

The Heartbeat of America's Mother Road

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Endangered status for Route 66 sites

New partnership promotes Roy's preservation in Calif.



By Bill Gates & Al Morrissette
Amboy, CA -- Three developments in June focused national and international attention on Route 66 preservation efforts.

First, on June 6, the World Monuments Fund included The Mother Road on its 2008 watch list of 100 threatened sites around the globe.

A week later, the National Trust for Historic Preservation collectively named Route 66 motels to its 20th annual list of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in the U.S.

Within days, California Route 66 preservationists announced a partnership to restore one of the Road's best known sites, Roy's of Amboy.

"Historic-building surveys of Route 66 show that the transportation-related buildings such as motels, gas stations, cafes and trading posts are primarily threatened by development in urban areas, and by decay and abandonment in rural areas," the World Monuments Fund warned.

The National Trust struck a similar theme in its announcement. "In recent years, Route 66 motels in hot real-estate markets have been torn down at record rates, while in cold real-estate markets, motels languish and are being reclaimed by the forces of nature," the Trust said.

But the national preservation organization expressed guarded optimism. "Over the past decade, private property owners, nonprofit organizations, and local, state, federal and tribal governments have worked together to identify ... and address Route 66 preservation needs."

Both organizations cited the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program as a valuable vehicle in efforts to save motels and other Mother Road sites.

As if to underscore that point, on June 14, the California Route 66 Preservation Foundation and the Bureau of Land Management announced their partnership with Albert Okura, owner of Roy's Motel, Café and gas station in Amboy.

"Of the motels on Route 66, this is one of the most significant" said Glen Duncan, a member of the preservation foundation's board. "For 20 years, the National Trust has named 11 most endangered sites [each year] and only six have been lost since it started the program."

"A joint passion and dedication to restore Amboy by the BLM, San Bernardino County and us, have joined forces to support Albert Okura," said Jim Conkle, another California foundation board member.

"I am dedicated to seeing it through and look forward to partnerships with these organizations" Okura said, noting that he had promised Bessie Burris, widow of Buster Burris, longtime owner of Roy's and the town, that he would "restore it completely."

Bessie Burris sold the Amboy complex to Okura for \$425,000 after repossessing it from a previous buyer in 2005.

Okura is owner of the Juan Pollo restaurant chain. "Roy's motel, café and gas station are perhaps most beloved and considered particularly important relative to other Route 66 properties because of the remote desert location" said Duncan, "Traveling east or west, it was and still is a long way to go for gasoline, a bed or something to eat. Roy's was a god-send for travelers."

Amboy is about halfway between Needles and Barstow.



Albert Okura (center) discusses improvement ideas for Roy's with Jeff Samudio (left) who is documenting historic sites for California, and Glenn Duncan of the California Route 66 Preservation Foundation