



Photos by Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

A MEMORIAL for Hector Hernandez was placed in front of his former home in Fullerton on the one-year anniversary of his death on May 27. Hernandez was shot and killed by a police officer last year, and an investigation by the district attorney's office is ongoing.

WAITING ON ANSWERS

Friends and family urge an end to D.A.'s investigation into the police shooting of Hector Hernandez in 2020.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Bill Brown won't touch his torque wrench.

It sits in a box on a shelf in his garage — a protected memory.

It was the last tool Brown ever lent to Hector Hernandez. Seared into the handle are the dusty fingerprints of his old friend.

It's been a year since Hernandez was shot to death in his frontyard by a Fullerton police officer, yet his friends, family and neighbors are still waiting for the results of an investigation into the incident.

They say the district attorney's probe of the shooting has gone on far longer than expected. But they are continuing to push for the officer who shot Hernandez to be held accountable.

The Justice for Hector Hernandez coalition, which now includes about 20 organizations, has spent the last year advocating for their cause with protests and by attending City Council meetings to put pressure on city officials.

But Dist. Atty. Todd Spitzer's office has not yet concluded the investigation.

"This incident is still under review, and we have no further comment at this time," D.A. spokeswoman Kimberly Edds wrote in an email.

Peter Hardin, who is running against Spitzer for D.A., posted several Tweets last week criticizing Spitzer and his role in the drawn-out investigation.

"This week O.C. mourns the loss of Hector Hernandez, whose life was lost one year ago in a concerning use-of-force case that



BILL BROWN addresses the Fullerton City Council in December about Hector Hernandez, who was shot and killed by a Fullerton police officer in late May 2020.

was captured on video," Hardin wrote. "Mr. Hernandez's family & our community continue to wait for answers. District Attorney Todd Spitzer has met them with silence.

"Given the standards governing police use of force & video showing Mr. Hernandez to be on his back (a K-9 having taken him to the ground) at the time he was shot, I'm as concerned by the facts of this case as

I am by Mr. Spitzer's delay in reaching a charging decision.

"I'm calling on DA Spitzer to end the delay and make a decision, and to ensure the findings of his investigation are made public. There must be equal justice under the law. When our leaders fail to hold the pow-

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UCI film program waits in budget limbo

The digital filmmaking minor has become a valuable pipeline to underrepresented students, founder says.

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Even before the pandemic, budget cuts hit arts programs the hardest. Now, UC Irvine students involved in the digital filmmaking minor wonder if the program, which was already hanging on by a thin thread, will survive the university's latest financial hardships.

Seven years ago, SoCal-based artists Ulysses Jenkins, Bruce Yonemoto and Bryan Jackson founded the digital filmmaking minor at UCI under the Claire Trevor School of the Arts. Jenkins put together a small number of courses. When Yonemoto and Jackson were hired, the three instructors were able to expand the courses and revise a curriculum that turned into a minor.

Jackson said over the years the program became a pipeline to filmmaking for primarily Black and Indigenous people of color, women and LGBTQ students who have gone on to work in the film industry as producers, directors, cinematographers and crew members or continued their education at Cal Arts, UCLA, Columbia and New York University to name a few.

"There are actually two professors of color [in the program], which is unusual at the university," said Yonemoto. "One of the strong parts of our program is that we support our students of color and want to enable them to tell their stories, which haven't been told."

A highlight of the program has been participating in the Newport Beach Film Festival, where students showcase their work like alumna Nancy Nguyen who decided to make a documentary about the last gay bar in her Garden Grove hometown titled "Frat House," which later traveled to additional festivals.

They've also created a partnership across departments with the Blum Center for Poverty Alleviation — an opportunity for undergraduates to travel internationally to make films about communities outside of the United States.

In fall 2019, students received news that the program would be undergoing significant cuts due to lack of funding. They created a petition that garnered over 430 signatures and 50 testimonies.

The university was able to secure emergency funding. Stu-

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A legendary ride rises from the grave at Knott's Berry Farm

One of Disneyland's original designers has a hand in Knott's Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair.

BY TODD MARTENS

Robotics, digital trickery, trackless rides — modern theme parks are full of technological innovations. Rolly Crump, the 91-year-old designer who helped shape It's a Small World, the Enchanted Tiki Room and the Haunted Mansion at Disneyland, has his share of myth-making tales as well.

He's one of the few surviving ex-Disney staffers who not only knew Walt Disney but also enjoyed a somewhat close relationship with him. When it comes to the creative process, he can be blunt — myth-shattering, if you will.

Consider this Crump insight: Sometimes the best theme park rides are built on lots of beer, probably even more marijuana and large purchases of panty hose.

Now, Crump's influence can be seen in a new ride at Knott's Berry Farm that's based on an old ride

THE SIGN for Knott's Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair nods to designer Rolly Crump's love of movement. The ride recently reopened.



at Knott's Berry Farm. Knott's Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair is an adorable, video-game like animated romp with cartoon critters and lots of pies — a respectful and nostalgic 2021 endeavor that lives up to the park by celebrating its history.

The original 1970s Knott's Bear-y Tales was overseen by Crump and may be the greatest theme park ride you've likely never been on. Overflowing with color, puppet-like animals and borderline absurd tricks of light, it was the result of a do-it-yourself,

always-improvise mind-set.

At least when those minds were sober.

"We had a lot of fun with this damn ride," Crump says today, sitting in his office near a stack of signed and dedicated photos to him from Disney. On a nearby bookshelf rests one of the original frogs from Bear-y Tales, all spindly legs and bugged-out cartoon eyes, a creature with alien-like feet and a belly that appears full of hops.

"It didn't stay with anything in particular," Crump says of the ride, a journey from a factory to a



Photos by Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

CAT MADINGER and Jason Ybarra, dressed in costumes as the video team Crafty's Pie Thieves, get on the new ride, Knott's Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair, at Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park on May 29.

fair with lots of psychedelics, tarot imagery and some not-so-subtle boozy influences. Knott's Bear-y Tales, after all, was originally destined for a hippie-friendly area of Knott's known as the Gypsy

Camp; by the time guests reached the grand finale with a bonanza of animals, their eyes would have been zapped with what Crump

See *Knott's*, page R4

Santa Ana opts against citations for watching street races

BY BEN BRAZIL

The Santa Ana City Council on Tuesday reversed its initial approval of an ordinance that could have imposed fines and jail time on people who watch street races.

At its last meeting earlier this month, the council voted 4-3 in favor of the ordinance, which would have allowed police to target spectators who knowingly attend a street race within 200 feet of the event. Although a violation of the ordinance would have included a maximum of six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine, the city would have provided a written

warning to any accused spectator.

The ordinance was meant to deter people from attending street races, which have been a problem in Santa Ana and other parts of Orange County. Some contend that spectators encourage street racing by promoting the events on social media. The presence of spectators may also attract street racers looking for an audience.

The meeting on Tuesday was the second reading of the street racing ordinance. Final approval was required by the council before it went into law.

Similar to the last meet-

ing, some council members questioned whether targeting spectators is the right move and whether it would lead to innocent people being cited.

The difference in this decision was Councilman Phil Bacerra's vote against the ordinance he initially supported. On Tuesday, Bacerra took umbrage with the written warning component of the ordinance after Police Chief David Valentin said it could be difficult for officers to confirm that a spectator received a written warning out in the field during a street race.

At the last meeting, Councilwoman Thai Viet

Phan added the written warning to the language of the ordinance so that spectators would be issued the warning before any fine or infraction.

"To me, the purpose of this ordinance was not to give our [police department] more busy work and more hoops to have to jump through to enforce what should be common sense," Bacerra said. "I don't believe that our officers are going to come through a scene of a street racing incident and just apprehend everybody within sight. I don't think they even have the capa-

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Daniel Miller

TWO CARS PREPARE to square off in an early morning street race in South Los Angeles in September 2018. The Santa Ana City Council has opted against making it a crime to watch such races in the city.

WAITING

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erful accountable we erode trust between law enforcement and the communities we are sworn to protect and serve."

During the last year, there has also been an Internal Affairs investigation into the incident. Fullerton Police Cpl. Billy Phu said Tuesday that the investigation is still ongoing.

"As per our policy and protocol, this officer-involved shooting is pending an independent investigation by the Orange County district attorney's office," Phu wrote in an email. "The findings of the district attorney's independent legal review is taken into consideration as part of the internal affairs investigation. We withhold judgment and do not draw any conclusions until all facts are known and the investigations are complete."

Phu pointed out that the Fullerton Police Department created a webpage where the public can see documents related to police shootings and other use-of-force incidents. He said that documents on Hernandez's shooting will be available on the webpage once the investigations are completed.

Meanwhile, the officer who shot Hernandez, Jonathan Ferrell, is still working and is assigned to patrol.

About 60 people gathered in front of Hernandez's home last week to hold a vigil marking the one-year anniversary of his death. Friends, family, neighbors and activists took turns speaking about Hernandez as people stood in the yard and spilled out into the street.

Prayer candles flickered next to a photo of Hernandez on the spot where he was fatally shot.

"It happened right here, right where we stand, in the front yard, right here where these candles are lit," said Santi Santiago, who was friends with Hernandez.

"He is still here with me," Santiago said. "He's never going to leave. He's always going to be in my heart."

Santiago spoke about Hernandez's love for his wife and children. He said that Hernandez taught him how to be a father.

"He was such a good friend to me," Santiago said. "How could he do so much, and never ask me for anything?"

In between speakers, chants broke out among



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

NEIGHBORS AND FAMILY members attend a memorial for Hector Hernandez on the one-year anniversary of his death in Fullerton on May 27. Hernandez was shot and killed by a police officer one year ago. The officer continues to work on patrol.

the attendees.

"Say his name!" a man yelled.

"Hector Hernandez!" everyone responded.

In the steel-grey dusk, neighbors lit their prayer candles and laid them at the memorial. A man poured out some of his beer in Hernandez's honor.

"We know that too often when police show up to a scene of a crisis, they escalate that crisis," said Jennifer Rojas of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. "... Hector should be with his family. He should have not been killed that night, and the police should have not used deadly force that evening."

Fullerton Mayor Bruce Whitaker also spoke at the vigil.

"I've often spoken out against the Peace Officers' Bill of Rights, [which] causes city council members and mayors to become silent," Whitaker said. "We're told by legal experts and by everyone else in the system that we must put on a muzzle, or sit on our hands and just be mute. I'm not wired that way."

Whitaker compared the incident to the Fullerton police killing of Kelly Thomas, a mentally ill homeless man. The incident sparked national uproar, though the officers were acquitted of all charges.

Whitaker had been on the council for a few months when Thomas was beaten. Whitaker said he

and his wife Linda were the only city officials to attend Thomas' funeral in Yorba Linda.

"Over time I found out from eye witnesses that the accounts that we were being given, officially, were not accurate, and they were not truthful," Whitaker said. "My goal back then was to do what I could do. We couldn't bring Kelly back, someone who had schizophrenia or someone who was disabled to that degree that didn't receive the mercy that should be incumbent upon all of us to provide to someone in distress. So my goal as a council member then, and since then, is to do what I can to...create a defense against these kinds of actions."

Following his speech at the vigil, Whitaker, who has been mayor since December, said in an interview that he felt guilty for initially not speaking out on behalf of Hernandez's family and friends. Whitaker said he will try to help accelerate the investigation if possible.

"I think it's incumbent upon us as council members to try to make sure that they get a full, thorough accounting of what happened," Whitaker said. "Justice delayed is justice denied. So the delay is a very, very great concern ... When they say that an investigation is going to take several months but now it's a year, accountability has to be applied somewhere."

"... I was very hopeful

that maybe we'd learn something from the Kelly Thomas incident, maybe they'd be a little bit swifter in putting facts on the table, an accounting that would at least alleviate all those questions here in people's minds."

Whitaker said he sent a letter to the district attorney's office last week seeking answers on the investigation after receiving unanimous approval from the City Council. Edds did not confirm that the district attorney's office received the letter.

"I write in behalf of the relatives, friends, co-workers and neighbors of Hector Hernandez, who died in front of his home on the 3600 block of W. West Avenue, Fullerton, as a result of an officer involved shooting on May 27, 2020," the letter says. "Your office has been investigating this matter for nearly one year, and those who survive Mr. Hernandez have regularly appeared at Fullerton City Council meetings since late last year with demands and aggrieved pleas for information and findings of that investigation."

"At our City Council meeting on May 18, 2021, following many impassioned public comments from residents of west Fullerton and others, our City Council expressed unanimous support to contact your office. As mayor, I request and we appreciate your personal assistance in this matter."

Hernandez was shot on

May 27, 2020 on West Avenue.

According to a video posted online by Fullerton police, one of Hernandez's sons called the police to report his stepfather for being drunk, hitting his brother and brandishing a knife. The boy also reported that Hernandez had armed himself with a gun and fired the weapon. The video includes a recording of the 911 call.

After police arrive on scene, body-worn camera footage of the shooting in the police video shows Ferrell approaching Hernandez's home with his K-9 unit. Officers have their guns drawn.

Advocates have pointed out that police have only released selected portions of the body cam footage of the shooting.

"The community must have access to all body camera footage of the incident," Rojas has said. "The footage that is currently available to the public is highly editorialized and serves to exonerate the officer and prosecute Hector Hernandez."

In the footage released by the police department, as Ferrell gets up to the home, he directs the dog toward Hernandez, who is standing in his frontyard with his hands up. The dog disobeys at first and runs toward other officers.

As the K-9 turns and rushes toward Hernandez to take him down, Hernandez puts one of his arms down and takes a knife

from his pocket. After the dog takes him down, he stabs the dog near the shoulder blade.

Ferrell runs up to Hernandez, yells "He's got a knife!" and fires two shots at him.

Ferrell pulls the dog from Hernandez while it tears away at his shirt.

Brown and others contend that the dog should never have been directed toward Hernandez. Brown said the dog didn't even perceive Hernandez as a threat at first, as evidenced by it initially walking over to officers.

Brown said in a prior interview that Hernandez had his hands raised and only lowered his hand to his knife when the dog rushed him. Then, Ferrell fired at Hernandez while he was on his back.

"The K-9 officer got concerned about his dog," Brown said. "The K-9 officer wasn't being threatened at all. Nobody in the frontyard was threatened, other than the dog, because the dog was attacking him."

Brown continued: "I mean he just got totally reckless because it was like he just got tunnel vision. He focused on, 'Oh, my God, he's hurting my dog, I'm gonna stop him now ...' That's exactly what it seems like happened — he lost all control of his training and reasonable thinking and just decided, I need to do this."

Garo Mardirossian, the attorney who represented Kelly Thomas' family, is representing Hernandez's family in a lawsuit against the city.

Mardirossian has said that Ferrell used excessive force when no force was necessary because Hernandez was complying with every order the officers gave him.

"This K-9 officer for no good reason releases his dog," Mardirossian said. "The dog is smart enough to see that there is no danger and starts running towards his K-9 unit. He's thinking 'OK, time to go.' This man's got his hands up, he's no threat."

"Then you see the officers yelling, trying to get [the dog] back and redirected, and to heal and then to attack. Why, why are you taking a man with his hands up?"

He continued: "Neither one of those shots were necessary. Nobody was being threatened."

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PROGRAM

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dents who led the petition initiative counted it as a win at the time, but now they find themselves in the same position they were in two years ago.

Recently, the arts department administration advised the program faculty to stop accepting new students into the minor for the new school year until there is clarity on its future. Jackson, a continuing lecturer, was given notice that his employment will be terminated in December of this year.

The pandemic threw the UC schools into a financial crisis resulting in overall budget cuts and halts in hiring.

Last year, The Times reported that UCI was able to fill a \$67-million budget shortfall and achieve its UC-imposed \$12-million savings target with no pandemic-driven furloughs or layoffs in 2020. Interim Provost Hal Stern said the cam-



Courtesy of Noelle McClinton

A VIDEO STILL from "Human" by Noelle McClinton.

pus dug into reserves, made a 2% budget cut and dramatically slowed down hiring, including largely pausing midway through a plan to add 250 new faculty.

Earlier this month, Gov. Gavin Newsom unveiled a budget proposal that would give UCs an economic boost that includes restoring a \$302.4-million budget cut imposed last year and adding \$506 million in ongoing funding for core campus operations, student needs and the training of diverse medical profession-

als as well as one-time funds toward repairing facilities and a variety of research programs.

"With all of the news from the governor, you would hope that there's good signs ahead," said Jackson. "What we learned from 2008 with the last financial crisis when I still had a full-time job was that when money returns, it doesn't go to the same place. It's the next administrator's position to decide where it goes."

Although students like

Stefan Buhr have reached out to student government and administrators, they describe their interactions with administrators as dismissive and evasive about student concerns.

"I'm graduating, but I don't want to just see it disappear," said Buhr, who is also co-president of the program's club. "I want to make sure that the students that come after me also have those resources available to them so that they feel like they can navigate a difficult industry with the right tools and the right knowledge."

Buhr added that his ultimate hope is for the university to recognize the potential of the program and to work with students to secure a stable source of funding and support.

Through an email statement, Kevin Appel, art department chair, said, "The Digifilm Art Minor has been a valued asset in the undergraduate curriculum of UC Irvine. The scale of any academic program on this campus depends on a

budget received from the state that varies widely in size from year to year. We plan with a high degree of flexibility to make sure the resources received from the state are used in the most impactful way possible, balancing the needs of students in all of our existing areas of instruction. We are exploring all options to secure funding for the program to continue but have not made a final decision as to its extension."

For Nguyen, the program changed the course of her career. She graduated from UCI with a biology major but is pursuing filmmaking while working as a crewmember on a feature production. She describes committing to film school as a hard sell for first-generation students and transferring to a film program as difficult in most colleges.

"It was a community that was really formative for me as a queer person and a filmmaker to know that there are other students who are very passionate about making stories about

their experiences of being queer or coming from immigrant families and what-not," said Nguyen. "To know that there's a very safe space where people can create work is reassuring and unique to other film schools, which tend to abide by Hollywood set structures."

Ideally, the founders of the program would like three to five years to develop it into a major.

"Everything is changing so quickly [in terms of technology and platforms] that you have to be flexible and open to change," said Yonemoto. "These schools are not, so that's why we are very positive about our program. Students of color have a hunger to tell their stories ... we feel that it's important to continue our programs and to give the opportunity for students to tell their stories to develop in the industry and to, literally, change the complexion of the industry."

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Courtesy of Beyond Exhibitions

A SHOT OF Vincent Van Gogh's "The Starry Night" in the Beyond Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience.

Exhibit to immerse itself in Van Gogh

An immersive Vincent Van Gogh exhibit arrives in Orange County on July 20 through Sept. 6.

The exhibit projects 300 of the Dutch painter's most famous works like "The Starry Night," "Sunflowers," and "Café Terrace at Night" across walls, floors and ceilings while Van Gogh's words are set to a symphonic score.

Artnet news reports there are nearly 50 immersive Van Gogh shows across North America created by about five different companies, who might be taking a page from a similar exhibit in France featured in an episode of the Netflix series "Emily in Paris."

The July exhibit at the Anaheim Convention Center was created by Mathieu St-Arnaud, a creative direc-

tor of Montreal-based Normal Studio. The company previously worked with the Montreal symphony and brought the "Diary of Anne Frank" to life.

With a timed one-hour entry, guests are required to wear face masks while walking through the space that allows for 6-foot social distancing, separate entrance and exit directions and hand-sanitizing stations. Increased cleaning practices on high-touch surface areas are also a part of the exhibit's COVID-19 safety protocols.

Tickets for adults, which go on sale June 4, are listed as \$36.99 for off-peak times and \$46.99 for peak times. For information and tickets, visit beyondvangogh.com.

— From staff reports

Viet Film Fest presents free short film series 'Under the Same Roof'

Viet Film Fest is screening a short film series titled "Under the Same Roof" from June 1 to 15 for free.

The series features six films curated from the festival's collections and centered on the theme of family.

Films include "Walk Run Cha-Cha" by Laura Nix, about a real-life refugee love story between a couple separated by the Vietnam War who become ballroom dancers together 40 years later; "Like Mother, Like Daughter" by Kady Le, which follows a Vietnamese American trans woman who wears her first áo dài (a traditional Vietnamese silk dress) during Lunar New Year in hopes of convincing her immigrant mother that she is capable of being her daughter; and "Chez moi" by Phuong Mai Nguyen, an animated fantasy where a young boy



Courtesy of Viet Film Fest

A STILL from "Like Mother, Like Daughter," directed by Kady Le, part of a Viet Film Fest offering this month.

wakes up to find an unexpected addition to the family as his mother takes on a giant bird-man as a lover.

Additional shorts include "The Anniversary," by Ham Tram, "Hieu" by Richard Van and "My Father's Truck" by Mauricio Osaki.

The virtual event is meant to celebrate the return of Viet Film Fest,

which was canceled last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The past year has brought as many opportunities as it has challenges," said Eric Nong, the festival's artistic director, in a statement. "In reimagining societal structures with greater intent and purpose, artists continue to create bold, innovative work of dialectical reflec-

tion. Viet Film Fest, as a space for visual storytelling, will bring that work to audiences however we can."

Event organizers plan on the festival returning from Oct. 15 to 30 via on-demand streaming, along with drive-in and theater screenings if local health and safety regulations permit.

"Amidst these changes, our commitment to enrich and connect communities through Vietnamese arts and culture persists. We believe that art — no matter the medium — allows exploration of new perspectives, celebration of unheard voices and revitalization of marginalized identities," stated Tony Nguyen, festival digital director.

To register for the "Under the Same Roof" film series, visit vietfilmfest.eventive.org/welcome.

— From staff reports

RACES

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bility to do that, let alone would they do that. I was open to seeing where this ordinance could go, and I was optimistic because I have faith in my colleagues that possibly we could see the right language com-

posed. But in reading this section, I can't support this language as is."

Bacerra proposed an amended motion without the required written warning, but it failed 3-4, with dissenting votes from Mayor Vicente Sarmiento and council members Johnathan Hernandez, Jessie Lopez and Phan.

Phan then proposed her original ordinance, which also failed with a 3-4 vote. Sarmiento, Hernandez, Bacerra and Lopez dissented.

"I certainly understand and appreciate the intention of this — an effort to try to prevent and stop street racing," Sarmiento said. "I don't think there's

anybody who wants to condone that or support that. I just think this is a solution that's looking for anybody to cite ... It's kind of misdirected because it goes after people who aren't really organizing or participating in it."

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KNOTT'S

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hoped were some mind-altering lights.

The avalanche of mirrors, glossy cave walls and strobes was a spur-of-the-moment decision, inspired by the inability to add a minor, coaster-inspired drop to the attraction. "We developed the story as we were building it," Crump says. "That's a crackup. 'Oh, by the way, this is the story.' It was one of the most fun times I ever had. We didn't know what we were doing. We were just down."

And what they built has become the stuff of theme park legend.

Although barely known — or, is it bear-ly known? — outside Southern California, the ride, which opened in July 1975, represents a themed entertainment era when "intellectual property" wasn't a marketing buzz phrase and a trippy ride could overflow with hand-crafted dolls created from a single haphazard sketch.

Knott's Bear-y Tales, with its sly fox selling "Weird Juice" (it will "make you feel weird!") and its steampunk-inspired Chug-a-Chug piemaking assembly line, represents Crump's whimsical-meets-beatnik-meets-rock 'n' roll personality, a designer who around the same time was also trying to pitch himself as an artist for a prophylactic line (the get-rich-quick scheme failed) and once plastered his office at Walt Disney Imagineering, the company's theme park design division, with his "dopers," that is, drug-inspired attraction posters.

"I only went on it four or five times as a kid, but it left such a lasting impression on me," says Eric Nix, 41, producer of the modernized and digitized Bear-y Tales. "I remember the smell of the boysenberries. I remember the Chug-a-Chug machine. I remember being terrified of the thunder cave. From a Knott's Berry Farm perspective, that legitimized what we do here. It put Knott's in a league with Disney, as far as dark rides go."

The ride's imagery was so vivid that it even kept people up at night. Fountain Valley's Brian McGee, 58, worked on the ride in the early 1980s. "When I first started, I didn't sleep at all. I had the characters and the liveliness and the music in my head. It was invigorating. There is no one who went through who didn't enjoy themselves, put it that way."

The ride's resurrection furthers the argument that Crump is as integral to theme park design as more well-known creatives such as Marc Davis and, one of Crump's favorite collaborators, Mary Blair. Crump's designs now live not just at Knott's but also at Disney-



THE "CHUG-A-CHUG" machine on the original Bear-y Tales ride at Knott's Berry Farm, circa 1985. The ride has reopened as Knott's Berry-Tales: Return to the Fair.

land in the facade of It's a Small World, the gods of the Enchanted Tiki Room, bits of the Haunted Mansion and scattered remnants throughout Adventureland and Tomorrowland.

An amazing feat, considering that his art often looks more like the intricate, line-heavy work one would see in a tattoo parlor rather than Main Street, U.S.A. Former Walt Disney Imagineer and theme park historian Christopher Merritt, like many others, cites Crump as a precursor to filmmaker Tim Burton, although Crump's exuberant use of color feels freer and looser, the illustrative equivalent of jazz improvisation.

"I can see that in all the swirls and the loops," says Merritt, who wrote a book with Pixar's Pete Docter on Davis and is at work on a book about the original Bear-y Tales ride.

"There's a weird, almost Gorey-esque sensibility in his lines. I love it. There's a strangeness in all his art, and it's all self-taught. I don't know if there's another artist who designs like him. I love that Rolly is so confident as a designer and cocksure of himself."

"Anything Rolly has ever worked on has no fear of color," Merritt adds. "It's like, 'Hey man, I'm coloring, and it's gonna be in your face.'"

And he was certainly unconventional as a boss. Ask Crump what it was like to be on his design team for Bear-y Tales, and he starts talking about booze, specifically giving it to his staff to unleash their creativity.

"I had this one kid who came from Disney, and he was a close friend of mine," says Crump. "He loved beer. So what I did, I gave him his own office, and I would bring him as many six packs as he wanted. I turned him loose. The stuff he came up with was absolutely incredible. Oh, God, that was fun. We were doing this by the seat of our pants."

100 YEARS OF KNOTT'S

Knott's Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair was far more planned.

Theme parks today understand that long-term success is a careful balance of newness and nostalgia, as locales such as Knott's Berry Farm and Disneyland are less a collection of thrills than showcases for cross-generational environmental design. Their appeal is akin to that of a national park or Dodger Stadium, places that will adapt over time but fulfill a similar role as a cultural heritage site.

Knott's, for its COVID-19 pandemic-delayed 100th anniversary, wanted to lean into its past, and it did so in part by replacing the little-known Voyage to the Iron Reef with an interactive dark ride that serves as a Silly Symphony-inspired sequel to Crump's original attraction. Armed with jelly projectiles in the ride vehicle, guests take virtual aim at animated foxes that are making off with pies.

Zaniness takes precedence over plot, and joy comes from seeing what kind of inspired interactions guests concoct as they traverse among screens filled with plump bears, bouncing frogs and fortune tellers. Fire away at googly eyed mushrooms, an owl apparently conjuring a spell or mystical tents and carts filled with ghosts.

The drawings are more rounded and friendly than Crump's originals — a Crump mushroom would have a moustache and nearly broken glasses — but the festive absurdity, such as critters taking a bath in Weird Juice, remains. Between the animated scenes are practical sets, some original pieces pulled from storage and others faithful re-creations of Crump's ride, which was revamped in the mid-'80s into Kingdom of the Dinosaurs.

"Over the years, there's been a lore build-up amongst fans over Knott's Bear-y Tales," says Jon Stor-

beck, Knott's vice president and general manager. "Interestingly, it has not been here for over a generation. There's a whole new generation of guests who will see it for the first time. We hope they see it the same way, that the characters are endearing."

Although Crump didn't consult on the ride's revival, his son, Chris, a former Imagineer himself, did speak with Knott's throughout the process. He also worked on the original. The younger Crump was just out of high school then, and it was his first major job. Ask Rolly what it was like to partner with his son, and he praises Chris' set-building skills before adding, "He was brought up by me to begin with, so he better do it right."

Chris speaks not necessarily of a casual environment but one in which designers had to essentially learn to speak his dad's language.

"Back then, this was full-tilt Rolly, and he's very specific of what he likes and what he wants. Let's just say that," says the younger Crump. "There was this kind of 'You can do it' attitude, which was all the early Imagineers. Nobody had done it before, so what's the idea? What's the thing? What's it look like? You just go. He would do a sketch, and it was never to scale, and I'd go, 'How big is that?' and he'd go, 'I don't know, two feet?' So I'd buy a 24-inch tube and it'd just design itself, really."

To understand, ultimately, what made Knott's Bear-y Tales so distinct, so absurd and relatively reckless, one should probably understand the definition of "full-tilt Rolly." Crump started at Imagineering — then known as WED Enterprises (for Walter Elias Disney) — in 1959 and gradually built up a reputation as a rebel. He would fall in and out of love with the company, ultimately returning to Disney after his work on Bear-y Tales.



Photos by Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

A VIEW OF the new ride called "Knott's Betty Tales" during the reopening day at Knott's Berry-y Tales: Return to the Fair.

He was known as a charmer who would drive his Porsche around Fantasyland when he served as Disneyland's art director, his innate confidence buoyed by the fact that the father of modern animation and the creator of the American theme park took a shine to Crump's designs. Today, Crump is best represented by the clock facade at It's a Small World. Full of knobs, dials and off-center numbers, it's as much a symbol of Disneyland as Sleeping Beauty Castle.

Merritt, who was a lead show designer on Tokyo Disneyland's recently opened Enchanted Tale of Beauty and the Beast and who delved deep into theme park history in his various stints with the company, has plenty of stories that build on the myth of Crump. "He was a bad boy. Rolly was the guy in the model shop blasting rock 'n' roll," Merritt says, adding that former Imagineers recalled constantly yelling at Crump to turn the music down, to which he would only turn it up out of spite.

"You had people coming in suits and skinny ties and pocket protectors and [designer] Harriet Burns wearing gloves," says Merritt. "Here comes Rolly Crump with his jazz and rock 'n' roll records." Crump even installed a tent in the middle of the model shop, a place for secret meetings.

"You can imagine how it was," says Merritt. "All these amazingly talented artists forced to work in this tiny space."

On Knott's Bear-y Tales, "full-tilt Rolly" meant a mix of innovations — the use, for instance, of traditional theater lighting intermingled with Disney-style black lighting effects to better showcase the frenzied designs of the animals, or the prevalence of magic-like illusions and the desire to fill every scene with details large and small — and just plain head-scratchers.

Crump once envisioned a roller coaster-like drop that would take guests to the big show-ending scene of the fair. When that became impossible because of the building's structure and the ride's relatively modest budget, Crump decided to just make guests

dizzy, to simulate some sort of drug-induced haze.

The Knott's Berry Farm designers essentially "fixed" this scene for the reimagined ride. It should be noted that Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair is much more than a game-like attraction — there are a surprising number of actual figures and show sets for a screen-based ride. Where Crump once saw a dark cave, the ride now has thunder and lightning effects in a mysterious cavern, one complete with not-so-creepy insects. In the '70s, however, Crump wanted to disorient guests before bringing them to the ride's large ending scene.

"Instead of a major roller coaster drop, we thought we'd do a black hole area," he says. "What we did is we used a lot of strobe lights. We wanted you to be blind as a bat when you came out of it. I wanted to screw up your vision. It was just a black tunnel, and we'd turn out all the lights and screw up your eyes. I wanted you to be all messed up."

To which Crump's wife, Marie Tocci, turns to a reporter and says, "Yeah, I don't understand."

SENSORY OVERLOAD

Today, the original ride lives on only in the imaginations and memories of those who experienced it — the few videos online don't really do it justice. Part of the reason it left such an impression is its ending: a grand party with jazz and an abundance of characters, color and light. Merritt says the ride made an impact on him as a 5-year-old in the same way as he imagines Rise of the Resistance at Disneyland's Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge does on kids today.

High praise, but he believes Bear-y Tales deserves it.

"Everyone comes together at the fair at the end," Merritt says. "All the characters you saw in the previous scene make a new appearance, doing something different and fun. It's a big room. It takes up almost half of the show building."

Crump's theme park designs were known for near

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KNOTT'S

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constant movement. The figures may not have been as advanced as those at Disneyland, but every mechanical creature was moving. Today's theme park fans may want to picture the grand musical and animal finale of Disneyland's soon-to-be rethemed Splash Mountain when trying to picture the closing seconds of Bear-y Tales.

Describes Merritt, "In the middle of the room, there's a big balloon coming from the ceiling where the Bear-y Family are going up and down, and there's music, there's Dr. Fox selling his Weird Juice, there's puppets and there's a frog jumping contest. There's musicians, there's a rabbit who's walking on wire, there's jugglers. It's too much. It's sensory overload."

Crump has some favorite scenes from the original ride. One involves a chicken contraption in the factory. Crump and his team constructed a device that constantly moved eggs up and down a ramp. The eggs, however, were not what you think.

The secret behind those eggs was far more low tech, yet arguably fashionable: "Women's stockings," says Crump.

More specifically, the plastic eggs L'eggs pantyhose once were sold in.

Crump and his team

bought hundreds, at least when they weren't able to get enough from female staffers. The eggs would be painted in such a way that it looked like the chickens were laying something nuclear.

"Well, you had to put something heavy in the egg so it would turn over and move forward," Crump says on the reasoning behind the L'egg containers: They were easy to reopen. "But it was crazy," he says. "We were just a bunch of kids playing."

The more one digs into the scenes of the Bear-y Tales ride, the more detail and uniqueness one uncovers.

One of Crump's first jobs at Disney was to partner with illusionist Yale Gracey on potential effects for the Haunted Mansion, so it's perhaps no surprise that Crump wanted a sense of magic throughout Bear-y Tales. The ride was liberal in its use of projections and Pepper's ghost-like effects. There were floating instruments, hovering candle tips and one neat trick that Merritt recalls involving an adorable mouse suddenly appearing out of a candle holder in midair.

But perhaps the real reason Bear-y Tales had such a grip on those who rode it is because in some ways it represents the kind of ride that doesn't really exist anymore. Crump's original had pies — and pie scents — but was little more than a

story about a bunch of no-mad, bohemian animals.

"It's super unique. It was such a snapshot in time," says Nix. "When you look at the pictures, it wasn't terribly advanced. The animatronics were simple, but there were a lot of them. You just felt like you were in these scenes and places."

In turn, it represents theme parks at their most weird, their most removed from daily life — the sort of ride fans thought was forever lost.

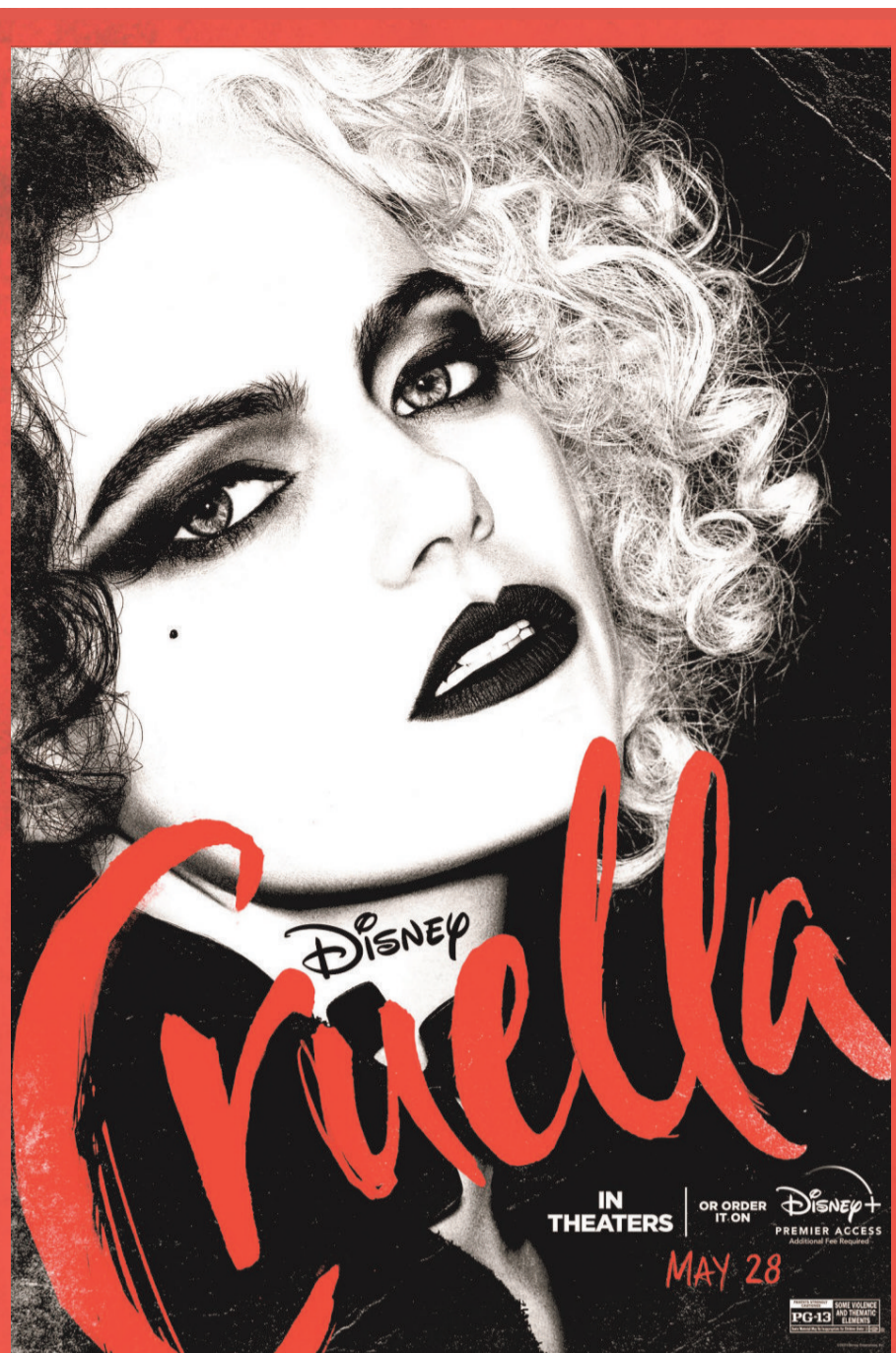
That is, until nostalgia willed a version of it back into existence. While Crump's age will likely keep him from visiting the attraction, he's pleased, of course, that his most personal ride has been reimagined.

"I think other people should have a crack at it, so this is good," he says. "I want other people to pick up the ball and go with it."

Then, Crump pauses and starts asking questions about the lighting on the new ride: Did they get it right, and does it work with the mix of digital and physical sets? "I can't wait to talk to my son about the lighting to see if they did a good job on the lighting," says Crump. "That was really important to me."

This too is "full tilt Rolly." Retired, relaxed and ready to design — or offer a frank opinion on someone else's.

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TimesOC

A Times Community News publication serving Orange County

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TimesOC is published Sundays by Times Community News, a division of the Los Angeles Times. Subscriptions are available only by subscribing to The Times, Orange County.

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