

Munchkins Have a Local Fan to Thank

**Theater Owner Helps
Secure a Star on
Hollywood's World
Famous Walk of Fame
for 'Oz' actors** by Joseph Ruzich



Hollywood Blvd Cinema Owner Ted Bulthaup snuggles up to one of the seven surviving Munchkins, Margaret Pellegrini

On the famous Hollywood Walk of Fame, Godzilla has a star, as do Soupy Sales, Vanna White and the Rugrats. Heck, even Ryan Seacrest has one.

But before now you couldn't find a star representing an integral group of actors who appeared in "The Wizard of Oz."

"I couldn't understand why the Munchkins didn't have one," said Ted Bulthaup, whose Woodridge movie house holds annual screenings of the 1939 American classic.

Bulthaup -- who became friends with the seven surviving Munchkins after hiring them several years ago to host his annual event -- decided to spearhead the nomination process. He paid a nomination fee of \$25,000 to get the process going.

After getting turned down initially in 2005, Bulthaup decided to give it a second try this last April. Only this time, he reached out to some of his heavy hitting friends, calling on Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Hugh Hefner, Ted Turner, Roger Ebert and major Hollywood film companies such as Sony, Warner Bros, Universal, Disney, Paramount and MGM.

"I just started calling friends to make a direct appeal, or other friends who had contacts with other people that made sense," Bulthaup said. "We even got an endorsement letter from the State of Kansas" and the Producers of the hit Broadway Play, "Wicked!"

Soon, calls and letters of support began to come in.

'The Wizard of Oz' was one of the greatest contributions to the golden age of Hollywood and fantasy," Spielberg wrote, while Lucas wrote in his letter, "With their joyous send-off for Dorothy as she began her journey down the yellow brick road, the Munchkins secured their place in Hollywood history and in the hearts of movie fans everywhere."

Johnny Grant, chairman of the Walk of Fame, announced on June 20 that the Munchkins had been selected as Walk of Fame recipients for 2007. The date for ceremony for the surviving actors will be announced soon. The Munchkins' star will represent the more than 120 actors who appeared in the film.



Mickey Carroll and several of the surviving Munchkins -- ranging in age from 86 to 92 -- said they plan to attend the installation ceremony. "It's very exciting," said Carroll, of St. Louis. The Munchkins "are a great group of people and they deserve to be remembered."

Bulthaupt, owner of the Hollywood Boulevard Cinema in Woodridge, also considers the movie a classic that crosses all language and cultural barriers.

The Walk of Fame honors individuals in the entertainment industry who have made significant contributions to radio, television, motion pictures, live performance or recordings. Honorees are voted on every June, with an average of 20 stars selected a year.



Carroll, who was in his teens during the filming of the "Wizard of Oz," said he knew Judy Garland and that the two of them performed on the same stage during Vaudeville's heyday, including here in Chicago, where she was the youngest of the Gumm Sisters .

He said he and Garland also sang together at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair.

I only earned \$50 a week from the movie. I earned more than that in one day if I did a show at a club." He said his greatest memory of the movie is during a rehearsal when Garland sang the film's signature song, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow".

"She was the most beautiful girl," Carroll said. "I can't forget when she was practicing the song. All the Munchkins were sitting on the floor. All of a sudden she started to sing; we were amazed by her voice. She was like an angel."

Los Angeles Times

We Wish to Welcome You to the Walk of Fame

by Bob Pool, Times Staff Writer



They're little more than waist high to some people. But on Tuesday no one was standing taller in Hollywood than the Munchkins.

The seven surviving Munchkins from the 1939 movie classic "The Wizard of Oz" received their star on Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame.

Hundreds of fans craned their necks to see Karl Slover, Clarence Swenson, Jerry Maren, Meinhardt Raabe, Ruth Duccini, Margaret Pellegrini and Mickey Carroll as they pulled up in

front of Grauman's Chinese Theater riding in a white carriage pulled by a horse of a different color (died purple) and then made their way down a carpet printed with a yellow brick road.

They are the last of the 124 diminutive inhabitants of fictional Munchkinland in the merry old land of Oz, and who appeared with Judy Garland in the movie. They were mostly midgets with a few children thrown in—although to movie buffs, only the little people truly count as Munchkins.

See Munchkins, Page A16

A STAR FOR THE MUNCHKINS: Margaret Pellegrini came in costume to the Hollywood Walk of Fame ceremony in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater that honored the seven surviving Munchkins from the "The Wizard of Oz". Several of these Munchkins had also attended the 1939 premier of the film in this very same theater.

Munchkins, Continued from Page 1

For Munchkins, A Star Over the Rainbow

The star ceremony was a family reunion for the Munchkins, who scattered across the continent after filming - some staying in Hollywood as actors, others eventually moving to different parts of the country.

Like any family reunion some memories fade, but all agreed that "The Wizard of Oz" was a turning point in their lives - giving some the self-confidence to follow their dreams, and in the case of some German born actors a chance to flea the Nazis and come to America.

"I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't been in the Wizard of Oz," said Clarence Swenson, who played a Munchkin Soldier



CHECK IT OUT: Margaret Pellegrini points to their new star in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre. Hundreds of Wizard of Oz fans attended the ceremony. An Illinois theater owner enlisted the help of movie industry leaders to get a star for the Munchkins.



Karl Slover, 89, now lives in Georgia. He remembers the film work as grueling and for which Munchkins earned \$60 a week. (Compared to the \$125 per week paid Toto, Dorothy's dog, noted Hollywood Mayor Johnny Grant).

“At the time I didn’t enjoy it much. I had four parts and each time I had to change clothes very fast. But years later I saw the movie and really enjoyed it.

The mini-reunions the Munchkins have when they periodically meet with fans to sign autographs and sign color still photos are “like a family get together,” he said. “We’re really good friends and really enjoy one another.”

Karl recalled that many of the Munchkins were from all over Europe,

PROUD MUNCHKINS; The seven remaining Munchkins stand tall with their commemorative plaques, flanking Hollywood Mayor Johnny Grant taking center stage for the presentations. Ted Bulthaupt, the man behind the curtain and the wheelchair carrying Munchkin Clarence Swenson is the one that made it all happen.

and now lives in Texas. “It was a great teacher.”

For decades after the movie premier, the Munchkins had little contact as a group. It wasn’t until the last 20 years that the survivors “began gathering at special events honoring the movie. Most are well into their 80’s.

“We didn’t start getting together again until about 1985. That’s when they started having events all over the country and inviting us,” says Pellegrini, an 84- year-old Glendale, Arizona resident. In the movie she played a Sleepy Head in the giant birds next and the flower pot hated chorus girl.

She shrugged off rumors of hard partying by the Munchkins when they stayed three-to-a-bed at the Culver Hotel in Culver City, near what was then the MGM studio lot.

“I was only 15-years-old when the movie was filmed. There were a few of them that liked to drink, but it was not at all what people now think it was. A lot of those stories are just made up.

said Pellegrini, whose show business career ended four years later in the early 1940’s when she got married and then had four children.

Jerry Maren lives in the Hollywood Hills in a house overlooking Universal Studios that was custom built for he and his wife’s small stature. Maren will be 88 in January and was the center member of the Lollipop Guild that handed off the huge all-week-sucker to Dorothy. He went on to have roles in over a hundred films such as Professor Atom in the Marx Brothers At the Circus, Tarzan films and Planet of the Apes where he wore monkey suits, and his most recent was The Green Mile. He was in just as many TV shows, including Lucy, Star Trek, Twilight Zone, Odd Couple and even Seinfeld. He and his diminutive wife were stand-ins and stunt doubles as kids in many TV shows including the children in Little House on the Prairie”. He was even the original Mayor McCheese in the McDonald’s commercials and little Buster Brown in the famous shoe commercials.



“It’s taken a long time. We have a lot of fans. It really makes you understand just how much this picture means to people”

Jerry Maren

above, who played the center Lollipop Kid in Munchkin land.

including Germany, “They had performed throughout the continent in a midget circus booked by showman Leo Singer who was approached by MGM and arranged to bring them to the United States for the filming.” “The Wizard of Oz”, allowed the actors to escape as the Nazi’s began to extend their reach across Europe in the 1930’s. If they ever got their hands on us, we would have been killed for being freaks.

Leo Singer handled the Munchkins and was paid by MGM \$100 per week for each, keeping \$50 for himself and paying his little people the other \$50. His Munchkin Troupe was called “The Singer Midgets” and that is how they are billed at the end of the film. Most people believe it was the Singer Midgets because we all sang, but we were named after Leo.

Several of the Munchkins wore reproduction costumes for the ceremony. Meinhardt Raabe, who lives in Florida, portrayed the Coroner and delighted the crowds by reciting his most memorable line, “As coroner I must aver, I thoroughly examined her, and she’s not only merely dead, she’s really most sincerely dead.” Meinhardt was one of several “Little Chef Oscar” who drove the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile around the country. He had also played Buster Brown of the famous shoe company. During World War II he was smallest pilot in the Army Air Corps and flew submarine patrols along the East coast.

Judy Garland’s son, Joey Luft, spoke to the crowd about his Mothers great film and told the adoring fans that she would be so proud of this day and was looking down on them all, from her rainbow in heaven.

After the star ceremony and interviews with the worldwide press, the horse-drawn carriage returned and took the seven little actors up the street



CARRIAGE AWAY: The seven remaining Munchkins arrive in a white carriage drawn by the horse of a different color you’ve heard tell about. In this case it was purple and was preceded by the Hollywood High School Marching Band playing. “We’re Off to See the Wizard, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz.”

to the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel for an 800 seat luncheon in their honor in the Blossom Room, site of the very first Academy Award Ceremony.

The impetus for this celebration came not from Hollywood but from Ted Bulthaupt, the owner of Hollywood Blvd Cinema in Woodridge, Illinois.

Bulthaupt eventually enlisted the help of Hollywood heavy weights with George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Ted Turner and Hugh Hefner among them, along with the studio bosses from MGM, Warner Bros, Paramount, Sony Pictures, Disney, Universal, and the Weinstein Companies as well as some of Teds’ actor friends Tippi Hedren, Mickey Rooney, and Jane Russell.

The recognition is long overdue, says fan Phylliss Turner who drove all the way from Winslow, Arizona for the event.

“I grew up every year watching them. We had a ritual. Every year we’d make root beer floats and sit down and watch “The Wizard of Oz” as a family, said Turner, 43.

Standing next to her was Dorothy Walker, 56, of Salinas, California.

“With my name, I’ve been a fan of the movie all my life. The Munchkins are part of a film history and those people are the last of a breed.”

Rather than engrave all seven of the names, the star on the Walk of Fame is engraved in honor of “The Munchkins.” Ruth Duccini, who played a Munchkin villager and now lives outside Phoenix thanked officials for remembering, “all 124 Munchkins” rather than just focusing on the remaining individuals.

On a big day for Munchkins there was no disagreement about that sentiment..



Hollywood Celebrates It's Biggest Little Stars

WORLDWIDE MUNCHKIN EVENT COVERAGE

There was saturation US and International press coverage of the Munchkin's Walk of Fame ceremony including on CNN, BBC, NBC, ABC, CBS, WGN, Fox and MSNBC networks and all the entertainment news shows such as Entertainment Tonight, Access Hollywood, The Insider, Show Biz Tonight, etc. Warner Bros., who now owns "The Wizard of Oz", tracked what they called an "unprecedented" 575 television shows picked up the story across the United States and Canada. Aside from the standard network coverage, there were segments on "Good Morning America", "The Today Show", "CBS This Morning", "CBS Sunday Morning", "Hardball with Chris Matthews" and much more.

As part of the coverage on the "Today Show", anchors Matt Lauer, Al Roker & Meredith Vieira actually sang a chorus of "We Represent the Lollipop Guild". "Fox & Friends" started their extended nationwide coverage in black & white, transitioning to color as in the film's initial Munchkin sequence and had a one on one in studio interview with the leader of the Lollipop Guild that ended with a box of Dunkin' Munchkins!

BBC radio, CBS, Reuters, and National Public Radio networks ran stories that broadcast on their worldwide affiliates as well as countless other radio stories.

The event was also on the MSN search engine home page under "Breaking Entertainment News" and as one of the little cartoons on Google search page; and appeared in literally millions of internet postings, websites and blogs the world over.

There were countless national and international print articles including USA Today, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, People and the "Hot List" of Entertainment Weekly. This was the first star ceremony to ever be covered on the front page of the LA Times. Coverage started on page 2 of the New York Times and page 4 of the Chicago Tribune. The ceremony had international coverage over the news wire services like AP, UPI and Reuters with print stories from Beijing to Thailand, India, Australia, Taiwan, Kuwait, Israel, Thailand, Japan, China and throughout Europe with especially heavy coverage in England. The newspaper coverage in Istanbul, written in Arabic script, does not have certain words in that language and so inserts English for "Munchkins" and "Cinesman Sahib Ted Bulthaup". The magnitude of worldwide interest testifies to the heartfelt prominence of this film and the appeal of all its characters to the entire world.

Click on the "Munchkins" tab of this site for more,

including letters of support from Spielberg, Lucas, Ebert and others, and the ten minute "Special Feature" on how the Munchkins got there Star that was produced for the 70th Anniversary Edition of "The Wizard of Oz".

