

# VENTURA COUNTY Showcase

## Portrait of a Ventura County folk artist

**BY KRISTI KELLOGG**  
SPECIAL TO STAR HOMES

When taking Route 66 in the 1950s, drivers eventually encountered a towering, larger-than-life sign of a dancing hula girl, signaling their arrival at Hula Ville. Part attraction and part museum, Hula Ville was folk artist and Ventura County native Miles Mahan's passion. Mahan, a poet and former circus worker, purchased a 2.5 acre plot of desert land in Hesperia and set about turning into a haven for art. The hula dancer was famed along Route 66, and people from far and wide stopped to visit Hula Ville, marveling at Mahan's artwork.

But who was Mahan the man? Local realtor and avid Ventura County history-buff Gwyn Goodman remembers him fondly – he was, after all, part of her extended family.

"He was just one of those characters," she said. "Every family has one."

Born in 1897, Mahan was known for his eccentric charm. He was considered a "true artist" by those that knew him. After all, only a true artist could turn a recycled sign from a Polynesian restaurant into the mainstay piece of art that the dancing hula girl became. Running through his artist's soul was also a streak of spontaneity. As a young man, Goodman said, he literally ran away with the circus when it passed through Ventura. He earned his wages guessing people's weights.

"(Mahan) is just a corner of our family tree, but a genuinely interesting one. He built commercial buildings, wrote poems, even crossed the lines of the law at times – but he was sincerely enjoyed by all, partly because we couldn't believe his escapades," said Goodman.

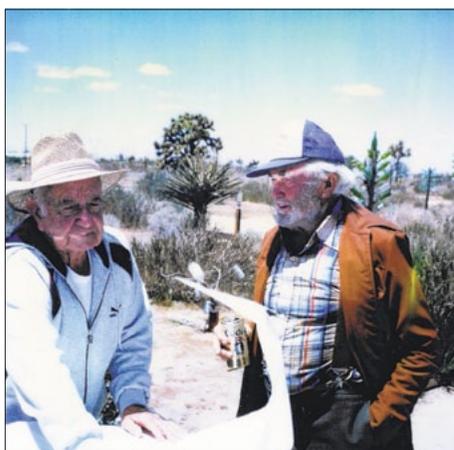
Mahan also had a way with words. He sold books of poetry at Hula Ville. One poem, in fact, was dedicated to Hula Ville: "Yea so welcome are all of thee/ To this museum so full with glee/ Here are a host of signs you may see/ So cleverly painted by old Mile-zee."

At the entrance to Hula Ville, he created a post-modern work of art out of a cactus garden and empty wine bottles. Above the display hung a sign reading "Give thanks to God for all things, most of all what Mahan brings."

Another of his poems was dedicated to the



**From left: Millie, Ralph, Arthur, Lila and Harry Mahan.**



**Art Mahan, left, and Miles Marion Mahan.**

Hula Girl.

"Once I found her in an old scrap heap/A lone some hula girl, so sound asleep/how long she slept here, no one knows/only seen from the pile were her toes."

Mahan died in 1997 after 100 years of escapades. Though gone, he's not forgotten – certainly not by Goodman or the thousands of people who continue to marvel at his unique folk art when they visit the Route 66 Museum.

In addition to recounting Ventura County's rich history, Gwyn Goodman works daily to help people find the land they're looking for. Goodman is a proud real estate agent specializing in agricultural estates in Somis, Camarillo and Moorpark. Let her help you find the property you're looking for. Visit [GwynGoodman.com](http://GwynGoodman.com).



**The shapely girl in the grass skirt is seen here along Interstate 15 on the way to Las Vegas.**