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PRESS RELEASE

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The Doo Wop Movement: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?

by Mike D'Angelo

Before the "real estate mania" of 2003-2007, there was **real change** beginning to happen in the Wildwoods. No, it wasn't the "tear everything down and build thousands of look-alike condos" kind of change, but rather, it was a serious effort to revitalize, grow and evolve the Wildwoods on the basis of their well-preserved, quirky character and heritage that came to be described as "Doo Wop" - and it was a plan endorsed by some of the nation's best and brightest urban design professionals, Ivy League universities, architects, historians, government officials and top media outlets.

That's right. Before there was "condo flipping", "demolition sales" and "pre-construction pricing" there was ONE thing driving the Wildwood revival and renewed interest and investment in the resort; that one thing was the Doo Wop Preservation League and our efforts to promote the Wildwoods' one-of-a-kind "Doo Wop Motel District" and inspire its transformation into a world-class historic attraction and resort destination - a world-class tribute to mid-20th century leisure and lifestyle and the classic American shore vacation.

As it was envisioned nearly a decade ago, the revitalized "Doo Wop Motel District" would become a world-famous destination on par with the Art Deco District in Miami's South Beach and the Victorian Historic District in Cape May. In addition to a preservation district, new development and new construction throughout the resort would take its inspiration from the 1950s and 60s-era motels with similarly whimsical, fantastical and futuristic designs. The "new" Wildwoods would simply be a bigger, better, more contemporary version of the old, with all the quirky charms intact - some old, some new.

Fast forward to 2009. We've had some remarkable successes (resurrection of the old Surfside Restaurant as the new Doo Wop Experience museum; the dramatic restoration of the Caribbean Motel - now listed on the National Register of Historic Places; the historically-sensitive renovation and expansion of the '60s-era Shalimar Motel, etc..) and some obvious failures (the loss of Doo Wop classics like the Satellite Motel, Casa Bahama Motel, Wildwood Diner and others). While some never gave Doo Wop much of a chance to succeed from the start, and others wrote it off after the seemingly unstoppable wave of demolitions between 2004 and 2006, many others have since come to lend their support - including local residents, numerous motel owners, potential investors, and even developers in the Wildwoods. A majority of stakeholders in the community have now finally come to understand what the Doo Wop movement was always really supposed to be all about - ensuring the long-term success and survival of the Wildwoods as a distinctive resort destination with increasing national and even international appeal.

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That's not to say that progress has come easily; indeed not, as both sides of the preservation argument have learned some tough lessons in recent years to reach the point where a consensus is finally emerging. Preservationists have come to realize that they need to make concessions and compromises in order to give Doo Wop a realistic chance at succeeding. As such, our recent efforts have focused largely on creating incentives and helping owners of Doo Wop properties expand and even re-build their properties - rather than freeze-drying - to make preservation more feasible and more profitable. Likewise, developers have come to realize that Doo Wop is good business; it offers the Wildwoods an opportunity to market a product - 1950s-style fun and fantasy - that no other resort can offer, especially during these troubled economic times. Doo Wop Architecture gives the Wildwoods character, cachet, and notoriety - things that can only further help to enhance the resort's reputation and make future developments more viable - as any smart businessperson understands. Doo Wop can be made to entice both the "upscale", design-conscious visitor (see the 1950s-inspired resorts of Palm Springs, CA) and the traditional family looking for some good old-fashioned fun at the shore. There is really nothing to lose when it comes to Doo Wop Preservation - only a whole lot to gain. It just takes a little vision to see the bigger picture.

The overbuilding of condominiums in certain areas of the resort is bad business for everyone involved - they have over-saturated the resort's second-home market and have reduced the visual appeal of the Wildwoods by diluting the community's historic character. These factors have combined to lower property values and discourage new investment in the resort. If left to continue, this will threaten or even negate the Wildwoods' long-deserved opportunity to capitalize on its national recognition. The rest of the world finds the Wildwoods unique and interesting because of the prevalence of Doo Wop architecture - not the excess of beige condominiums. If you eliminate Doo Wop, you eliminate much of what was responsible for starting the Wildwood revival in the first place; talk about killing the goose that laid the golden egg!

The economic downturn has slowed the pressure to tear down and re-develop historic motels as condos. A sizeable district of Doo Wop motels remains intact - primarily along Ocean Avenue in the upper portion of Wildwood Crest - having survived the condo boom relatively unscathed. Support is now increasing amongst property owners and residents in the area to establish a formal historic district - as the Doo Wop Preservation League has long lobbied for - to ensure that the remaining motels and the unique character of the district remain intact for future generations to enjoy - and for the Wildwoods to capitalize on.

However, despite the recent successes, there is still much work to be done. Saving the motels from demolition is one thing. The next, even more important step is to make restoration and re-invention of the motels more financially feasible so that these cute but crumbling relics can be updated and transformed into modern boutique-style lodging - just like South Beach's Art Deco Hotels - that capture the glitz and glamour of 1950/60s Wildwood but with a modern twist that includes 21st-century amenities and services. This has always been the ultimate goal of the Doo Wop Preservation League - to re-establish the Wildwoods as a distinctively modern resort community with a uniquely nostalgic touch - and we feel we are getting closer than we've ever been before to achieving our goal.

Now, perhaps more than ever before, we **need** the continued vocal support of property owners, residents, visitors, and anyone else with an interest and/or tie to the Wildwoods and the resort's historic architecture as we make a final push towards securing the "Doo Wop Motel District" and encouraging a "master plan" for the future that would allow condos, second homes, future high-rises and other forms of new development (which are inevitable) to peacefully and profitably co-exist with Doo Wop Motels so the Wildwoods can reach their full potential as much more than just another plain-jane seashore community - but as America's one and only "Doo Wop" beach resort by the sea - a resort with style, substance, history and character.

If we can save our unique history, we can secure our unique future. No one in the Wildwoods can argue with that - and we don't know why anyone would want to.

Sincerely,

The Doo Wop Preservation League