

A Dead-letter day



BILL LOVEJOY — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Bob Weir, left, and Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead answer questions at Thursday's news conference announcing the gift of the band's archives to UC-Santa Cruz.

Band's archives getting a final resting place at UC-Santa Cruz library

By Lisa M. Krieger
Mercury News

The Grateful Dead's long strange trip through American popular culture is landing in a library at the University of California-Santa Cruz, preserved for future generations of study by scholars and stoners.

Three decades worth of archival materials — from business records to stage backdrops — have been donated by the band to the school's McHenry Library, where a room called Dead Central is being dedicated to a beloved band dubbed “the largest unofficial religion in the world.”

UC-Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal joined Dead drummer Mickey Hart and guitarist and singer Bob Weir in a buoyant press conference Thursday at San Francisco's aging Fillmore Auditorium, the site of 51 Dead concerts. In honor of the event, Blumenthal was given a tie-dyed T-shirt.

“All of this stuff doesn't belong to us — it belongs to the culture that spawned us,” Weir said. “It seemed like getting it into a campus archive, with



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UC-Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal shows off his new tie-dyed fashions Thursday.

access for the people in the community that gave rise to it, was the right thing to do.”

The seaside campus was the “most enthusiastic” and “organized,” which helped it edge out two heavyweight suitors, Stanford and UC-Berkeley, Weir said.

“Santa Cruz is the seat of the neo-bohemian culture that we're a facet of,” Weir said. “So there

BACKGROUND ON THE COLLECTION

Before Thursday, fans wondered about the purpose of the news conference. Some feared for band members' health. Others predicted a Barack Obama endorsement. There were the inevitable rumors of a summer tour. News that the archives were moving to UC-Santa Cruz — a city the band is believed to have played only once, in 1983 — was met with jubilation. “Let's all enroll!” wrote one fan. Other facts revealed Thursday:

Stanford University expressed interest in the collection, given the band's early Palo Alto and Menlo Park connections. Bassist Phil Lesh pays tuition to the school; his son Grahame is a junior there. UC-Berkeley also made a pitch.

Eileen Law, who had stored the material all these years, was hired in 1972 to take care of the Deadheads. It was her voice on the popular mail-order tickets hotline. The birth of her daughter Cassidy inspired the song of the same name.

Originally, the vision was for the archives to be showcased in a San Francisco-based Dead museum called Terrapin Station, after a popular album. That changed after Jerry Garcia's death.

The collection will be moved to Santa Cruz this summer. In phases, it will be cataloged, repackaged and preserved with acid-free materials. Much will be digitized. Stored in the school's Special Collections department, some of it may be seen by the public when the renovated library opens in fall 2009.

Source: Mercury News reporting

DEAD | Band's papers, artifacts find a home at UC-Santa Cruz

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could not have been a more cozy place for this collection to land."

The gift does not contain any of the band's vast musical recordings; those are stored in a Southern California vault belonging to producer Rhino Entertainment. The university said it will work with Rhino on how to access musical material.

But it does contain valuable artifacts that document the band's ascendance into one of California's most durable and influential musical phenomena. Currently held in a 2,000-square-foot San Rafael warehouse, the collection includes the Dead's first recording contract, life-size skeletons of band members used in the 1987 "Touch of Grey" video, and an estimated 50,000 to 75,000 fan letters from around the world, many decorated with elaborate art.

"What you'll see is our conversation with the people who loved us, and vice versa," Hart said.

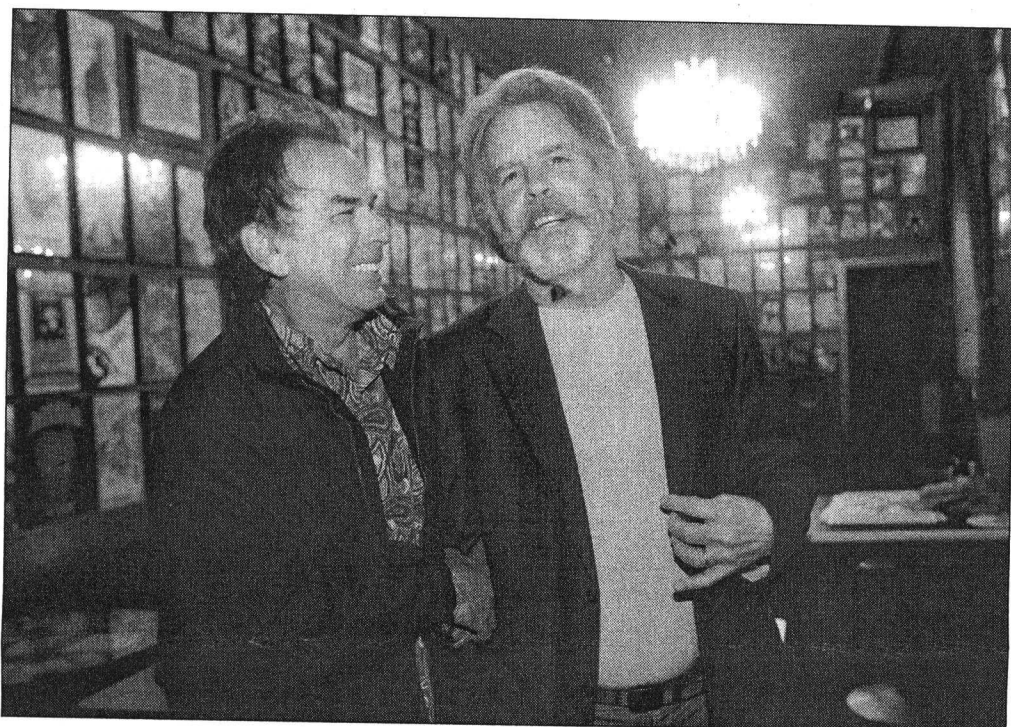
A blue-chip team including several Silicon Valley-based fans — among them venture capitalist and musician Roger McNamee — will oversee a \$2 million fundraising campaign for the archive. Seagate Technology CEO Bill Watkins has volunteered technical support.

Formal academics never meant much to the Dead.

But fans say their image-rich lyrics about such themes as love, trust and rebirth are worthy of scholarship. The song "Box of Rain" is as central to Deadheads as Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" was to Beats and T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" was to Modernists.

For musicologists, there is value in studying how the Dead's repertoire updated many of the nation's older musical traditions, from bluegrass to jazz, said Fred Lieberman, a UC-Santa Cruz music professor.

"They were the quintessential American band," said Lieberman, who first proposed the archive idea to Hart, with



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Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart, left, called the archive "our conversation with the people who loved us." "It belongs to the culture that spawned us," bandmate Bob Weir said.



Eileen Law has been the Grateful Dead's archivist since the 1970s.

whom he has collaborated on three books. This will boost the university's scholarship on American culture, he said.

However, the gift may do little to help the university shed its image as a mecca of hacky sack and patchouli oil — and, in fact, is likely to attract a tie-dyed pilgrimage. In recent years, the school has worked to refocus attention on its am-

bitious scientific research efforts. It has even cracked down on its traditional April marijuana smoke-in at Porter Meadow, barring non-students and overnight guests.

Campus librarians said they would welcome Deadheads to the grassy lawn outside the library.

The library already has the vast and eclectic archive of the late Aptos composer Lou Harrison, and was looking to expand.

"This is the first step toward having a library that is a destination for scholars interested in studying an important aspect of America's vernacular music," he said.

The survival of the archives through turbulent decades is due to a devoted staffer named Eileen Law, who was hired in 1972 to take care of the Deadheads and who worked with the band for the next 34 years.

Among other jobs, she tended the mail that flooded into a San Rafael post office box.

"Pretty soon I found myself being the keeper of everything — press clips, posters, all

their vinyl. I kept getting more and more stuff," she said. "Everything I could collect, I did."

At the press conference, UC-Santa Cruz librarians assured Law, who is unemployed, that she'll play an important role in the cataloging of the material.

"I had faith that something good would someday happen to it," Law said, grinning.

Fans rejoiced at the news of the gift — and instantly began offering their own contributions to the collection.

"Can we submit material?" one fan asked on the band's Web site. "I have my own stash — much of it from the parking lot scene, '83-'95."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

See http://library.ucsc.edu/speccoll/GD_archive.html or e-mail grateful@ucsc.edu.

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