

The 'Wright' party

The Gordon House celebrates the famed architect's birthday

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Approximately 200 people came to the Gordon House at the Oregon Garden Saturday to celebrate Frank Lloyd Wright's 139th birthday with ideal summer weather, free cake and vintage cars.



Danielle Kuehnel / Appeal Tribune

The Gordon House, completed in 1964 by Burton Goodrich (one of Wright's Taliesin Fellows) five years after Wright's death, moved from its original Wilsonville location to its spot at The Oregon Garden in 2001.

"The site was selected because it's reminiscent of the original site," said Jack Witt, a volunteer tour guide for the Gordon House. "It's still surrounded by forest, and the house even remained in the same direction after its move — facing north."

While Witt admitted that the house is “not spectacular,” he said it’s unique because of its individual Usonian features. The Usonian-design era was marked theoretically by Wright’s belief that middle-class families should be able to live inexpensively yet elegantly.

“The simple fact that this is not a cookie-cutter house and that it was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright makes it unique,” Witt said.

Gordon House visitor Bill Hellie of Salem agrees.

“At the turn of the century, when everyone was building salt-box houses, Frank Lloyd Wright was building beautiful houses,” Hellie said, pointing to the Gordon House.

He and his wife, Fern, came to the house Saturday not only to marvel at the unique architecture, but also to celebrate Wright’s love of cars. The Hellies, vintage-car aficionados themselves, brought two of their own brands: a midnight-blue Mustang and a 1940 Lincoln Zephyr Continental Cabriole. The teal Cabriole, they said, is one of the same models that Wright owned during his lifetime. The car is in mint condition, after a fresh coat of paint and new red-leather interior.

Guests also participated in a People’s Choice Award activity Saturday, where they were able to vote for their favorite car featured at the house.

The Hellies’ Cabriole took home the award for the people’s favorite vintage car. Silverton Mayor Ken Hector also chose the 1940 ride as the winner of the Mayor’s Choice Award.

“This is the second year in a row that an automobile won both the People’s Choice Award and the Mayor’s Choice Award,” said Gordon House Manager Molly Murphy. “The Lincoln had a slightly better chance of winning, though, because it was Frank Lloyd Wright’s favorite. It was definitely a success.”

The couple behind the wheel of the winning car also own Hellie Automobile Co. in Salem, opened in 1908 by Bill’s grandfather, and is part of the Northwest Vintage Car and Motorcycle Museum, where most of the cars at the Gordon House Saturday were procured.

The Taylors also came out Saturday to see the vintage cars. While Jill Taylor preferred the 1938 Buick Open Coupe, her husband, Ferren, enjoyed the vintage Volkswagen Beetle.

“The Bug’s my favorite,” he said. “I used to have a blue one.”

Visitors are invited to explore the Gordon House and its well-manicured grounds May through September, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call (503) 874-6006 for more information.

