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The famed Flamingo Hotel at night

Classic 50's Neon Bird still at Flamingo Hotel

by **Anne Burch**

Santa Rosa, Calif. -- After an absence of almost 20 years, the classic nine-foot neon pink flamingo once again graces the tower of Santa Rosa, California's Flamingo Hotel, now officially a historical landmark.

Called the jewel of Santa Rosa, early celebrity guests included Jayne Mansfield, George Gobel, George Fenneman (Groucho Marx' 'You Bet Your Life' show), Tony Curtis, Guns and Roses, Steve Allen, the Kingston Trio, David Soul, Tommy Smothers, Lorenzo Lamas and a host of others. It was designed to be an exact replica of the famed Lady Luck in Las Vegas and the hotel was considered the classic garden hotel. Opening night in June of 1957 featured the Golden Deed Ball, remembered by those who attended as grand indeed.

The City of
Santa Rosa
Cultural Heritage
Board designated



the neon bird as a historical landmark and, at its dedication, a time capsule was installed. Its contents included an autographed



copy of Annie Well's Pulitzer Prize, a bottle of Korbel champagne signed by Gary Heck, a gold medal from the Sonoma County Harvest Fair donated by Peter Rabbit Chocolate Factory and an autographed book by cartoonist Charles Schultz. Local residents joined in with the restoration process and the ceremony.

When the question arose as to whether the big bird did actually revolve in its hey day, Jon Sawyer, who grew up in Santa Rosa and owns Sawyer's News and Coffeeshop nearby, said he knew it did. "I was mesmerized by it as a kid," he said; "it was considered so high-tech back in the 1960's; my friends and I would gather at June Kinney's house at night to watch it through telescopes and could see the big bird spinning around...it was like a beacon to us." Now it has returned.

The hotel still bears some of its 1950s facade, rising above Fourth Street and Farmers Lane in Santa Rosa. Built in 1957 by Theron L. Hedgepeth of Garden Investment Co., the hotel was owned in early years by Ramada Inns, then to Chicago real estate investor James D. Harvey, who loved the area and had family nearby. Elaborate plans were laid to expand, including an Executive Club with bathhouse, lockers, massage room and steam baths.



The Flamingo began attracting celebrities, movie producers and fast became a celebrated place of hospitality in northern California.

The Flamingo went through a period of hard times, began showing its age and passing through several ownerships until the property was purchased in the late 1970s and remodeling and refurnishing began in earnest by the new owner, West German industrialist-businessman-rancher Werner Ehret. Each of the 120

rooms were complete redone, ballrooms rebuilt and audio visual capabilities installed to attract business conferences. His son Pierre later took over the operations. Since that time he has been responsible for the complete redecoration of the hotel and the Montecito Heights Health and Fitness Club, available to hotel guests, bringing the Flamingo into the 1990s by creating enjoyable ambiance and focusing on excellent service, including concierge services and a Corporate Travel Club.

Nestled in the heart of the beautiful Sonoma Wine Country, the Flamingo is considered the area's finest in service, luxury and comfort in its tranquil surroundings. Guests may enjoy the Terrace Grill, with daily chefs for lunch and dinner, a spectacular view and a Sunday brunch offered. The hotel has a piano bar and live entertainment in the Cabaret lounge. There is an Olympic size swimming pool heated year-round, an outdoor spa, five tennis courts, shuffleboard, table tennis and a state-of the art full service Health Club with massages available, basket ball, volleyball, steam room, saunas, tennis, aerobics, lighted jogging path, whirlpool and fitness lectures, all for the active lifestyle. The Flamingo offers banquet facilities and a board room, as well as the ballroom, complete with chandeliers.

Facilities include names as the Empire, Flamingo, Garden, Ranch, Redwood, Walnut, Loft, Patio, Terrace and Alexander Rooms. There are 170 spacious accommodations as two-room Spa Suites, two-room Sofa Bed Suites, Family Rooms, Executive Rooms, Country Kings and



Double-Doubles. There is a business port transmission capability from each guest room as well. Guest services include Massage Therapy, a travel agency, nail care and hair salon on the premises. One of the newer additions to the Flamingo includes The Courtyard -- a fabulous sanctuary for the weary business traveler, which boasts ..."a hotel within a hotel..." The Courtyard offers an abundance of serene gardens and rooms are equipped with data ports, refrigerators, speaker phones, spacious work areas and king beds. More than \$100,000 went into the refurbishing the kitchen area and special attention has been given to the cuisine under the direction of the Flamingo's distinguished chefs. German, Chinese, Italian and American cuisine are offered to diners with his particular specialty in French cuisine. The wine list includes virtually every major winery in that part of California, with special effort made to buy locally.

Close by, visitors may enjoy more than 100 specialty shops within walking distance of the Flamingo, there are 125 Sonoma County wineries to enjoy and tour, 15 golf courses, Pacific Coast beaches and redwood groves, Russian River canoe trips are offered, along with horseback riding and hot air ballooning. Sonoma County has something for everyone to enjoy for a memorable vacation/business trip.

The Flamingo Resort Hotel and Fitness Center is one hour north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. To get there drive north on Highway 101, exit on Highway 12 toward Sonoma, turn left onto Farmers Lane and continue straight to the Flamingo. It's on the Internet at [Http://www.flamingoresort.com](http://www.flamingoresort.com) ; email - Info@flamingoresort.com ; fax 707/528-1404; or, call 800-848-8300.

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Anne Burch, a resident of Florida, has been writing since about 1990, beginning with articles about activities for retirement homes for her local newspaper. The winner of several writing awards, she expanded to composing articles for various organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, an aids task force, and civic groups, and recently began writing about travel.

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