

Uncommon Valor: WWII through the Eyes of Tom Lea & Admiral Chester W. Nimitz

ONE might wonder why Tom Lea and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz would be featured in our next curriculum for high school history. Both men represented uncompromising examples of sterling character during battles in World War II's Pacific Theater. The curriculum will introduce high school students to the character of Tom Lea, as the first and finest embedded artist correspondent for *Life* magazine, and Admiral Nimitz, commander in chief of the United States Pacific Fleet during WWII. Students learn about the war through examples of character and leadership that were essential for victory then and are vital to success now. Art and writings by Tom Lea and stories about the difficult choices made by Admiral Nimitz will challenge students to emulate their character qualities.

Tom Lea met Admiral Nimitz in Pearl Harbor after he completed a three-month stint on the aircraft carrier *Hornet*. In the words of Tom Lea, "The admiral broke the silence. 'Lea -' he said, with a different tone of voice, 'When Waldo Drake got that call from Hickam, he didn't know if you knew or not. We brought you over here to find out if you did. You don't, and I hate to tell you. You are a sensitive man. Something has happened to your ship. We lost *Hornet* last night.'



U.S.S. Hornet. Watercolor on paper, 10 X 14. Life Collection of Art WWII, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Chester W. Nimitz had tears in his eyes. I saw them. There in his office I learned of *Hornet's* valiant death. I cried later." Since all photos and records went down with the *USS Hornet*, Lea's work is the last record of service aboard the ship.

The name of the curriculum comes from a quote by Nimitz, "Among the men who fought on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue." The Institute is partnering with the National Museum of the Pacific War in

Fredericksburg, Texas, and the premier district of choice, Northside ISD in San Antonio. It will include a Teacher's Guide, visual presentation, a tour of the museum organized by Education Director Brian Degner, and a professionally produced video featuring museum President and CEO General Michael W. Hagee, USMC (Retired), who will relate stories about the character of Admiral Nimitz.

— Holly Packard Cobb,
Director of Education

Tom Lea
INSTITUTE

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Spring has sprung

... AND summer is on its way to the Tom Lea Institute. As the school year comes to close and the number of tours decreases, now is a time for planning, grant writing and catching our breath.

This year, summer promises to be an especially busy season and it's time for **Summer Camp!!!** Once again our fearless education crew will be training teachers and lending expertise for the middle school summer camp in the Ysleta Independent School District. The theme is drawn from our WWII curriculum *World War II: Through the Eyes of Tom Lea*. We are working with numerous partners to ensure that the students have a wonderful educational experience. During the camp, students will assemble models of WWII aircraft while learning about Tom Lea's war experiences, especially the time he spent in the Pacific Theater. The camp includes a field trip to the War Eagles Air Museum in Santa Teresa, where students will be able to see vintage aircraft similar to those depicted in Tom Lea's works and visit with some incredibly knowledgeable volunteers. If you haven't been to the War Eagles Air Museum, it has a fascinating collection of vintage aircraft, vehicles, and military memorabilia. The museum should definitely be on your list of summer vacation stops.

Lea's motion picture legacy

Also this summer, the Institute will be a sponsor of the **Plaza Classic Film Festival**. Now in its 11th year, the festival was started by the El Paso Community Foundation as a project to bring movies back to the historic Plaza Theatre. The Community Foundation purchased 35mm and state-of-the-art digital projection equipment for the theater, which opened in 1930, closed in the early '80s, and was restored for \$38 million in 2006 in a joint partnership between the City of El Paso and the Community Foundation. This year we are pleased to announce the showing of two classic films adapted from novels written by Tom Lea: *The Wonderful Country* starring Julie London and Robert Mitchum and *The Brave Bulls*, featuring Mel Ferrer, Anthony Quinn, and Miroslava. At the El Paso Museum of History, visitors will find a display of El Paso film memorabilia including movie posters and photographs from our collection and perhaps a few hidden treasures from Tom Lea's papers at the C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department of the University of Texas at El Paso Library. The Plaza Classic Film Festival takes place August 2-12 and we hope to see you there.

Plans for Tom Lea Month 2018

With time moving so quickly **Tom Lea Month** is on the horizon. Outreach Coordinator Sarah Prezioso has been busy making plans for the 2018 celebration. Already on the calendar – programs in six cities, three states and two countries. There will be an exhibit at the El Paso Museum of Art; lectures by art historians and history professors; participation in the City's Chalk the Block Festival; walking tours of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso; demonstrations at the Magoffin Home; and reenactments and performances hosted by the El Paso County Sheriff's Posse. A full schedule of activities will be published in the summer newsletter. It should be an exciting time for all and you don't want to miss a thing.

— Lisa M. Pugh, Executive Director



“Challenge imaginations to look at the norm and expand its potential.”

– Nevena Christi,
Rocketbuster Handmade Custom Boots

“I Love El Paso”

EVERY February the Institute hosts an “I Love El Paso” event where we celebrate and highlight local businesses and locally-made goods. This year we invited Nevena Christi from Rocketbuster Handmade Custom Boots to share her fresh perspective on the advantages of entrepreneurship in El Paso with invited guests and students of UTEP’s College of Business Administration and the



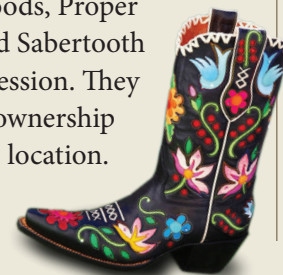
Nevena Christi, far right, with other El Paso entrepreneurs

MBA at their quarterly Lunch and Lead series. Nevena’s company draws thousands of customers from all over the world, including Sharon Stone, Whoopi Goldberg, Taylor Swift, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, just to name a few. As an artist who never wanted to make anything twice, Nevena built demand for one-of-a-kind designs while elevating the world of American handmade cowboy boots.

Her talk focused on adapting to the environment around you so that your business can thrive, or as she put it, “terraforming.” She emphasized that the workplace should not be a place where your employees feel boxed in, conforming to past norms, but should be a place that breeds creativity and the “F” word – FUN – no matter the type of work. Nevena also talked about how employee backgrounds and schooling do not necessarily mean that is where their passion lies.

Having “barista-engineers” and “journalist-gym owners” or as she calls them “super hero” titles, is becoming the new norm. Often, the best employees come from non-traditional backgrounds. She drove that fact home by inviting a handful of entrepreneurs who run successful businesses here in El Paso who also come from non-traditional backgrounds. The owners of Savage Goods, Proper Print Shop, Pronto Body Shop, Hybrid Fitness, and Sabertooth restaurant presented during the Lunch and Lead session. They described their unconventional starts to business ownership and detailed why El Paso was their choice start-up location.

– Sarah Prezioso, Outreach Coordinator

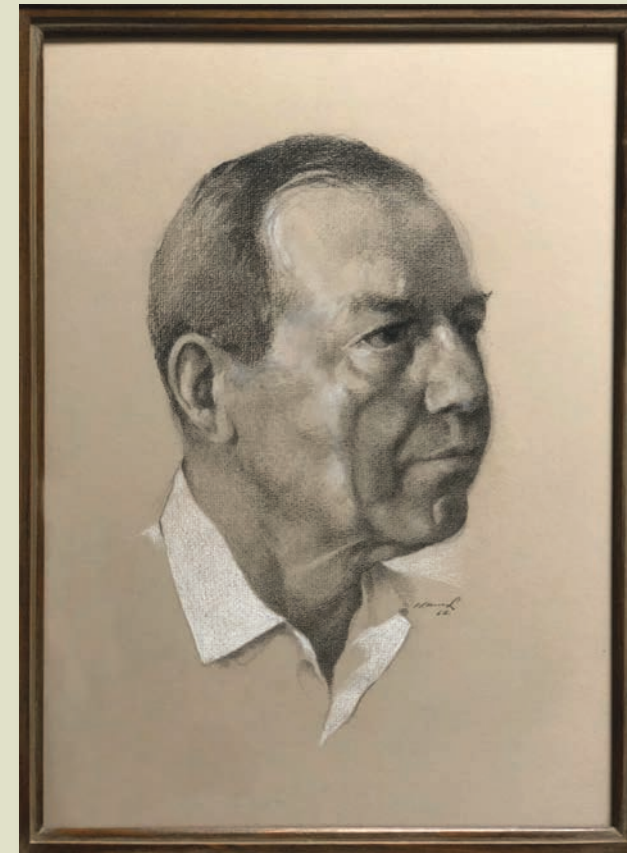


Recent Gifts

WE have received two wonderful donations to add to our collection! One is a generous gift from Jack Diamond – a charcoal portrait of Tom Lea, dated 1963 and signed H. Schreck. The other is a rare copy of *In the Crucible of the Sun*, gifted by St. Mary’s School in Medford, Oregon.

Horst Schreck, the portraitist, was born in 1885 in Herisau, Switzerland. He arrived in the United States in 1906 and worked as an apprentice printer in Cincinnati, Ohio. Legend has it that he entered a nationwide logo contest and one of his designs was chosen, winning a prize of \$2. The design was the “Little Dutch Girl” for Dutch Cleanser. Later he was accepted into the veterinary program at Indiana Veterinary College in Indianapolis. After graduation in 1916, he joined the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps and while serving in the Army he became a U.S. citizen. His last military assignment was at Ft. Bliss, Texas, in El Paso. As a veterinarian in private practice, he worked in El Paso until 1946. A man of many talents, Dr. Schreck designed several houses and two veterinary hospitals including the El Paso Veterinary Hospital on Texas Street. After his retirement, he moved to a 228-acre farm on North Loop Road. In the late 1950s, Dr. Schreck returned to his artwork and designed many of the floats for the Sun Carnival Parade. He was admired by his fellow El Paso artists including his good friends Tom Lea and Jose Cisneros. His beautiful portrait of Tom Lea now graces our conference room, welcoming people to the Institute.

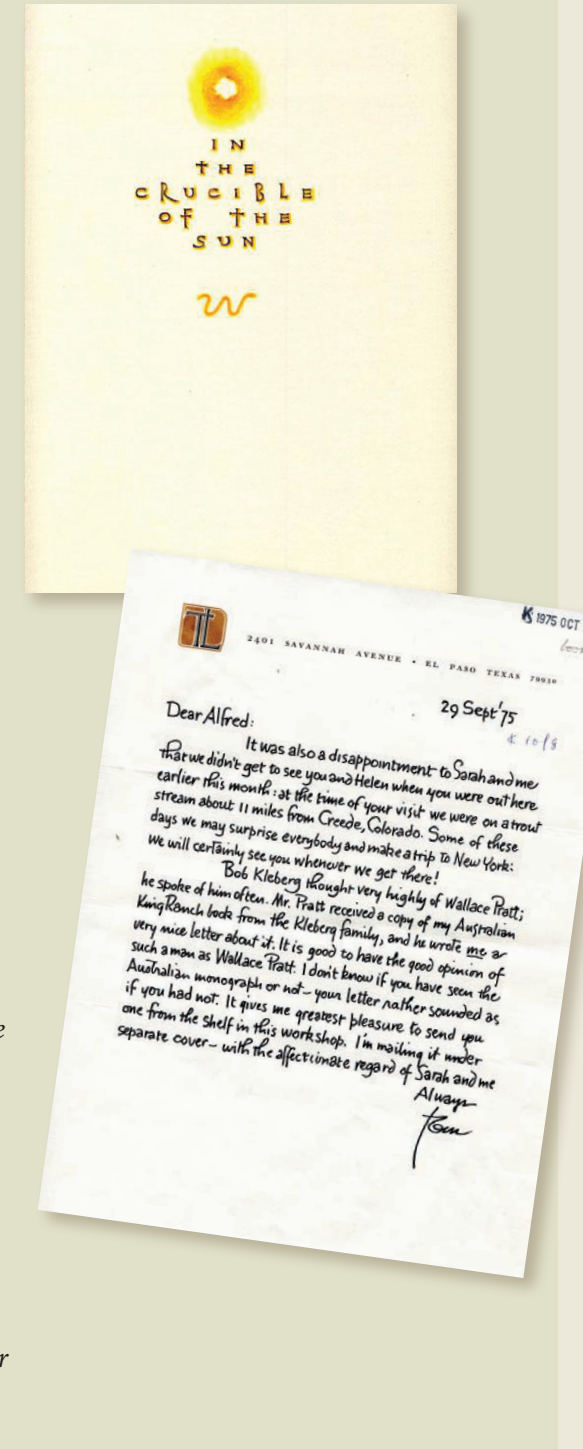
Our second acquisition was a copy of *In the Crucible of the Sun*, a book designed, written and illustrated by Tom Lea, detailing the history of King Ranch operations in Australia. The librarian from St. Mary’s School



contacted the Institute after she discovered the mint-condition book in their collection. Inside the book she found correspondence between Tom Lea and the publisher Alfred Knopf. Printed in a small edition, *In the Crucible of the Sun* is one of Tom Lea’s finest works. St. Mary’s wanted the book to go to a good home where it would be properly taken care of. We were thrilled to add it to our publications collection.

Do you have a Tom Lea and are wondering where to donate? Please contact us at the Institute; we’d be happy to assist you.

– Arturo Flores, Finance Manager



MEMORIALS

In remembrance of those who have passed – Virginia Hooten, Ann Pooley Boylan, Evelyn Goodman, Frances Jackson and Jennifer Riordan. Our sincere condolences to their families and loved ones. These remarkable women will most certainly be missed.

SEYMOUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BANQUET



Comanches, mural, 1942 Oil on canvas 5 x 13 feet 7 inches © James D. Lea.

Finding friends along the trail

SEYMOUR, Texas, is not far from the Oklahoma border, about halfway between Dallas and Lubbock. It’s located in what used to be called the Comancheria, the area dominated by the fierce mounted Indian warriors who lived on the southern Plains. Tom Lea painted the *Comanches* mural for the Seymour Post Office on N. Washington Street in 1942. The purpose of the New Deal murals was to lift the spirits of the American people and instill pride in the places where they lived. Bill Culver, a Seymour native, told me of going to the postage stamp window as a boy, thrilled to see the Comanche Indians on a war path, galloping overhead.

Bill attended the Seymour Chamber of Commerce banquet on March 3, where I was invited to speak. The Texas Country Reporter had aired a segment on Tom Lea’s murals a week prior, which may have contributed to the crowd of 140 people. Some had driven from Fort Worth, Wichita Falls and Vernon. Myra Busby, director of the Chamber, and Sis Hammack, the president, asked me to speak after the



Adair Margo gives her presentation in Seymour.

passage of Senate Bill 928, naming the Tom Lea Heritage Trail.

After a lunch of roast beef and baked potato and before being introduced, Tom Lea himself approached the podium. He let the audience know he lived on the “sunrise side” of Mount Franklin. The actor – Presbyterian minister Randy Branson – was so good that I sensed Tom Lea smiling! Then, through projected pictures, I shared the history to be discovered along the Tom Lea Trail. It includes the *Pass of the North* in El Paso, *The First Recorded Surgical Operation in North America* in Galveston, and the history of Mesilla in Las Cruces, New Mexico, along

with eleven additional stops.

I ended my presentation by showing “Luciano Cheles and the Tom Lea Trail,” the video my friend Laura Crawford made for me in 2014. It documents an Italian Renaissance scholar travelling through Texas, lecturing in cities about the correlations of Tom Lea’s murals and those of a 15th century Italian muralist. As Luciano speaks, he shares his thoughts on Seymour. How he stayed at Sis and Brad Hammack’s ranch. How he saw horses and got to ride one – a wonderful experience! The one thing that touched him most was how people treated him as a friend.

During my visit – as I stayed at the HH Creek Inn, ate in its Chuck Wagon Café, visited Tom’s mural and the Whiteside Museum – Luciano’s experience became my experience, too.

Yes, there is great art and history along the Tom Lea Trail, but its greatest bonus may be making new friends.

– Adair Margo, Founder