get information from NOE once a month at meetings. They forward community concerns in the areas they represent and they report back information from NOE. CPAB members are selected by NOE and the CPAB Board, there is some training and it does require a background clearance.

Atwater Village has two CPAB reps at this time. Carol Moore (who is also heading up the newly formed Teen CPAB) can be **Cont'd on Page 6**

## Spring Calendar of Atwater Village Events

**AVNC Board Meeting – All are welcome!**  
Thursday, April 9th – 7p.m.  
Christ’s Church at Griffith Park  
Community Room, 3852 Edenhurst Ave.

**AVNC Board Meeting – Join us!**  
Thursday, May 14th – 7p.m.  
Christ’s Church at Griffith Park  
Community Room, 3852 Edenhurst Ave.

**AVNC Board Meeting – Come take part!**  
Thursday, June 11th – 7p.m.  
Christ’s Church at Griffith Park  
Community Room, 3852 Edenhurst Ave.

*Remember to check the AVNC website at  
[www.atwatervillage.org](http://www.atwatervillage.org) for other important  
updates & committee meeting announcements!*



**Sundays**  
**10a.m.-2p.m.**  
**3250 Glendale Blvd.**

**PLEASE NOTE:**  
**Artwater Music & Art Festival**  
**Previously Scheduled for**  
**Saturday, April 25 –**  
**CANCELLED UNTIL**  
**FURTHER NOTICE**

**Town Hall**  
**SATURDAY**  
**APRIL 18th 1PM**  
**3852 Edenhurst Ave.**

Garden Co-Op Nursery School  
Spring Fundraiser  
**The Garden Spring Bonanza**  
Consignment, Rummage, and Bake-Sale  
Sunday, April 19th 8am-1pm  
Bank of America parking lot  
2263 Colorado Blvd.

### ATWATER ABBY CONT'D.

reached via email at [iloveatwater@yahoo.com](mailto:iloveatwater@yahoo.com) our second and new CPAB rep is Jorge Sanguinetti whose email contact is [jorgest@dslextreme.com](mailto:jorgest@dslextreme.com).

The next scheduled CPAB meeting is Monday, April 27 and the meetings are generally being held in the communities. If you have more questions, call Sgt. Roman at NOE in the Community Relations Office (CRO) at (213) 485-2548.

*When is the next AVNC Board meeting so I can give them a piece of my mind?*

The AVNC meets the second Thursday of each month at 7 PM in the Community Room of Christ's

Church at 3852 Edenhurst Avenue. There is an agenda but public comment is always welcome. *The AVNC needs to know what your concerns are in order to do something about it.*

Please remember if you are tech-challenged, call your questions to the AVNC Hotline number 24 hours a day at (323) 634-2862 and if you prefer; email questions to:

[dearatwaterabby@gmail.com](mailto:dearatwaterabby@gmail.com)

### ISSUE No. 6 – THE 2009 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

*Help make the next Atwater Village Voice the best it can be!*

Do you have an idea for an article on the Village? Are you willing to write a piece about how we can improve our community? Are you willing to contribute an opinion piece about what you see in the future of our village? Or maybe you want to write a story about long-time residents or share some historic research on the Village! Do you want to translate an article to Spanish? Do you want to write an article *en Español*? Do you want to share your story at a community event? Perhaps you have a spectacular photograph of the Village... We want to hear from you! We need your help!

Please send all submissions to [board@atwatervillage.org](mailto:board@atwatervillage.org) or [spencer@tylerspencer.com](mailto:spencer@tylerspencer.com) **NO LATER THAN June 16th.**



#### The ATWATER VILLAGE VOICE Community Newsletter

*This issue of the Village Voice was made possible through the volunteer work and contributions of the Atwater Village Neighborhood Council &...*

*Spencer Collins  
Ginger Damon  
Mike Eberts  
Leonora Gershman Pitts  
Roberta Javier*