

L.A. honors its modern Medicis

Chamber of Commerce lauds business' art patrons

By Hunter Drohojowska

In the name of legendary art supporter Lorenzo the Magnificent, of Italy's great Medici clan, they gathered in a pseudo-Roman villa overlooking Malibu beach. They came to dine on roast beef, cheesecake and California wine, and to honor the modern-day equivalents of Renaissance art patrons.

"These are the modern Medicis," enthused Caroline Ahmanson, standing in the marble foyer of the J. Paul Getty Museum to greet the guests. "We're giving awards to the large and growing companies who've made a significant contribution to the cultural resources of the community." They also honored charter members of what is called the "Two-Percent Club," those organizations who pledge two percent of their profits (before taxes) to charitable organizations.

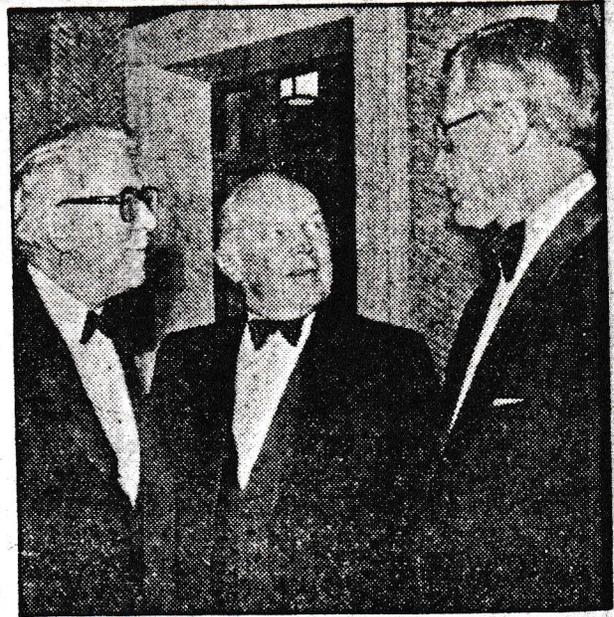
This is the first awarding of the Medici awards, which will continue annually, according to Ahmanson, chairperson of the cultural resources committee of the L.A. Area Chamber of Commerce. (Next year she will become chair of the chamber itself, the first woman selected to the post in the 95-year history of the organization.)

"If we spotlight the companies who contribute to this philosophy, we can inspire other businesses to participate in supporting the arts," said Ahmanson. "We started with seven, because that's a lucky number. These were the most obvious (corporations)."

The winners are familiar corporate giants: Atlantic Richfield Company, Carter Hawley Hale Stores, Inc., Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, Parsons Corp., Security Pacific National Bank, and Times Mirror Corp. The only surprise award went to Ratkovich, Bowers Inc., a medium-size company, whose contributions come in the form of saving L.A.'s landmark buildings, such as the Wiltern and Pellesier Buildings in mid-Wilshire.

The chief executive officers of the corporations accepted hand-decorated Renaissance scrolls. Their corporations also paid the \$100 per plate for some 150 guests who dined in the columned courtyard. The profits go to the Chamber of Commerce.

Edward Carter of Carter Hawley Hale, the parent company for Neiman-Marcus and other posh department stores (and a collector of 17th-century Dutch paintings), personally spearheaded a campaign which raised over \$50 million for the L.A. County Museum of



Also attending the awards dinner were O.C. Roddey, left, Robert O. Anderson and Lloyd E. Johnson.

Art. He is also on the board of the Music Center, L.A. Philharmonic, and San Francisco Opera. Of the connection between business and the arts, Carter said, "When I was 40, and the head of a major corporation, I decided to devote one-third of my time to things other than business — to education, art and music. These associations are useful to your perspective and in your judgments of business affairs, particularly in the higher echelons, because the matters your dealing with are intangible and longer term."

Among the massive contributions to the arts from ARCO in the last year were a \$3 million challenge grant to L.A. County Museum of Art and \$1 million to the new Museum of Contemporary Art. Robert O. Anderson, chief executive officer, said the decision to support both operations was partially his. "I don't see the various museums in a competitive sense, but as complimenting each other. I find the arts too large for any institution to encompass by itself. I've always believed a corporation has a definite relationship with the community in which it conducts its business. Cultural and charitable organizations make up the character of a community."

A subtle undercurrent of partisan politics ran through the evening ceremonies. Two years ago, the president had asked big business to contribute more actively to the arts, filling the gaps left by cuts in federal spending, and these are a few of the corporations who met the challenge. Washington's endorsement was made clear by the presence of Reagan-appointed chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts, Frank Hodsoll, who presented the awards. He was introduced by Armand Deutsche, a representative of the President's Committee for the Arts and Humanities. In addition, the first lady sent a congratulatory telegram which was read by Getty president Harold Williams.

Ahmanson proudly noted that the awards "coincide with President Reagan's plan to involve the private sector in supporting the arts."

These really are the modern Medicis.



Gathering to honor art patrons at Friday night's Medici Awards benefit, from left: Armand Deutsch, Edward Carter, Harriet Deutsch, Frank Hodsoll, Wayne Ratkovich and event chairperson Caroline L. Ahmanson.