

PEPPERDINE PEOPLE

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Geoffrey & Anne
PALMER

Dan Caldwell & Robert Williams
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Los Angeles Renaissance

*Geoff and Anne Palmer Build a Dream
and Their Community*

by **RICK GIBSON**

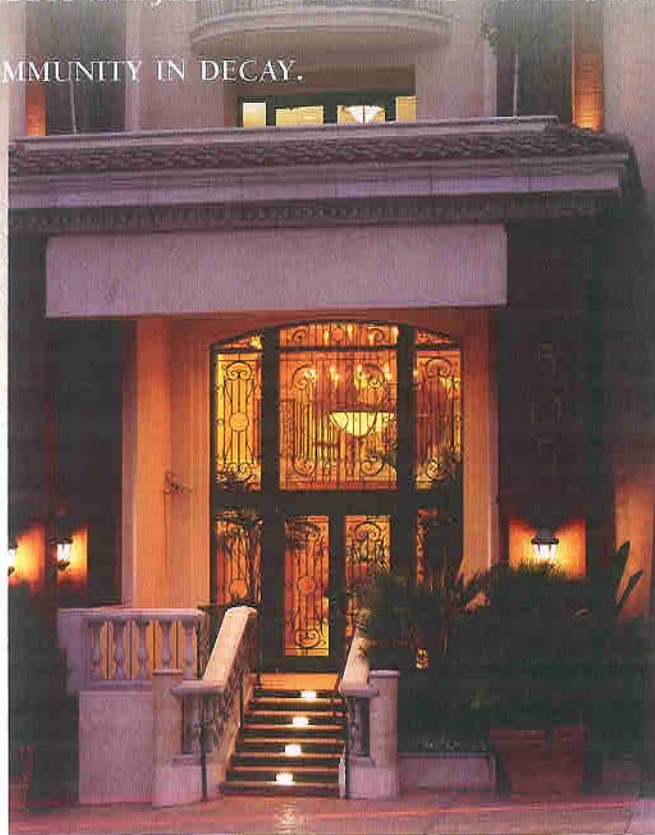
GEOFF PALMER IS A TRUE VISIONARY. HE SEES OPPORTUNITY WHERE OTHERS SEE ONLY OBSTACLES AND THEN MASTERFULLY MOVES HIS IDEA FROM THE DRAWING BOARD TO REALITY. HIS MOST RECENT WORK IN DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES HAS ESTABLISHED HIM AS ONE OF THE NATION'S FOREMOST DEVELOPERS. THE HANDSOMELY DESIGNED MEDICI AND ORSINI RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS ARE JUST TWO EXAMPLES WHERE RENEWED LIFE HAS BLOSSOMED IN WHAT WAS ONCE A COMMUNITY IN DECAY.

Bucking conventional wisdom as downtown Los Angeles declined sharply in the early 1990s, Geoff envisioned a revitalized city with large, classically designed upscale apartments that would attract young, successful business executives. He was alone in his vision. After the riots and recession of the early 90s, Los Angeles had been redlined and no institutional money was available for downtown development.

At a time when people were fleeing downtown L.A., Geoff was designing apartment communities that would lure them back. He purchased property and persisted without partners. At the time, most thought his to be a fool's dream; the ambitious project was the only one of its kind planned in the mid-1990s. But through his passion and tenacity, Geoff pioneered a vision for Los Angeles that is today embraced by many. Indeed, there are 153 significant Los Angeles projects now in development, each inspired by the success of the Medici development. Geoff Palmer has led the way in what has come to be called the Los Angeles Renaissance.

An alumnus of the Pepperdine School of Law, Geoff is eager to inspire this kind of visionary thinking in the next generation of young lawyers. In the spring of 2006, he and his wife, Anne, partnered with Pepperdine and endowed the Geoffrey H. Palmer Center for Entrepreneurship and the Law by making the largest gift ever from a Pepperdine School of Law graduate.

The Palmer Center reflects the style and character of its chief benefactor. It offers a unique certificate program within the School of Law designed to equip students with the necessary skills to excel in high-technology businesses. Geoff, an entrepreneur at his core, says, "I have worked with lawyers who don't think like entre-



◀ Entrance to the Orsini residential project

preneurs." To him, lawyers who represent the interests of businessmen need to think like businessmen. Geoff sees the Palmer Center as an effective way the Pepperdine School of Law can prepare students to compete more effectively in a rapidly changing world brimming with tremendous opportunities.



The second child of five, Geoff was born in Los Angeles to parents who were builders in their own right. The Palmers moved to the Southland in pursuit of the California dream and established themselves professionally as architects. Geoff's predisposition as a builder grew out of a family who understood the promise of Los Angeles and the opportunity available to those who contribute to its growth.

Half a world away, Anne was born and raised in France. After completing her university studies in Lyon, she too moved to California to find a dream, but never lost her connections with the tightly knit community that raised her. Her father, a banker, and her mother, a homemaker, instilled in her the values that honor family. Both parents complemented each other, Anne recalls. Her father taught her much about integrity and work ethics. Anne's mother alerted her to the plight of the needy living within every community. These values have brought balance to her life and shaped her into a confident, compassionate, and deeply caring woman.

Like many young people, Geoff spent his early college years planning what he was going to do with his life. He moved to Malibu in 1962, and after finishing high school, he attended Santa Monica



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Pictured: The Piero (top) and Medici residential projects

College for a year. He filled his days with course work and surfing the waves along Southern California's golden beaches. Always motivated to achieve, he enrolled in classes at the University of Colorado at Boulder, earning his undergraduate degree in finance and real estate. While completing his MBA at Boulder, where his entrepreneurial interests first developed, Geoff decided to apply to law school. He always knew that a law degree would enhance his business prospects.

Growing up in Los Angeles, Geoff had heard of Pepperdine and he learned that the college had moved to Malibu. More importantly, he learned that it was starting a new law school. He saw this as the perfect opportunity to continue his education in a way that made sense to him, as well as a chance to move home. His assumption, however, that Pepperdine's law school was in Malibu in those early years was mistaken.

In 1969, in a deal brokered by Edward Di Loreto and then Pepperdine president, Norvel Young, the Orange University College of Law, founded in 1964, became the Pepperdine School of Law. Many changes took place within the new Pepperdine law school, but as Geoff was soon to learn, the campus remained in Orange County. He recalls the early campus looked like a "little motel" but still Geoff enrolled, took law classes in Anaheim and Santa Ana, and moved to Newport Beach.

He looks back admiringly on his law school days as rich and fruitful, and recalls studying wills and trusts with Charles Nelson, constitutional law with Jim McGoldrick, and criminal law with Lagard Smith. Geoff's internship as a clerk for Superior Court Judge Kenny Williams confirmed what he knew previously—he was not interested in law as a profession. But his law degree did round out his business degree. Geoff reflects on the contracts course taught by Ron Phillips and acknowledges that it provided a strong, ethical, and practical foundation for much of his business dealings even today.

In addition to this training, Geoff needed grooming. He required what every aspiring entrepreneur needs to prepare for the grueling world of high finance and real estate development: a master teacher. According to Palmer, Mel Kauffman was typecast for the part. "He was 48 and I was 25," says Geoff. "He was a hard-driving taskmaster and I was his apprentice." Through Kauffman's guidance, Geoff was introduced and then immersed into the risky but potentially rewarding world of residential real estate. Working as an emissary for Kauffman, he met creative and powerful entrepreneurs who provided yet another layer of practical training.

The nation's economy was just crawling out from under the weight of the 1975 recession, and Kauffman and Palmer took advantage of the upturn. Together, the master and the apprentice developed several highly successful projects. The partnership continued for two and a half years, but by the late 70s, Geoff yearned to launch his own business. He had developed a strong understanding of the local market, and he had ideas and dreams of his own. Fortified with his newly earned capital and knowledge, Geoff decided to go it alone.

In 1978, he started G. H. Palmer Associates and began developing condominiums for sale throughout Southern California. Less capital was needed in outlying areas such as the Santa Clarita Valley, so Geoff started there. By 1984, G. H. Palmer Associates was generating a significant amount of capital and the company began developing income properties exclusively to hold.

By this time, Anne was making plans of her own to move to Southern California. After she completed her undergraduate degree from Lyon University, she moved to the United States to become proficient in the English language and explore what America had to offer. She fully intended to return home someday to her beloved France. Not many people would be so inclined to launch from the safety and security of a community as closely knit as hers, but Anne Palmer's curiosity and confidence paved the way. Los Angeles, she observed, offered a different way of life and thinking.

Once in the U.S. she enrolled at UCLA Extension and worked during weekends at a deli on the Westside. During an early morning shift, Geoff, never shy, asked permission to call her. Anne thought that was both bold and polite. He called her exactly when he had agreed to and his promptness impressed her. Their first date came in the summer of 1988 at a French restaurant in Santa Monica called Michael's. During dinner the first of many political debates erupted and resolved.

Lively political debate is very much a part of their married life. She sees in Geoff some of the conservatism of her father, which she respects, but she is also guided personally by the centrist views of her mother. The couple often discusses politics and the challenges facing society both locally and globally, and rarely see things exactly the same way. As far as Anne is concerned, that is as it should be. It provides that familiar balance she experienced in her childhood home. After their marriage, Anne resumed her higher education and obtained a master's degree in counseling psychology at Antioch University of Southern California.

These days, Anne is as likely to be dining with the President one evening, as she and Geoff did during President Bush's most recent visit to the Southland, as she is, in the same week, to be hosting a group of supporters of Friends of the Family, a local family resource center. She is passionate about the work of FOF, located in Van Nuys, California, where

she completed her internship as a family therapist. She is not hesitant to say that she uses Geoff's success to support its cause. Ask her about the value of their work and she quotes recent statistics about the plight of teenage mothers, disadvantaged children, and fragile families, and she will tell you how Friends of the Family is helping more than 5,000 families each year.

Geoff is enthusiastic about Anne's work and very supportive. He, too, pursues several philanthropic interests including the Los Angeles Music Center and the Fund for the Performing Arts. But besides his love for Anne and their son, Grant Henri Palmer, Geoff is passionate about polo. An internationally rated polo player, he takes the sport seriously. He travels often and fields several teams.

He plays throughout the year on grounds as close as Santa Barbara and as far away as Argentina and France. Geoff is currently the chairman of the Eldorado Polo Club in Indio and past director of the Santa Barbara Polo Club.

Polo is not just a personal passion. Geoff makes the sport a family affair. At only 4 years old, Grant has already joined Pee Wee Polo. Anne sees the sport as something positive that Grant can share with his father, and she finds the community of polo players to be a wholesome environment as it brings together animals, human beings, and nature.



Few people enjoy the fruits of opportunity the way the Palmers do. Their family life, coupled with international travel, dinner with heads of state, and their Beverly Hills estate, impress the casual observer as idyllic. But such rewards come to people who have vision and the courage to seek opportunities and capitalize on them.

The Palmers are rooted in their value system: family, hard work, and service to the community are placed above all things. Through people like Geoff and Anne Palmer, communities like Los Angeles are renewed and strengthened, lives are changed, and progress realized. ▶



Polo provides a wholesome and tradition-rich activity for the entire Palmer family. Anne believes that it is important for their son, Grant, to share an interest in the same sport as his father. "It is very good for children to share a common sport with their parents," she says. "When teenagers enter the difficult years they need to develop their own identity but still need their parents. A common sport provides a gathering activity. If they can't get together at the dinner table, they can gather around the sport."