

Hall of Fame ceremony lauds state achievers in many fields

Exhibit now top draw at California Museum

By [Timm Herdt](#) ([Contact](#))
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2008: Dave Brubeck, Jane Fonda, Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel, Robert Graham, Quincy Jones, Dorothea Lange, Jack LaLanne, Julia Morgan, Jack Nicholson, Linus Pauling, Leland Stanford, Alice Waters.

2007: Ansel Adams, Milton Berle, Steve Jobs, Willie Mays, Robert Mondavi, Rita Moreno, Jackie Robinson, Jonas Salk, John Steinbeck, Elizabeth Taylor, Earl Warren, John Wayne, Tiger Woods.

2006: Cesar Chavez, Walt Disney, Amelia Earhart, Clint Eastwood, Frank Gehry, the Hearst family, David D. Ho, Billie Jean King, John Muir, the Packard family, Ronald Reagan, Sally Ride, Alice Walker.

SACRAMENTO — When Tiger Woods took the stage last year to be ceremonially inducted into the California Hall of Fame, on his face was a look of what one might call celebrity oblige, that slightly bored but good-humored visage that one might see on honorees at the ESPY Awards.

As the night progressed, however, it seemed to hit home that these were not mere sports celebrities in his company on this night.

Woods' look evolved, revealing awe, then humility, then pride as the stories of his fellow inductees were told: the story, for instance, of how Jonas Salk stopped the scourge of polio, or how Jackie Robinson changed not just baseball but also civil rights in America, or how John Steinbeck revealed the resilience of the human spirit amid the backbreaking poverty of the Great Depression.

A year later, during the 2008 induction ceremony Monday at the California Museum in the state's capital, Jack Nicholson would put into words the feelings that Woods' persona had revealed.

After jazz great Dave Brubeck had strayed from his script in reading the tribute to Nicholson, to tell the story of a long-ago personal encounter with the then-young actor at a hotel bar, Nicholson walked to the microphone shaking his head.

With a nod to the son of the late Nobel Prize-winning chemist — and fellow inductee — Linus Pauling, Nicholson mused: "Everybody else discovers molecules. I'm a drunk in a bar."

Entry into the California Hall of Fame can humble even an actor who has been nominated for an Oscar at least once in every decade since the 1970s.

To be sure, there are other actors in the hall — great ones, including Clint Eastwood and Elizabeth Taylor. There also are giants from nearly every other human endeavor: science (Salk and Pauling), literature (Steinbeck, Alice Walker), photography (Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange), sports (Billie Jean King, Willie Mays), politics (Ronald Reagan, Earl Warren) and architecture (Frank Gehry, Julia

Morgan). And there is a high-tech visionary (Steve Jobs), a labor organizer (Cesar Chavez) and a one-of-a-kind entrepreneur (Walt Disney).

The only qualifications for entry: to have conceived and achieved a California dream, and to have accomplished it in California.

"As diverse as the inductees are, they each have two things in common," said California historian Kevin Starr. "First of all, each of them has developed his or her talents to maximum effect. Second, for each of them, California — as place, as stimulus to creativity — enabled them to make a major contribution to the larger American society."

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A major attraction

Conceived by first lady Maria Shriver in 2006, the Hall of Fame has become the No. 1 attraction at the California Museum, located a block from the Capitol in downtown Sacramento.

The induction ceremony — complete with an Oscar-style, red-carpet walk of inductees as autograph seekers snap photos — has become a highlight of the social year in the celebrity-starved state capital.

The Hall of Fame exhibit, expanded this year to cover 3,000 square feet and relocated to the first floor, features displays honoring the current year's class of inductees. Each year's exhibit runs through Oct. 31, when it is closed to begin preparing a new exhibit to honor the next year's class.

Shriver sees the Hall of Fame as a shrine to California's spirit of discovery, its reputation as a place where people are limited only by their vision.

"When you come here, you can dream, you can dare, you can be accepted," she said at this week's induction ceremony.

"One of the goals of the Hall of Fame is to inspire young people," Shriver said.

"None of the people here went into what they did with the goal of becoming famous," she said. "They followed their passion and they did it well. They had to work, and they had to dream themselves."

The museum is visited each year by tens of thousands of schoolchildren, often as a side trip as part of a tour of the Capitol.

With the popularity of the Hall of Fame exhibit, Shriver said, the museum has become "a landmark destination."

Among the highlights of the exhibition is a Dr. Seuss reading room, part of the display honoring Theodor Geisel, who created the Cat in the Hat and most of his other fanciful characters from his study in La Jolla.

The brightly colored reading room features a bench and copies of such classics as "The Lorax" and "Oh, the Places You'll Go," which visitors are welcome to take from the shelves, sit down and read.

The walls are adorned with what Geisel called his "unorthodox taxidermies" — the mounted heads of such creatures as the Mulberry Street Unicorn and a Sawfish, an aquatic creature with a saw blade for a nose.

Golden moments

For a limited time — through February — the famed Golden Spike that railroad baron Leland Stanford used in 1869 to commemorate the completion of the transcontinental railroad is included in the display honoring Stanford.

Other shiny gold objects abound: Brubeck's gold album for "Time Out"; Jane Fonda's Oscars for "Klute" and "Coming Home"; Nicholson's Oscars for "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Terms of Endearment" and "As Good as it Gets"; and family replicas of Pauling's two Nobel Prizes.

For fans of other metals, there are three bronze sculptures by inductee Robert Graham and Quincy Jones' platinum album for "Thriller."

Perhaps the most intriguing metal object is a set of handcuffs — those worn by fitness legend Jack LaLanne when, to celebrate his 70th birthday, he swam in shackles from Alcatraz Island to San Francisco.

The growing prominence of the Hall of Fame exhibit comes at a time when some are concerned about its fate beyond 2010 — after Shriver leaves Sacramento when the term of her husband, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, ends.

Shriver has used the persuasive power of her own celebrity to help make her idea blossom. She insists, for instance, that living inductees agree to personally attend the induction ceremonies. Those who can't are asked to consider accepting induction in a later year. The presence at their inductions of those who do accept has given the museum a glamour that may be difficult to sustain.

Claudia French, the museum's executive director, believes the hall will survive on its own momentum.

"We think that will be part of the first lady's legacy, to have it last long past her," she said.