



# NEWSLETTER

MARCH

1999

## from the President

Warmest greetings, everyone. I must tell you that we are about to look back at a very busy and extraordinarily successful season by nearly all standards. Let me focus on two major events that by themselves put the Foundation on track to make another real difference in the preservation of old island architecture: the House Tours and the Evening in Black and White.

They are wonderful events in themselves, of course, immensely enjoyed by everyone who participated in them. As you know, they are the Foundation's two major fund raisers which support a grants program for the preservation of the Oldest House and many other important preservation projects in Key West. Let me tell you how well you did: The aggregate money raised by the 4 exciting house tours this season amount to \$58,600, another immense success made possible by Chairman, Trip Hoffman, supported by committee subchairs, Momy Ortiz-Benavides, Mitzi Krabill, Helen Crimmins and Paula Newhouse. The second event was, of course, the Evening in Black and White

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*The group of 57 contestants in the annual Conch Shell Blowing Contest gather for a "group bellow" heard 'round the harbor.*

## SHELL BLOWING CONTEST

One of the highlights of Old Island Days is the annual Conch Shell Blowing Contest, which was held on March 20 at the Sunset Pier, Ocean Key House. Celebrating its 37th year of promoting the cultural heritage of Key West, the contest gathered close to 60 entrants, fourteen under the age of 12, whose varying degrees of skill and lung power sent out sounds reminiscent of days of the Calusa Indians, the islands first inhabitants, wafting over the harbor waters.

Most folks know this mollusk as a luxury edible, but in fact, its shell is what has given it prominence. Not only was it used for communication by the earliest settlers, sea captains would give a toot or two to signal their departure from the harbor.

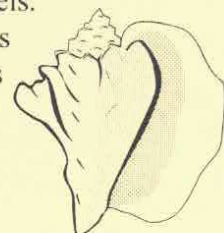
But it is best known as the symbol and strength and durability of the native

Key West, referred to as a conch.

Entrants using various sizes and shapes of shells are judged by the **quality** of the sound produced, the **duration** and **loudness** of the sounds and by **novelty** sounds. Judges were Commissioners Sally Lewis, Merili McCoy and our favorite storyteller Rex Brumgart. Winners by category were: Emma Fehling for 5 years and under; Natasha Conde for 6 to 11 years, Lisa Jones 12 to 17 years, John Lebitsch over 18 years and the "Jimmy B" Conch Band for group.

CNN covered the event as did most of the Miami channels.

And, great fun was had by ALL. Join us next year for the 38<sup>th</sup> year OIRF has hosted this ear splitting event.



Last call for  
**Membership Dues**  
before the annual  
**MEMBERS**  
**APPRECIATION**  
**PARTY**

Wed., April 7

6:30 PM

in the garden of the  
Oldest House Museum





*Joan Dalbey, chairperson for the annual museum fund raiser, models a fabulous if not (for the first time) weather required, raccoon coat donated to the Silent Auction table by Carla Curtis.*

### AN EVENING IN BLACK AND WHITE

A stunning evening, with the weather in full cooperation, welcomed 100 guests attired in black and white for the annual gala to benefit the Oldest House Museum. Cocktails and mingling about among the many Silent Auction items donated for the festivities preceded an elegant dinner prepared by the Hilton Resort.

Joan Dalbey and Helen Crimmins, co-chairs for the event, decorated the tables with white orchids and votive candles to set off the glamorous black and white attire of the partygoers. As always, Trip Hoffman gathered an astonishing array of donated items ranging from several art prints and Becky Thatcher jewelry to a carved Thai elephant chair from Fast Buck Freddie's for the Silent Auction tables which raised alone over \$13,000. Debra Dean supplied music for listening and dancing, leaving all attending with a feeling of complete enjoyment.

The evening also left the museum with the funds needed to complete the Master Restoration Program begun six years earlier. OIRF sends its thanks out to the very generous Key West community for its support for this endeavor.

*Gib and Marcia Peters, Bud and Joanne Hoffman, and Louise Thayer survey the groaning Silent Auction table which contributed a substantial portion of the revenue from the gala evening*



### THIS OLD HOUSE

By now most of you have read about, gaped at, hovered around (waiting for autographs, we know...), photographed, worked on or seen the Key West rehabilitation being featured this season by the television show "This Old House." Architect Michael Miller- who has been OIRF's architect throughout the Oldest House Museum Master Restoration Plan, from preparing the historic structures report to completing the work on the gift shop (with MANY donations in between for which we are MOST grateful) - and his wife artist Helen Colley are the owners of this wonderful project. Having seen the results, we congratulate them both on their design and, no doubt, patience. Look for the premier of the Key West segment of "This Old House" on March 28, 10AM, WLRN-TV, Channel 17.

### from the President *continued*

on the 10th of March organized and presented by Joan Dalbey and Helen Crimmins. Through their efforts, tickets and donations equaled \$10,500. The centerpiece event that evening was the Silent Auction, brought together almost single-handedly by Trip Hoffman (with Michael Pelkey). It brought in \$13,500 plus. You will be introduced to every one of the member volunteers who made these and other events possible at the Member Appreciation party on April 7, 1999. Mark your calendar now!

I want to extend special recognition to Trip for his monumental efforts on behalf of the Foundation this year. Please acknowledge him as well when you next see him. He is clearly the most dedicated, talented and under appreciated and purposely underpaid member of the Board of Directors who has again this year led our merry band to exceed its money raising targets and keep our mission focused.

On behalf of all 600 of us, Trip, thanks for your leadership and generous service to our old island.

*Gib Peters*





*President Gib Peters presents to Joe Barker, director of Wesley House, the final \$10,000 installment of the grant awarded them for the restoration of the Ley Memorial Church building on Truman Ave. to enhance the entrance to the City. Sharing the honors are Wesley House and OIRF board member, Carmen Turner, Wesley House capital campaign co-chairs Lynn Kaufelt and Debbie Horan and OIRF board member Momy Ortiz-Benavides*

## BAHAMA VILLAGE PHOTO PROJECT

Board member Dick Moody has organized an ambitious project, a photo documentary of Bahama Village, which will be presented at the Members Appreciation Party on April 7th.

The Bahama Village Photo Project, according to Moody, will provide the viewer with a time capsule of unique, unrestored homes in Key West. It will emphasize the construction methods used for many of the homes, which have proven quite reliable and mostly hurricane proof. Photographers Thomas Butler, Scott Wilcox and Richard Watherwax worked with Moody on the project and produced some outstanding results.

Plans are in the works to send the exhibit to Tallahassee during Black History Month in 2000. Locally, the project will be preserved with the Lofton Sands Museum and the Key West Library historical section for future generations of research.

## OIRF NEWSLETTER

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## APPLAUSE FOR BUSINESS RESTORATIONS

The corner of Duval St. and Fleming St. has taken on a bright, shiny face as a structural restoration, which is just the kind of thing we like to see in Key West, proceeds. The Spottswood family, also responsible for a sensitive rehabilitation of the building across the street now housing Express and the restoration of the Fogarty House, have given new life to the Page building (home of fond memories for Mayor Wilhelmina Harvey where she and CB had a drugstore).

This building appears to connect with a second partway down Fleming St. where a long burned out area (whose interesting history relates the fire to a stripper/management conflict) has been replaced as original according to the former owner.

The edifice uplift has added greatly to wonderful corner which includes the La Concha and The Kress Building (Fast Buck Freddies).

Barry Schmitt owner of Coldwell Banker Read Estate has put tremendous effort into the rehabilitation of the former Firestone Tire Company building at White St. The design is true to the original structure of the building and sensitive to the neighborhood. In fact, it is proof that "preservation makes good sense" having stimulated many others in the neighborhood to consider sprucing up properties.

# Old Island Restoration Foundation Inc ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Tuesday, APRIL 13, 5:30 PM**

**in the garden of the**

**Oldest House Museum**

**322 Duval St., Key West, Florida**

**-to hear Treasurer's Report**

**-to hear reports of active committees**

**-to discuss business as necessary**

***Refreshments to Follow Meeting***



Members of  
**Old Island Restoration Foundation**

are cordially invited to  
gather together for the annual  
**Members Appreciation Party**

**Wednesday, April 7**  
**from 6:30 to 8:30PM**  
at the Oldest House Museum  
322 Duval Street

★ *Refreshments* ★ *Refreshments* ★ *Refreshments* ★  
★ *Presentation of the Bahama Village Photo Project* ★

**Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc.**

At the Hospitality House, Mallory Square  
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