Weighty guests arrive for annual Bohemian Grove


Abstract

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Full Text

July 14--Some of the world's wealthiest and most prominent begin arriving today for the annual encampment at the Bohemian Grove, a gathering some describe as a benign men's club and others as an insidious gathering of power.

The encampment is expected to have 2,000 attendees at any one time, a guest list that has included U.S. presidents and foreign heads of state, politicians, industrial barons, actors, artists and musicians.

As in the past, their identities and a description of the programs are closely guarded by officials of the San Francisco-based Bohemian Club.

Club General Manager Matt Oggero declined to discuss the event, although he did say the grove has hired 600 to 800 local workers, mostly high school and college aged.

"We hire a great bunch of really great young people each year," Oggero said.

The encampment opens on Friday and will run until Aug. 1. It will include a Cremation of Care ritual, "low jinks" comedic play held on the middle weekend and a "high jinks" serious dramatic play the final weekend.

The most heavily attended weekend will be July 24 and 25.
Grove members also provide entertainment for the annual Monte Rio variety show and fund-raiser, scheduled for July 29. Last year it raised $32,000 for Monte Rio Fire Services Foundation, Monte Rio Elementary School Foundation and St. Catherine of Sienna Catholic Church.

The men-only conclave has been described by some as nothing more than a gathering of rich Elks, while others believe it is far more insidious, with back-room deals being made in the 120 individual camps that are scattered throughout the 2,700-acre redwood forest.

Past encampments have been attended by both Presidents Bush; Presidents Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon; former cabinet members Colin Powell, George Schultz and Henry Kissinger; and business leaders Stephen David Bechtel, Leonard Firestone and David Rockefeller.

Encampments have also drawn protesters, although for the past few years they have been low-key or non-existent.

Activists now are more distracted by problems looming elsewhere, said Susan Lamont of the Peace and Justice Center of Sonoma County.

"The world works with the affluents and the powerful knowing each other and working together, and that is symbolized at the Bohemian Grove," Lamont said.

"I am not one who thinks plots are hatched there. It is more the reinforcing of the network. If you want something done, you think of the person you met at the Bohemian Grove."

Hundreds of private jets will begin landing today at the Charles M. Schulz-Sonoma County Airport, where attendees will be met by limousines and rental cars and whisked to Monte Rio.

"We are starting to get reservations, but I'm not sure how strong it will be," said Glenn Barrett, general manager of Kaiser Jet Center. He said he can expect 100 to 200 planes during the two weeks, ranging from the smallest corporate jet to the Boeing Business Jet.

They will bring activity to the airport, where the recession has eroded operations. So far this year, flights are down 14 percent for the same period from last year. The airport charges landing fees and gets 11 cents for each gallon of fuel sold.

"With the recession we have seen a fall off in traffic," said Jon Stout, airport manager. "Seeing an uptick is a good thing."

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