

# The Treasures of Walt Disney: Disney Exhibit at the Ronald Reagan Library

by Gerri Smoluk, PassPorter Guest Contributor

[D23](#), the Official Disney Fan Club and the Walt Disney Archives have put together a wonderful exhibit at The [Reagan Library](#) in Simi Valley, California, about 35 miles north of Los Angeles.

The Treasures of Walt Disney exhibit is the largest (~ 12,000 square feet) ever put together by the Walt Disney Archives and features more than 500 pieces of Disney memorabilia. The exhibit officially opened on July 6th, 2012.

When I saw that D23 was hosting a preview event at the Ronald Reagan Library, I decided this was something I shouldn't pass up, even though I live in Northern California. I had never been to the Reagan Library but had been curious, and I love all things Disney, so this seemed to have my name all over it. I wasn't alone at this sellout event -- I met a number of other people from Northern California who also made the drive down for the weekend. We stayed at the Best Western [Posada Royale Hotel & Suites](#), less than 3 miles from the museum, a very nice hotel with reasonable rates that includes a cooked-to-order breakfast.

□ The Reagan Library is located on top of a mountain in Simi Valley with spectacular views, and the weather was perfect. At first glance the Reagan Library may seem like an odd place to hold this event, but President Reagan and Walt Disney were good friends and had worked together in Hollywood. Ronald Reagan was also one of the television hosts for the opening of Disneyland in 1955.

□ Quite a number of items in the collection paid tribute to presidential visits to Disney parks; all but one President since Truman (Johnson is the only exception) as well as quite a number of foreign heads of state have been Disney's guest. The collection includes photos and letters from all the presidents who have visited a Disney Park. One of my favorite items was a picture of then-Governor Clinton along with Mrs. Clinton, Chelsea, and Donald Duck, all wearing Donald Duck hats for Donald's 50th birthday.

Both the Disney event and the Reagan Museum were open for the evening exclusively for the event attendees, and there was a lot to see! The Treasure of Walt Disney included original artifacts, props, costumes, models, and the artwork of artists, architects, animators, and designers who have, for nearly nine decades, contributed to Disney's legacy.

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□ In my opinion, two of the most special pieces are one of the original animator's desks designed and used by the Walt Disney Company (and perhaps by Walt himself), and Walt Disney's Disneyland ID badge (number 001). There were also lots of costumes and props from movies like *Mary Poppins*, *The Shaggy Dog*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Tron*, *The Avengers*, and *National Treasure*. One of the most interesting exhibits was the life-size busts of all the presidents, used to make the animatronics characters for the Hall of Presidents attraction at Walt Disney World. With the exception of President Obama, all the busts were sculpted by the same artist, Blaine Gibson. As you may know, Mr. Gibson also created the famous statue of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse called "Partners," which is found in the central hub at Disneyland Park and in Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom.

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□ Another historic piece in the collection is a small mechanical bird in a golden cage from the early 1900s. This is said to be Walt's inspiration for the "Enchanted Tiki Room" birds, which were the first animatronics Walt created.

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□ The Reagan Museum was also open and includes multi-media exhibits on Ronald Reagan's Hollywood days, a full-size replica of the oval office, a piece of the Berlin Wall, and the Air Force One plane he used. You can walk through the 707 jet and see just how small it is. I was surprised to find out that members of the press who fly on Air Force One are required to purchase first class tickets. Air Force One is housed in its own wing at the museum, with a huge 3-story window. This made a spectacular setting for the event's buffet dinner, which included Walt Disney's favorite chili.

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□ Another special part of the preview event was that all the Disney archivists and D23 staff, including Chief Archivist Emeritus Dave Smith, were at the event to talk with the guests. Mr. Smith was signing copies of his new book, *Disney Trivia from the Vault*. Disney Imagineer, Bob Gurr, was also on hand to autograph his own book, *Design: Just for Fun*. Mr. Gurr, a Disney Legend, is responsible for designing many of the ride vehicles in Disneyland.

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□ I highly recommend you visit both the Treasures of Walt Disney and The Reagan Library exhibits if you are in Southern California. The exhibit will be open through April 30, 2013.

*About The Author: Gerri is a Disney fan, a Disney pin collector, and a member of D23. She just returned from her sixth Disney cruise, on the Fantasy, and is looking forward to her next trip to Disneyland Resort to see Cars Land and Buena Vista Street.*

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