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LOCAL

Gregory Kondos, LeVar Burton among first honored in Sacramento's 'Walk of Stars'

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Midtown Sacramento soon will have more star power. Organizers for the Sacramento Walk of Stars on Monday announced its first class of inductees, a group that will be honored in a series of late-summer events including their star installations at 18th and L streets.

The list includes:

- LeVar Burton, the Christian Brothers High School graduate known for his acting work in "Roots," "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and "Reading Rainbow."

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- Debbie Meyer, the three-time Olympic swimming champion who won three gold medals while still a student at Rio Americano High School.
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- Gregory Kondos, the acclaimed landscape artist whose work hangs in galleries around the world.
- Dr. Balazs "Ernie" Bodai, former chief of surgery at Kaiser Permanente, Sacramento, who successfully lobbied Congress to create the breast cancer research stamp.

"Everybody comes from somewhere and I have always been proud of my Sacramento roots," Burton wrote in a statement. "From Glen Elder to Broderick to South Sac; from Holy Angels to St. Charles Borromeo to St. Ann's Elementary, Sacramento has imprinted itself on me in a most indelible way."

Burton could not attend a Monday morning ceremony in midtown announcing the four inductees. However, Bodai, Meyer and Kondos were in attendance.

All three said they were appreciative of the honor. Meyer, who swam under the coaching of Sherm Chavoor, said Sacramento support of athletes has been wonderful through the years.

“Sherm, and my dad: This is for you,” she told the small crowd on L Street.

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The Sacramento Walk of Stars is the brainchild of Scot and Lucy Crocker, the husband-and-wife team behind the local public relations firm Crocker & Crocker. The program intends to annually honor three to five people with strong ties to the Sacramento area who are nationally recognized for their achievements in entertainment, the arts, sports, business, science or other fields.

Organizers considered nearly 90 potential honorees for the first class of inductees. The final four were selected by a subcommittee of the Sacramento Walk of Stars steering committee, which includes the Crockers, developer Sotiris Kolokotronis and Steve Hammond, president of the Sacramento Convention and Visitors Bureau. Part of the criteria included the honoree's willingness to participate in the program and appear at the late-summer ceremonies, including the official unveiling of the stars in the sidewalk, a VIP reception and gala event.

Sacramento City Council greenlighted the project in August, a process that included the adoption of a resolution to approve the program. The City Council also authorized the city manager to issue a revocable encroachment permit to allow the Walk of Stars program to maintain the 3-foot-by-3-foot stars in Sacramento sidewalks.

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EVERYBODY COMES FROM SOMEWHERE AND I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PROUD OF MY SACRAMENTO ROOTS.

Actor LeVar Burton

While some have criticized the program as sounding like a Hollywood knock-off, and have suggested using a more Sacramento-centric symbol, the stars remain. No city funds are used to pay for the blue terrazzo-tile stars, which cost \$8,000 each. Unlike the familiar Hollywood Walk of Fame stars, the Sacramento version looks more like a star within a star.

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READER INPUT: See a gallery of Sacramentans who could be candidates for the “Walk of Stars.”

The program is funded by the nonprofit Sacramento Walk of Stars organization, which raised nearly \$70,000 to fund the project in its inaugural year.

Plans call for future stars to be installed in various locations between 21st Street and the upcoming Golden 1 Center at Fifth and L streets.



City Councilman Steve Hansen introduces the first of four Sacramento notables who will be honored with a star on a midtown sidewalk. The four notables announced Monday, May 9, 2016: Dr. Ernie Bodai, Debbie Meyer, Gregory Kondos and LeVar Burton. Bill Lindelof — The Sacramento Bee

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Sacramento Walk of Stars honorees Debbie Meyer, Gregory Kondos and Dr. Balazs "Ernie" Bodai attend the announcement ceremony as Meyer helps hold a photo of honoree LeVar Burton on Monday, May 9, 2016, in Sacramento. The Walk of Stars will start at 18th and L streets and will move toward Golden 1 Center. Hector Amezcua - hamezcua@sacbee.com

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