WHO’S WHO IN SILVER LAKE

Our Mission at the Silver Lake News is to connect the community much like a Community Newspaper. Our ‘Who’s Who in Silver Lake’ column honors the many individuals who have made a difference through their unselfish service to the community. If you have a Special Person you’d like to honor by nominating them for our ‘Who’s Who in Silver Lake’ column, be sure and give me a call! Michael J. Locke, Editor (323) 644-3338 or Email me

Meet Tom’s O’Grady: Founder of Farm Feliz

Tom’s grew on a farm in Galway, Ireland. He started life his adult life as a carpenter; going to school at night, he managed he managed to obtain the necessary grades to be accepted into Limerick University, where he studied industrial engineering. He worked his way through college, supporting himself as a musician.

After immigrating to the United States in 1990, he spent nine years in Hoboken, New Jersey where he and his wife Justine rehabilitated old brick and brownstone buildings. Tom currently lives in Los Feliz with his wife and their four children. He designed and built (with his own hands) the family home; a green, (solar electricity, solar powered water heating, grey water, and rainwater retention) white (read: Gone with the Wind) house. In 2008, he founded Farm Feliz, www.farmfeliz.org bringing together like-minded volunteers dedicated to the principal that problems are best fixed locally and incrementally rather than through grand, top down schemes. O’Grady points to the words of Mother Teresa as his modus operandi, If each of us would only sweep our own doorstep, the whole world would be clean.

The group that Tomas founded, Farm Feliz is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization encouraging gardeners and residents to trade in their gas blowers for a rake and broom. In partnership with Green Trees LA, the group has planted over 300 trees in the Los Feliz area alone. An offshoot of the group, Farm King runs a small garden at Thomas Starr King Middle School where students participate in garden projects on a weekly basis. In December 2009, he organized the first East Side Eco-Tour, a free tour of ten forward-thinking green homes attended by almost 400 people. A second tour in 2010 was recently completed. He has also worked with the Big Sunday Organization and the Friends of Los Angeles River to eliminate bottled water at their annual clean up events. He introduced recycling to Franklin Elementary and TS King Middle, as well as the Silver Lake Recreation Center and, most recently, the Griffith Park Adult Community Center.

Tomas, working with Dr. Kristen Murphy of King Middle School and others, was recently successful in establishing a new magnet school for environmental studies, to open at King in the fall of 2011. O’Grady says, This is a shoestring magnet. It is being formed at very little cost to the taxpayer. Confident that the community would come through with the estimated $30,000 start-up costs, he borrowed on his home equity line and personally guaranteed the initial funding. He founded and is currently the President of Friends of King, an organization committed to improving the education and environment at this school. He is the former President of the Silver Lake Neighborhood Nursery
Tomás O’Grady currently serves on the board of the Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council, where he is the chair of the Green Committee. He received an outstanding community volunteer award from the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA) in June 2010. Here is what some of his colleagues have to say about him:

"Tomas O’Grady has ignited more enthusiasm with the teachers, parents, and students at T.S. King Middle School than I have seen in my ten year history as a teacher in the community. His passion is contagious, and his commitment is unparalleled. I am glad he is on our team!" -David Egeler, Special Education Teacher, Thomas Starr King Middle School

Two years ago, regarding Tomas O’Grady, I said that I had never met anyone so dedicated to public service. In light of his efforts since that time at our public schools and throughout our community, I still have not met anyone so dedicated to public service. Steve Lopez, Columnist.

Look for Tom’s in the neighborhood around Los Feliz and Silver Lake. If you spot a silver-haired Irishman with a faint brogue, chances are he’ll be helping out on a public education project or planting a tree.

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**Meet David Wheatley: Music Man with a Passion for Social Justice**

Music has always played a prominent part in the life of David Wheatley. From an early age, musical tradition and power of the pipe organ captured the attention of the young musician-to-be, as many of Bach’s most important works were written for the organ. Growing up in the Anglican Church with its ceremonial liturgy, the pipe organ played a prominent role in the worship music. His passion for music assured his eventual success. David attended the University of Toronto and the Royal Conservatory of Music. He also studied under the late Canadian composer and author Gordon Delamont.

After graduating from the University of North Texas, he attended the University of Southern California, where he earned a Master’s Degree in Composition. At USC, he started the prestigious Scoring for Motion Pictures Program, of which he also served as Director.

After living briefly in Redondo Beach and Encino, David realized he needed a home closer to USC, and found Silver Lake to be an independent-minded artist community closer to school. He found Silver Lake to be the ideal place to put down roots, David explains, I first lived on Elevado Street near Sunset Blvd. I really liked the hills and the friendliness of the community, and I have been here ever since. He currently lives with his wife in the Ivanhoe area. Their son attended Los Angeles Family School and Ivanhoe Elementary, and is now a freshman at USC.

I’m a big fan of local Silver Lake establishments, David says. Some of my favorite spots are Hard Times Pizza, the Coffee Table, Astro Family Restaurant and Rafik Unocal. I often debate whether to go to Trader Joe’s or Gelson’s on both, and I try to park in the appropriate lot, whenever possible. I have the same issue with Burrito King and Pinkberry.

David’s passion for social justice has him involved in a myriad of interests. Presently, he is Chairperson of the Pasadena Tobacco Prevention Coalition. The group works to reduce access of tobacco products to minors. He has served on the board of Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace, and has chaired the organization’s Congregational Outreach Committee.

David has toured with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra throughout the United States, performed the Bach Mass in B Minor. He performed the Vivaldi Gloria with conductor Josh Elson (First Christian Church of North Hollywood). He is presently composing Star of Wonder, with author and lyricist Deanne Davis, a new Christmas musical to be debuted in December 2009.

David may be heard in a series of concerts continuing at the First Christian Church of North Hollywood on June 7, 2009.

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**Meet Filmmakers Rob Williams & Rodney Johnson: Bringing the Silver Screen to Silver Lake**

-by Michael Locke, Silver Lake Correspondent