

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXCELLENT CENTER FOR ART AND CULTURE IN GROVER BEACH

EXCELLENT CENTER
FOR ART AND CULTURE



Shirt design for Excellent Center and A Hole in the Sky by John London

The Excellent Center for Art and Culture in Grover Beach maintains a not-for-profit philosophy, with a primary goal of exposing the central coast to humanity’s diversity. Other aims are to strengthen cultural ties, highlight social justice concerns, and appreciating diversity through art.

The Excellent Center is sponsored by Charley Goodman and his next door gift shop, *A Hole in the Sky*:



The idea of having a gift shop with the name “A Hole in the Sky” came about while Charley Goodman was working for Boo Boo’s Records in Grover Beach. During foggy days he was able to mentally create a hole in the sky to let the sun shine in, and decided to use that name for his first A Hole in the Sky store.

A market had been created for marijuana paraphernalia in South San Luis Obispo County in 1978 when (due to political pressures and a movement throughout California to separate record buyers from exposure to “paraphernalia) BooBoo’s stopped carrying marijuana paraphernalia at their store in Grover Beach. Charley already knew the business very well by this time and knew a lawyer who knew the laws surrounding the First Amendment better than the city did, so he decided to go into business for himself.

In August, 1981 the first A Hole In The Sky store opened in a small building at 835 Grand Avenue in Grover Beach. With only \$500 cash and \$500 credit there wasn’t enough money for a phone, so a pay phone was installed. Business cards stated that Tobacco, Herb & Snuff Accessories, Coffees-Ginseng, Scales, Kama Sutra, Cards and Incense, Sunglasses and Jewelry were available. They also sold paraphernalia, reggae T-shirts, and other psychedelic apparel.

Because of having very limited capital to work with, there was a lot of empty space in the shop. Charley decided there was enough room to have some kind of gallery in his store where people could display their art (this was long before the Facebook phenomena where artists could easily display their work). The “Mail Art” movement was well underway at that time, so what was the first Mail Art Exhibit in San Luis Obispo County came into being at A Hole at the Sky in Grover Beach.

One of the criteria for Mail Art was that everything that came in the mail had to be shown in the exhibit. Mail Art starting coming in and easels were expensive, so they used old wooden doors that were propped up around the outside of the building for displays. There were interesting ways the mail got to its destination, and some was even hitch-hiked to A Hole in the Sky from different places around the world. Much of the first exhibit was from **Karl Kempton’s** series of Visual Poetry that had been featured in his magazine devoted to visual poetry, *KALDRON*. During this time Charley became interested in Cavellini.

September 12, 1981. *SANTA MARIA TIMES*. An article stating that the present city ordinance didn’t prohibit paraphernalia sales in Grover Beach was written by Stephanie Finucane (Five-Cities Bureau).

City Manager Arnold Dowdy stated there was nothing city officials could do about Charley's business under the existing city code. A local ordinance passed the previous year (Sec. 3220 of the Grover City Municipal Code) allowed drug paraphernalia to be sold, but it prohibited minors under the age of 18 from entering shops where those items were displayed.

October 6, 1981. An article in the *San Luis Obispo Tribune* stated that those South County residents wanting to get rid of a controversial gift shop in Grover (City) would have to appeal to State Legislators, not the City Council. Charley Goodman (who had been announcing a Rhythm, Rock & Reggae music show for KCBX at that time) had painted A Hole In The Sky a bright sky blue with clouds made with spray paint cans making layers of white, gray and silver. Almost as an aside, it was noted that the store sat just a few feet away from the Chamber of Commerce building.

(What was often left unsaid was the fact that there was a great deal of support for A Hole In the Sky, including the services of lawyer Ilan Funke-Bilu who provided free legal support during this time.)

October 6, 1981 (unknown newspaper). The Grover Beach City Council received a petition signed by about 400 people stating they did not want A Hole In The Sky to remain selling paraphernalia or pornographic comic books. In rebuttal, Charley stated he had about 400 signatures from people who didn't approve of religious organizations trying to put people out of business. This included a church leader and a few others who were involved in a South County group called "Up with Families" that was instrumental in stopping the showing of X-rated films in a Pismo Beach theater three years earlier.

(For many years the city had conveniently used the zone around A Hole in the Sky to keep out other businesses such as adult porn shops, citing existing limitations because of schools, churches, and playgrounds, etc.)

March 17, 1982. *Times Press Recorder.* Grover City Attorney Lyon was directed to draft an ordinance similar to the Village of Hoffman Estates which the Supreme Court upheld unanimously on March 3. Under that ordinance, drug paraphernalia could not be banned, but could only be sold by businesses which obtain a special city license and pay an extra \$150 fee. The ordinance also required the seller to keep a RECORD of all paraphernalia sold, including the name and address of the person who bought the items. The ordinance stated that any police officer could inspect the list during regular business hours for up to two years after the sale. Violations could be punishable by fines of not less than \$10 or more than \$500 for each offense during the same calendar year, according to the ordinance which Hoffman Estates passed in February, 1978 (which was later rescinded).

April 7, 1982. Jerry Bunin, *Times Press Recorder:* Roger Lyon, the city attorney stated Grover City should not change its ordinance until the courts ruled on other similar ordinances or the state legislature amended the Uniformed Controlled Substances Act to allow for tighter local regulation.

April 28, 1982. Grover Beach passed an ordinance controlling adult-oriented businesses in the city. With the ordinance clearly targeted at him, Charley spoke to the council explaining that he should not be included with businesses that feature pornography because he didn't fall into that category. In clear reference to a nearby store that was owned by the head of the Chamber of Commerce that sold beer, wine, guns, magazines and paraphernalia, Charley stated, "We do far more to keep minors away from adult-oriented things than, say any one of the three liquor stores in this city."



The second “A Hole In The Sky” store opened in 1984. The Excellent Center opened in 1992.

It was during this time that **Karl and Ruth Kempton** introduced Charley to **Elwood Decker**, a Dunite who had lived in the dunes of Oceano from 1931 to 1946. Elwood had recently moved back into the area and was living with his wife, Ann, on Fair Oaks in Arroyo Grande. Elwood later moved into one of the apartments owned by **Gudrun Grell** in Oceano, only a few blocks from Charley’s home.

Gudrun Grell had lived through the German occupation of Denmark while attending the University of Copenhagen and had been engaged as an actress at the Royal Theatre. After her husband John had brought her to America they purchased the original estate of **Chester Alan “Gavin” Arthur III** in 1950. Gavin was the grandson of U.S. President Chester Alan Arthur and was founder of the Dunite colony of Moy Mell in the Oceano Dunes. The Arthur estate in eastern Oceano then became an organic farm operated by the Grells, and later a portion of the estate became the Grell Co-Housing Project. Gudrun knew Elwood had been friends with Gavin when they lived in the dunes and was happy to provide a place for him to live. Once Elwood had moved into Gudrun’s apartment on the estate he became fast friends with Charley (who had moved to Grell Lane in March, 1976) and they often visited with each other at the health food bar on Grand Avenue.

In March of 1985 **Karl and Ruth Kempton** drove Elwood to a Reggae concert in San Luis Obispo that had been promoted by KCBX and Ken Volk’s Cultural Preservation League. The concert featured *Wailing Souls*, a seminal reggae group from Jamaica (that later won a Grammy Award). Elwood’s life was art and he saw art in everything including music and dance. Fond of Haiku poetry, Elwood often incorporated the same austere simplicity in his art in portraying feeling and emotion with a minimum of lines. He used that technique very successfully in making a number of “stick figure” design patterns that depicted the dancers at the reggae concert, including Charley as one of the dancers:



Reggae Concert design by Elwood Decker, with a note to Charley.

During this time Charley also met **Leo Kotarski** in Oceano and Leo became one of Charley's early entries to the spirituality of the area. Charley hung out at Mim's Antiques, ran by Leo's first wife Miriam. The office portion of the business was in a trailer that served as the office and their home. After Miriam died on the property, Leo had the trailer moved so his bed was positioned directly over the spot where Miriam had left the earth so he could be close to her while he was sleeping.

Charley loved rummaging through Leo's vast collection of books on mysticism in the warehouse in the back portion of the property. During this time he became exposed to **Cyril Scott, Theosophy** and **Halcyon**. He also became acquainted with and very influenced by Scott's three books on Theosophy, *The Initiate* (a series of three books) and *The Secret Influence of Music throughout the ages*. This became the center of his new understanding of the arts, music and justice.

January 8, 1992. Friends of Elwood Decker were shocked and dismayed to learn he had been instantly killed after being struck by a freight train while walking along the tracks just east of Oceano. How this happened remains a mystery because he was definitely not suicidal and not hard of hearing.

A month later a group of his close friends gathered at Ruth and Karl Kempton's home to commemorate Elwood's life. Among the small gathering were Karl and Ruth Kempton, Charley and Verona re-Bow, Gudrun Grell, and a few others. A ceremony was held where each person in the group poured sand from very small wax paper cups (similar to those used for pill dispensing). The cups had been used by Elwood for mixing small amounts of acrylic paints for his art work which resulted in each cup having a different color:



During the gathering Verona stated that Elwood was one of those people who had truly dedicated his life to art.

Charley had a paranormal experience during this time while riding his bicycle along an unpaved road through the fields on south 22nd street in Oceano. He was following a routine he had created years earlier where he would relax before doing his regular Sunday night KCBX reggae show in San Luis Obispo. It was a cloudy day and his mind was occupied with thoughts about Elwood. Shortly after crossing the railroad tracks he heard something and looked back over his shoulder towards the east, towards the area less than half a mile away where Elwood's spirit had left his body. He saw that a large white egret had struck one of the power lines. It was instantly electrocuted and plummeted into the ground.

Charley was curious and walked across the field to see that the egret had stiffened before it fell and that its legs had somehow jammed straight into the ground like stakes. In the gloomy light of that day in the field he saw that the bird was very rigid and still bleeding, and the blood was changing colors before his eyes in different tints of red, blue, and purple. Charley left the field on his bicycle and rode to Ruth and Karl Kempton's house to share with them the strange experience he just had.

After Charley left Ruth and Karl's he started looking closely at a photo of a painting that had been given to him by Verona re-Bow, a Theosophist and professional artist from Munich, Germany. Verona was one of Charley's long time friends and they had both been friends of Elwood. The painting was of a bird that had been made into a Christmas Card. Something in the painting clicked. Suddenly there was a strong connection between phosphorescence of her painting, the changing colors of the blood of the

bird in the field, and the acrylic color of Elwood's paint in the little paper cup that he had saved from the ceremony at Ruth and Karl's. He knew that the painting was somehow connected to what had happened in the field that day, but he didn't know what that connection was.



(Years later, in the month following 9-11, a modified version of Verona's original painting of "Art and Healing" was on the cover of the October 11-18, 2001 issue of *NEW TIMES*.)

In time Charley began to sense some meaning in the colors of Verona's painting, the color of the egret's blood, and the acrylic paint in the little paper cup. These elements had combined to give him a feeling that the bird had possessed freedom but didn't know how to hold the sphere of this earth and the responsibility of its even further promises of freedom. While he was pondering the meaning of these feelings he had a powerful vision of a group of artists who had a desire to create a Cooperative for Everyone. It was then that he knew what this was about, and exactly what he would do...

It happened that the building next door to A Hole in the Sky was becoming available for rent. Charley discussed this with Verona and it was decided that she would help coordinate and structure what would become the Center for Art and Culture as a not-for-profit cultural center and art gallery. She would then contact other artists to assist her in this project which would later become the **EXCELLENT CENTER OF ART AND CULTURE**.

March 11, 1992. By early March, 1992 the building next door to A Hole In the Sky was ready and The Excellent Center had come into being. One of the first programs was an evening of Music, Dance, and Tales, with **MOONDANCE** by the **Conga Society**.

April 12, 1992. The first **Poetry Reading** at the Excellent Center featured **Joan Campbell, Kevin Patrick Sullivan, and Marguerite Costigan**. Marguerite is not only a poet but also a visual artist who worked as an illustrator while earning a degree in biology at Cal Poly. She had been reading her poetry live to Central Coast audiences for the past 10 years and taught with the California Poets in the Schools'

state-grant funded poet-in-residence program, leading high school students in writing, performing and publishing their own works. Joan had worked as a magazine journalist, writing stories and articles for publications as diverse as *Playgirl* and *The Mother Earth News*.

Kevin is co-founder of the San Luis Obispo Poetry Festival (with Karl Kempton) as well as Corners of the Mouth, a monthly reading series at Linnaea's Café in San Luis Obispo.

April 26, 1992 through May 9. **David Foster Evan's "Blue Ladder Show"** of acrylics on paper and canvas came into being with a demonstration on May 9th.

May 10, 1992. Poetry Reading- **Sylvia Reichman, Ed Martin, and Karl Kempton.** Karl lives in Oceano, California and is a noted authority on Visual Poetry with over a dozen books to his credit. He also created and edited *KALDRON*, a magazine devoted to Visual Poetry with world-wide circulation. He is currently involved in several projects devoted to cataloguing the history and current state of the world of Visual Poetry.

May 10- May 23, 1992. Exhibit of **Carlos Eyles** "In Pursuit of the Water Spirit." Black-and-white underwater photography. **Garry Billington** "World Travels" featuring color portraits of people and their cultural environments.

May 16, 1992. **Carlos Eyles** gave a slide presentation and signed copies of his newest edition.

May 24- June 6, 1992. **Everado Martinez-Inzunza** presented "**Mind Visions Beyond Reality**" featuring oils on canvas, inks and acrylics on black and white photographs.

July 26, 1992. A slide show and presentation on **CHUMASH ROCK ART** was given by **Norm Hammond.** Norm is especially interested in Chumash calendrics which include light and shadow effects that occur in their rock art paintings during Winter and Summer Solstices and Equinoxes.

August 2- September 1, 1992. A **VISUAL POETRY AND LANGUAGE ART EXHIBIT** was on display at the Excellent Center. This was the very first (or second) International Postal "Mail Art" Show display on the Central Coast. The show was organized by *KALDRON*, an international journal of visual poetry and language art journal that was edited and published by **Karl Kempton**>
<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/kaldron.htm>

August 8, 1992. One of the first programs at the new Excellent Center was **SACRED PLACES AND CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS** by **Greg Beck** and **Theresa Sage.** This program was a slide show of Mayan Art and Sacred Places in Mexico and Central America where they had been guides. They also discussed their ongoing love affair with the Carrisa Plains. Following Theresa Sage's slide show, **Karl Kempton** presented a slide show of visual poems and discussed how ancient astronomical observatories, sacred sites, and measuring systems had influenced his work.

September 13, 1992. Poetry by **Glenna Luschei** and **Audrey Johnson** followed by an Open Reading.

September 19- October 17, 1992. **CELEBRATING THE GODDESS** exhibit. Barbara Beausoleil was the organizer and curator of the exhibition with plans for a larger show for the following year, which would include international participation. The reception and opening included poetry readings, music and dance. On display were drawings, paintings, sculpture, furniture, fiber arts, jewelry, ceramics and graphics. The show was a celebration of the GODDESS and the rebalancing of female and male energy in

a way that is not competitive or destructive. The exhibit focused on the female side of the creator and her regenerative power. Participants included **Mary Alpaugh, Barbara Beausoleil, Selene Coen, Phyllis Cutburth, Audrey Johnson, Karl Kempton, Wendy Lee, Dianne Morris, Karen Neisany, Tanja Nicklisch, Susan O Connor, Phoebe Palmer, Buffy Plante, Rebecca Reibel, Sylvia Reichman, Lani Steele, Kevin Patrick Sullivan, Amanda Swamy, Tracy Taylor, and Steve Word.**

October 11, 1992. **Michael Hannon** read translations of Latin American and Iberian Peninsula Poets. Also featured was **Kambiz** from Iran on Flamenco Guitar. An Open Reading followed.

October 31 to November 19, 1992. **UNA DIA EN LA VIDA DE MUERTOS** featuring Chicano and Mexican poetry of **John García, David Rosales, Pedro Arroyo & Everardo Martinez** plus 2 authentic altars. **Karl Kempton's KALDRON WALL** featured an essay on death images in Mexico accompanied with examples of images from ancient texts by noted poet, publisher, essayist, and critic **Karl Young.**

November 8, 1992. **Karl Kempton** presented and discussed his latest book of visual poetry, **RUNE: A Survey.**

November 1-21, 1992. Exhibit of **Aaron Lloyd** paintings. This exhibit included Aaron's work in the use of oil, acrylic, and water color paintings. Aaron was also well known for his photography that had appeared in well known international surfing publications. He participated in group and one man shows in California and Hawaii. Lloyd had merged several elements in his use of wood, paint, antler, and arrowhead relics attached with copper to create a powerful presence merging the past and present.

December 4, 1992. A program featuring the POETRY of **Will Inman.**

December 13, 1992. Poetry by **Mitchell Smith** and **Marni Grant**, followed by an Open Reading.

January 31, 1993 to end of February. These exhibits began (and extended into BLACK HISTORY MONTH) with the artwork of **Keith Williams** and **Kabu MBII.** Keith Williams' most recent exhibit was "More 'Y' Hats" which had been displayed at Gallery Design DeLeon Afrocentricity, of Oakland and also at Homeland Multi-Cultural Art Center in Long Beach.

Kabu MBII is an original who is essentially a self-taught artist. The changes in the 20th Century and environment had their impact upon his life and art. The urban sprawl of Los Angeles, The Civil Rights movement, The Vietnam war, and his concern for the environment have all influenced his style.

Other exhibits in this showing were: A beautiful ceramic exhibit by Kabu's wife "Maika," who resides in Santa Maria, a visual poetry exhibit by **Bill Keith**, of Beacon, New York, whose work is taken from his book *Sphinx*, and various artists in the community who also had their work on easels throughout the gallery. A display of Black inventions from the collection of **Vesta McFadden** of Lompoc was also present.

February 6, 1993. The official beginning of **BLACK HISTORY MONTH** at the Center began (on Bob Marley's birthday) with a bang as **Cina and Amon Sherriff** with **James Balseiro** of "Family Affair" guided the audience through the second half of their "Rhythm Workshop."

February 7, 1993. A Lecture on **Black History and Eurocentrism** by **Locksley Geoghagen** from Jamaica. Locksley was the Associate Director of Student Life and Activities at Cal Poly and had studied African History, Egyptology and Consciousness for the past 25 years. Charley got to know his parents real well when they vacationed in Grover Beach.

February 12, 1993. Featured artists were the family of **Kabu MBII.** The audience met Kabu, Maika and son Zero Akil Bey. Lively discussions and higher thoughts were guaranteed for this exhibit.

Also, "History in the Making" **Merilene M. Murphy** presents "**Telepoetics.**" Internationally acclaimed poet/ Organizer Merilene M. Murphy conducted Poetry performances at the Excellent Center and at the Telepoetic Studio of Hollywood at the same time...via *The Videophone!* This was being done from Paris to New York, and New York to Los Angeles and other big cities, and now Grover Beach was also in the link!

February 14, 1993. An **African-American Poetry** reading with **James Balseiro, Jerry Burge, Chris Finley, Tony Fox, Locksley Geoghagen, Ari Tovel, Tami Whitney** and **Toni Wynn**. An Open Reading followed.

February 21, 1993. **African and Contemporary Performance Storytelling, Drumming and Dancing.** African storytelling was by "Family Affair," **Cina and Amon Sherriff** and **James Balseiro**. Their group was committed to the uplifting of humanity and to the survival of the African-American family by helping to increase an awareness of constructive principles and values, particularly among children. African drumming and history was by James Balseiro playing some African rhythms on the drums and discussing the history of African drumming, how it was outlawed in the U.S., its influence on other cultures in the world, how it was used to communicate, and its healing and therapeutic qualities. **Jerry Whitaker** presented Contemporary Storytelling, which was an autobiography on his life as an African-American in the 20th Century.

February 28, 1993. BLACK HISTORY MONTH was concluded with **GOSPEL MUSIC** Performed by **Vesta McFadden** and **Second Baptist Church of Paso Robles**.

March 14, 1993. Poetry Reading by **Matthias Rosenthal** and **Adam Schewel** of Santa Barbara, followed by an Open Reading.

May 1 to June 7, 1993. The release of **Volume #1, Issue #1 of BECAUSE**, a news and event magazine published by the Excellent Center for Art and Culture. Publisher **Charley Goodman**, Editors **Trish (Goodman) Sarna** and **Karl Kempton**.

BECAUSE states that the exhibit themes at the Center are focused on exposing the lies and uncaring actions of governments and other institutions that are destroying the healthy human spirits we are all born with. The magazine features information on *H.E.A.L.* (Human Education Against Lies) from the Elektra Album, "Civilization vs. Technology" for healing humanity's physical, mental, and soul wounds.

Much is written about Charley's "Archway of Twinkies," an archway of actual cellophane wrapped Twinkies. *BECAUSE* states that, "Passing through the archway to see the exhibit makes the Twinkies metaphor become clear: Americans willingly swallow mass quantities of anything- especially lies- if served soft and syrupy... are mindlessly consumed by millions of Americans." The Twinkie Defense that was used to justify the assassination of San Francisco's liberal mayor George Moscone and gay county supervisor Harvey Milk (because of having become temporarily insane from eating too many Twinkies and other junk food in the days leading up to the murders) is firmly denounced.

Charley, having been an enlistee with the U.S. Navy during Viet Nam had much to say in *BECAUSE* regarding the war, "I got up to Saigon and that was where you really saw what was going on and what that war was really all about. That's where all the war profiteers were... it didn't have anything to do with democracy or any of that..."

Part of the H.E.A.L. exhibit was done by a group of international Mail Artists. Charley said, "The main H.E.A.L. manifest...was to point out where lies existed in life and institutions; but instead of just complaining about it, getting up and doing something about it. They weren't going to wait for the same people who are trying to kill them to save them."

The following forthcoming events were announced in *BECAUSE*:

August 1-31, 1993. The month of August would host **Open Poetry Readings**.

August 1- Sept. 15, 1993. **THE INTERNATIONAL SHADOW PROJECT** (Mail Art). Organized by **Karl Kempton** with the goal of memorializing victims of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and giving

artistic voice to anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiments. Following the cataclysmic explosion in 1945, the only remains of victims close to ground zero were ghostly, human-shaped shadows created by remnants of vaporized body matter embedded in streets, sidewalks and walls of the devastated cities. To preserve the memory of these victims, survivors of the blast used chalk and paint to outline and thus preserve these poignant images of disintegrated humanity. Also associated with the International Shadow Project is the ritual creation of cranes made of folded paper in the Japanese origami tradition. When 1,000 folded paper cranes had been gathered, participants wove them into a garland which was sent to a memorial at Hiroshima's Peace Park.

Other events that were associated with the Shadow Project at this time were at the Audio Ecstasy and Linnea's in San Luis Obispo (For list of local contributors see Excellent Center archives.)

May 7, 1993. Open reading with theme of **H.E.A.L.** (Human Education Against Lies).

May 27, 1993. **Corbin Harney**, Western Shoshone Spiritual Leader speaks to protect the environment and join in a non-violent march at Livermore National Laboratory to prevent resumption of nuclear testing.

June 3, 1993. **Kjerstina Creath** lectured on Reiki, an ancient Japanese healing art using Universal Life Force Energy.

June, 1993. Guided Meditations with **Swami Niranjananandaji** each Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m.

June 5, 1993. A display of the art of **Phil Collins'** pointillistic Pen and Ink, and **Van Marshall's** Oil and Ultra Violet Light.

June 6, 1993. Reception for art of **Don Klopfer** and **John Landon**. This exhibit featured Don Klopfer's Holocaust paintings and John Landon's "California Expressionism"

June 13, 1993. Poetry by **Dian Sousa** of Los Osos and **Mary Tattu Bowen** from Pismo Beach.

September 19 through October 16, 1993. **SECOND ANNUAL GODESS CELEBRATION.** The Celebration was dedicated to the female aspect of Creator and Creation. **Barbara Beausoleil.**

Regularly Scheduled Poetry Readings on the second Sunday of each month. **Kevin Patrick Sullivan.**

December 12, 1993. SLO Night Writer's Workshop with **Al Leddy, Anne G. Phillips, Jerry Smith,** and **Francesca Bell** followed by an Open Reading.

December 1993-February 1994. **KALDRON WALL** (mail art exhibit) by **Karl Kempton.** Kaldron Wall was a special display area at the Center showcasing visual poetry. Many of the visual poems were taken from the Kaldron Wall Archives. (For list of contributors see Excellent Center Archives.)

January 9, 1994. **Tom Dolan** presented Drama Drum followed by Open Reading/ Drumming. January 9th through 29th featured still life Performance Sculptures by **James Cline.**

March 4, 1994. Live concert on stage with **Eugene ("Shockabilly") Chadbourne.** "Free Concert in the all new *Hostess Twinkie Cocktail Lounge* located within the warmth and comfort of The Excellent Center for Art & Culture of Grover Beach." Eugene played a unique form of music using an "electric garden

rake with a hacksaw..." He was considered "the father of Grunge" in the 1980s, and today he plays with jazz legends around the world.

March 6, 1994 through April 3. **The Americhicano Art Show** featuring **Ernesto Palomino, Esteban Villa** (both art professors within the Cal State University system), plus **Ned Long** and **Rick Jimenez**. This art show brought the heritage and symbols of their culture to the canvas, along with Esteban on guitar and Ernesto on drums to offer up a mixture of music and art in Grover Beach.

March 13 1994. Poetry reading by **Stan Tysell** and **Ray Clark Dickson**.

June 12, 1994. **Hisao Shinagawa**, called "the Japanese Bob Dylan" and "the Japanese Johnny Rotten" shared his diverse brand of folk music as part of the Corners of the Mouth poetry series:

<http://www.last.fm/music/Hisao+Shinagawa>

April through July 31, 1994. The on-going **ART OF THE DUNITES** show was extended and expanded, featuring Dunite paintings, sculpture, books, poems, literary journals and abstract films created by **Elwood Decker**. The show featured photos of **Dixie Paul, Ella Young, Gavin Arthur** and other Dunites. Historic **Bennett-Loomis Archive** photographs of the Central Coast were also on display.

Sept. 6, 1994. **Healing Goddess:** "The Real Health Care System for all Men & Women" was presented by **Barbara Mendes**-Artist/ Organizer/ Activist/ T.V. Producer with her new perspective on the term "Healing Arts." www.barbaramendes.org

(See collection of videos of Mail Art shown in these exhibits in the Excellent Center Archives.)

September 18-October 15, 1994. **GODDESS CELEBRATION** (mail art exhibit). Curator **Barbara Beausoleil**. The cover of the book, *DEVI #1, CELEBRATING THE GODDESS* created during this show featured a stylized version of Elwood Decker's wood carving entitled, "A Dune Goddess, scattering bubbles of illusion to entertain and instruct children like us":



DEVI #1, CELEBRATING THE GODDESS

December 11, 1994. Poetry Reading by **Marsha Evans** followed by an Open Reading.

December 15-21, 1994. The exhibit, "Covers of Christmas" was featured in a *FOCUS* Editorial by **Monica Fiscalini**. *NEW TIMES* also featured "Covers of Christmas" by free-lance writer and Editor **David Ciafardini**. David wrote, "The Excellent Center's entire exhibition space had been given over to a flamboyant, wall-to-wall, floor to ceiling montage made from hundreds of Christmas-theme record album covers." The display from Charley Goodman's rather extensive collection of record albums dating from the '40s to the '70s was arranged with the help of artist and writer **Sarah Summerfield**.

March 1, 1995. **Excellent Radio 88.9 FM** came into being and began broadcasting as "an art project with clear intentions," bringing the Voice of the People to the Central Coast of South San Luis Obispo County, California (see Excellent Radio 88.9 FM on this site).

March 7, 1995. Exhibit, "FATHER OF LIES (T.V.) VS. MOTHER OF INVENTION (RADIO) (Necessity)-HUMANITY @RISK" underscored the continuing saga of man's inhumanity to man, with an eye towards hope and the action needed to change it. This event included **Gary Eister's** play/opera "The Father of Lies" and a sculpture by Mark Bryan in the shape of a grotesque temple containing two televisions that spews lies into silence- talking and watching us all- and changing mankind forever. Five different artists, **Jack Artusio, Don Klopher, John Garcia y Roberts, Kabu MBII** and political cartoonist **Russell Hodin** effectively reflected their concerns as individuals in the community of all mankind. Also included was a tribute to local conservationist **Kathleen Goddard Jones** for her 50 years of environmental actions including preservation of the Nipomo Dunes. Also on display was information on the history and current activities of Amnesty International and the ACLU.

March 19, 1995. The front cover of the *Santa Maria TIMES* featured headlines, "*Counter culture guru broadcasts his intentions-Grover man starts micro-powered station.*" The article stated that some of Charley's goals were promoting power to the people, overcoming the profit-driven dominance of corporate America, and easing the frustrations that have led people to embrace conservative talk radio. Charley stated that he wanted to help his listeners start their own radio stations. "It doesn't require \$50,000." he said. "For \$500 you can start a station and can buy a complete radio kit from a San Francisco company that is promoting micro-powered radio.

April 22, 1995. Excellent Radio presented in concert: Margaret Lange, Singer-songwriter and guitarist, Tony Skelton, Singer- Guitarist. Special Guests: Rob Kimball, Pete Morin, and Jan Grigsby. This program was the first in a series of acoustic music events with Acoustic Jazz, Country Folk, and Blues.

Charley drove his classic 1952 Chevrolet business coupe almost every day during this time. It served him well for transportation and also as a rolling billboard for his politics. He liked parking it in front of the Center so people going down Grand Avenue couldn't miss his large bumper sticker that proclaimed, "*WHEN THE PEOPLE LEAD, THE LEADERS WILL FOLLOW!*"

Charley had long admired the liberal political movements of the 'thirties, especially FDR and Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California (EPIC) movement in California as reflected in *DUNE FORUM*, a magazine published in the Oceano Dunes by Chester Alan ("Gavin") Arthur in 1933-34 and now available through the South County Historical Society: <http://www.southcountyhistory.org/duneforum.htm>

September 8-17, 1995. The Excellent Center participated in the **DUNE SPIRIT CELEBRATION**, a celebration of Art, Music and Culture. The celebration featured ten days of concerts, art exhibits, poetry readings, lectures, and tours at various south county locations celebrating the rich legacy left by

early 20th century artists, musicians, and literary figures who lived and worked in the communities of Halcyon, Oceano, and the Dunes. The event was sponsored by the **Varian Foundation, Henry and Connie Katzenstein**, and the **Temple of the People in Halcyon**.

The Celebration included **Joel Andrews**, concert harpist and nephew of “**Gavin**” **Arthur**, grandson of the President of the U.S. and founder of the Dunite colony of Moy Mell in the Oceano Dunes; a Dunite art exhibit at the Oceano Depot; a slide show and presentation on the Dunites by **Norm Hammond**; a presentation on the music of **Henry Cowell** (who once lived in Halcyon) by **Andy Harp**; a slide show and presentation on Chumash Rock Art by **Lee Thurston**; a piano concert by **Chris Brown** including a special appearance of Cowell student and composer **Lou Harrison**, who spoke about his experiences with **John Cage, Cowell** and others; a Concert by the **Abel/Steinberg/Winant trio & CAMA Ensemble** with music of **John Cage, Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison** plus newly commissioned song cycles by composer **Larry Delinger** to poems by **John Varian** and **Karl Kempton**. The celebration also included tours of Halcyon’s Blue Star Memorial Temple, William Quan Judge Library, Halcyon Store Craft Faire, displays of Halcyon art and pottery, and a Children’s Concert by **Ivan Ulz**

* * * During this entire event an exhibit at the Excellent Center throughout the month of September hosted works by **Charley Goodman, Kabu II, Karl Kempton**, and **Roselma Quinn**, an artist whose connection to the Dunite artist Elwood Decker provided the primary focus of the exhibition.

September 10, 1995. Poet **Karl Kempton** introduced featured readers who read selections of literature and poetry from Oceano, the Dunes, and Halcyon. Among the readers poets and writers were **Jane Eldsdon, Ray Clark Dickson, Gudrun Grell** and **Karl Kempton**. **Merrell Fankhauser** played original music during the intermission. The reading was followed by an open reading for contemporary poets who had been inspired by the environment on the central coast. This event was broadcast live by Excellent Radio, 88.9 FM.

September 13, 1995. As part of the DUNE SPIRIT CELEBRATION events, a special showing of Elwood Decker’s abstract 16 mm films that he made during the late ‘forties and early ‘fifties were shown at the Excellent Center. One of Elwood’s color films, “Color Fragments” had been shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the late ‘forties, as well as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. By the 1990s the films had become very fragile with age and would be further damaged if shown more than a few times. **Charley** and his wife **Trish** had them transferred from the original 16 mm film to Super 8 medium, assisted by a small grant from the South County Historical Society for this special event.

A separate 8mm video recording was made during the showings of the films by **Trish Goodman** and employs some in-camera illusions. The original films were silent, so background music was provided by **Charley Goodman** and **Darrell Jonsson**, Charley’s long-time friend and film mentor.

Darrell and Charley had met six years earlier through Sound Choice Music Magazine. David Ciaffardini, Editor of Sound Choice asked Charley if a friend of his who was a world traveling music and film enthusiast could crash at his place when he came through California. Charley agreed and would later state, “In spite of the fact he didn’t arrive until 2 a.m. we ended up making some pretty incredible pieces. Whenever Darrell and I get together this always happens.”

Much earlier (when Darrell Jonsson was attending UCLA) he had William St. Moritz as his film instructor. It was through St. Moritz that Darrell became interested in the work of renowned film maker and critic Oskar Fischinger and his wife Elfriede. Fischinger (who knew Elwood in Hollywood and had documented some of his early work) quickly became Darrell’s mentor.

Oskar Fischinger died in 1967. Over twenty years later, In 1991, Elfriede saw Huell Howser’s KCET TV program on *California’s Gold* with Elwood and Norm Hammond. She immediately recognized Elwood from his days in Hollywood and purchased a copy of the tape and also a copy of Norm’s book, *THE DUNITES*. Then in 1994 she heard of the upcoming (earlier) show of Elwood’s films at the Excellent Center through Sound Choice Audio Evolution Network and came with St. Moritz to see them at the Excellent Center. Neither of them had seen Darrell for 25 years and they were delightfully surprised to

see him and Charley providing live music for the showing of Elwood's films, which were being broadcast simultaneously over Excellent Radio.

The 8mm digital tape recording that was made by Charley's wife Trish during the showings of the Super 8 films at the Excellent Center was unique. The view from behind the audience shows Elwood's films playing with the tops of the heads of the live audience in the foreground:



(The 8 mm abstract films made by Elwood Decker in 1948-1951 are now being archived in the *Academy Film Archive* in Los Angeles, courtesy of the Excellent Center for Art and Culture. On October 23, 2011 two of these films, "Color Fragments" and "Crystals" were shown to the public in the Spielberg Theater at the Egyptian Theater in Los Angeles.)

September 15, 1996. **Elwood Decker** was fascinated by construction sites and regarded them as "living sculpture." He photographed them extensively and wrote a script to accompany his slide photographs. Charley Goodman narrated the *Evolution at Construction Site* program and did a live broadcast on Excellent Radio, 88.9 with background music provided by **Merrell Fankhauser**.

It was around this same time that Andy Harp, one of the key coordinators of the Dune Spirit Celebration received a CD of **THE BOBS-plugged** that was sent to KCBX radio in San Luis Obispo. Andy was surprised to see a song on it about Elwood and played it for Central Coast listeners. Charley also knew about the CD and made sure Elwood's friends were able to hear it on Excellent Radio.

* * *September 18-25, 1996. A *NEW TIMES* article (page 46) by Billy Houck reviews, "**What's It All About, Albee?**" a drama by **Gordon Osmond** that was being presented by Stolen Fire Productions at the Excellent Center through October 4. It was noted that a press release for this play promises that the play is certain to offend a wide range of the public, from Pat Roberson to Ralph Nader!

May 29 and 30, 1996. MARSINAH, a play given at the Excellent Center for Art and Culture was about a passionate response to the rape/murder/mutilation of a young female labor organizer. The play was notable for its large cast, filled with the talents of local actors which include: "X", a grieving angry activist, an establishment female judge, an allegorical Mother, several male politicians, female factory workers, security guards, and a chorus of the dead. The event was free; but donations were gratefully accepted for the legal defense and special needs of Ratna and her colleagues -- especially necessary during that turbulent Indonesian economic & political crisis.

July 6, 1996. DEUS EX QUANTA, an original dark comedy by E.F. Doucette, ran through July 6th at The Excellent Center. This comic drama dealt with quantum physics, chaos theory, homicide and the question of how one defines reality. DEUS EX QUANTA was directed by John Bartelt and John Battalino. Three local actors made up the cast: Daya Harris played the hardened, witty and humorous Detective White, Shannan Morris played Detective Chapel, a religious, sensitive and focused young woman, and Dwaine Nelson was John Doe, a university professor, who is sometimes dead and sometimes alive and sometimes both.

August 23, 1996. *The Five Cities Times Press Recorder* featured a photo of a life size mock nuclear waste storage cask that was on display, parked in front of the Excellent Center for Art and Culture. The display was part of a tour by a coalition of groups to convince the federal government to authorize a third party independent analysis of nuclear waste transportation and storage issues.

1998 to Present. One of the on-going projects of the Excellent Center is to organize materials from the events that have taken place at the Center into a cohesive body of information that may be of interest for future generations. All of the events at the Excellent Center are on 8 mm Video, and many (if not most) of the Excellent Radio shows are archived on cassettes and VHS audio tapes.

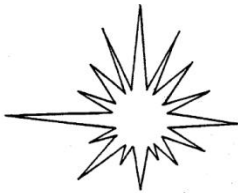
The organization project includes a continuation of cataloguing the names of all past and present participants and their materials to provide a window into the Spirit of the Dunes and Central Coast during those times. We feel it is important to recognize and acknowledge those contributors and not lose sight of their presence and accomplishments. It is our hope that we can bring their work forward once again, to share it and to preserve it in perpetuity.

Among the many items archived at the Excellent Center are many of the works of Dunite **Elwood Decker**, including many of his personal effects and the audio reel-to-reel tapes that he made. Also in the archives is an extensive collection of his "Photograms" that he made during the late 'forties and early 'fifties while he was experimenting with abstract photography. It is our hope to continue in the preservation and archiving this body of his work and to somehow bring them back into the light of day; that we might share them in a way that Elwood was never able to do...



“Sails of Silence” by Elwood Decker

FUTURE PLANS. Future plans also include a continuation of the **Cultural Literacy Movement** of the 1980s at the Excellent Center for Art and Culture at 11th and Grand in Grover Beach, and continuing to promote the awareness of the Spirit of the Dunes and Central Coast of California...



(For further information on the people and events mentioned here, please see the Archives of the Excellent Center for Art and Culture ____ NRH * * *)