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Groundbreaking for first PONCHO auction home takes place in Bellevue on February 13, 1963.

On February 13, 1963, groundbreaking ceremonies precede excavation for a home to be built in the Somerset area of Bellevue for the first PONCHO (Pacific Northwest Civic, Cultural, and Charitable Organizations) fundraising auction, which will be held later that year. Volunteers have formed the Seattle-based PONCHO to help the Seattle Symphony pay off a large debt incurred by its 1962 Century 21 World's Fair production of the opera *Aida*. The \$46,000 sale of the home will significantly help PONCHO exceed its \$100,000 goal. This initial fundraiser will be so successful that PONCHO will continue gala fundraisers for nearly half a century and, for more than three decades, include homes as big-ticket auction items.

The Proposal

While the Seattle Symphony's June 1962 performances of its first opera production, Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, were highly successful in both production and attendance, the symphony was left with a debt of \$35,000. Symphony board member Ruth Blethen (later Clayburgh, 1910-2002) approached civic leader Paul Friedlander (1912-1994) and explained the symphony's plight. The two met with arts activist Kayla Skinner (1919-2004) and formed a group they named Pacific Northwest Civic, Cultural, and Charitable Organizations (PONCHO) to raise needed funds for the symphony. Friedlander -- PONCHO's first president -- proposed that they hold a fundraiser, modeled after an auction event held in Portland the previous year that had raised money for the Portland Zoo and Museum of History and Industry. As Friedlander expressed it, "If Portland can do it for animals, we can do it for people" (Katz).

Other civic leaders soon joined the volunteer effort and PONCHO officially formed in February of 1963. Board members set the auction date for April 27 of that year and began procuring items. It was Paul Friedlander's idea that the auction needed a big-ticket item. He suggested they add a new home to the list.

Donations from Many

Friedlander built an amazing coalition of generous donors. Businessman Howard R. Watchie (1927-

2007) donated a lot in the Somerset area of Bellevue and builder Herman Sarkowsky (1925-2014) of United Homes agreed to build the house for free. Howard S. Wright (1927-1996) was chosen as chairman of the first PONCHO Home Committee, a daunting task that year due to the short turnaround time before the auction. Civic spirit was high and donors were found for every facet of the homebuilding process. On February 13, 1963, ground was broken for the building of PONCHO's first auction home.

By auction day, April 27, although not completed, the home was ready for sale. It had been a huge collaborative effort that included a home-mortgage lender, architects, lawyers, carpenters, cabinet makers, landscapers, plumbers, electrical workers, and dozens of businesses that supplied the necessary building materials and labor; even the advertising brochures were provided by volunteers. Sale of the house at auction for \$46,000 (\$1,000 more than it had been priced at) helped PONCHO top its fundraising goal of \$100,000.

Fundraising Continues

PONCHO decided to repeat the gala fundraiser in 1964, this time with a new list of recipients. On February 14 of that year, Dr. Richard E. Fuller (1897-1976), director of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM was a 1964 recipient), turned the soil for the first of three houses built by McGrath Homes: the Ardmore house in Bellevue, the Glenmore in Mountlake Terrace, and the Camelot in Auburn. Each was valued near \$22,000. Herman Sarkowsky chaired the home committee (also referred to in early years as the house committee, and later as the construction committee) in 1964.

These early PONCHO homes were "ramblers," a popular style at the time, but in 1965, with Friedlander still serving as PONCHO president, a modernistic three-bedroom, \$42,000 house, designed by Cuban architect Henry Griffin, was built for auction in Newport Hills. Property for the house was donated by Securities Intermountain, Inc.

Griffin also designed the 1968 PONCHO home, built by Herman Sarkowsky and United Homes. Described as an elegant 8,000-square-foot mansion, the \$136,000 home was built in Medina. In the 1980s it resold for \$265,000. A package of three condominium townhouses west of Auburn sold in 1969 for \$75,000.

The building of PONCHO homes continued into the 1990s. As housing prices and interest rates rose, PONCHO began arranging with builders for PONCHO to receive a set amount of the proceeds, and in 1983 the "PONCHO Dream Home" projects began under the leadership of David S. Bingham (b. 1943). Each of these dream homes brought PONCHO between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Five houses were offered in "PONCHO Quality Street, 1987" and PONCHO received \$30,000 from the developers for the use of its name. One of the grandest was the Lakemont, built in 1993 in what was described as the "PONCHO Dream Home Community." The auction catalog that year listed it as an "elegant, traditional-style Design Guild home offering breathtaking Cascade Mountain vistas from a spacious corner lot in Lakemont's popular Woodcroft neighborhood." It was priced at \$505,000.

Public open houses preceded the yearly auctions. As a small token of PONCHO's appreciation to the hundreds of donors who made these homes possible, annual board meetings were scheduled so that members could view each home before auction and personally thank those involved.

Although the home auctions ended in the late 1990s, PONCHO's signature gala fundraisers lasted another decade before being discontinued in 2008. Five years later in 2013 -- PONCHO's 50th anniversary year -- the group announced it would close down all operations and set up a legacy fund within the Seattle Foundation.

Sources:

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This essay was revised and updated on February 14, 2015. By Margaret Riddle, March 20, 2013



Richard E. Fuller, Barbara Rauscher, and Herman Sarkowsky, groundbreaking for PONCHO home, Auburn, February 1964

Courtesy The Seattle Times



Paul S. Friedlander (1912-1994)

Courtesy PONCHO

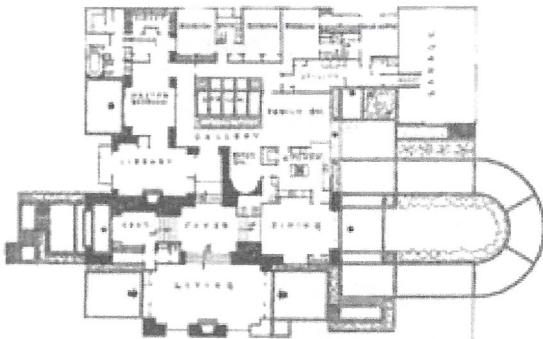
\$42,000 for Poncho Home



SKETCH OF NEWPORT HILLS HOME TO BE AUCTIONED BY PONCHO MAY 22

PONCHO auction home, Newport Hills, 1965

Courtesy The Seattle Times



The mansion has 4,000 square feet which includes five bedrooms, 8½ baths and rooms on main level.

Floor plan, PONCHO home, 1969

Courtesy The Seattle Times