

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

### *Dick Volpert, President, NHM Board of Governors and Grand Centennial Celebration Honorary Chair*

*It's hard to imagine a modern NHM without Dick Volpert. He first visited the Museum in the 1960's as a young attorney searching for historical photographs for covers of the Los Angeles Bar Journal. Since, he has served nearly four decades on the Board of Trustees, including six as President, and 16 years as President of the Board of Governors.*

#### **How is NHM different from what it was like in 1960?**

In those days, the rotunda was boarded up, and you couldn't see the Judson glass ceiling because it was dark and covered. The Three Muses statue was boarded up too. In 2010, after we opened the restored Haaga Family Rotunda, we held a reception with the doors open to the Rose Garden. If you had arrived blindfolded, you would have thought you were in New York or Paris. It was stunning.

#### **Does anything in NHM's collection hold special meaning for you?**

I'm fascinated by the model of downtown L.A. that was built as a WPA project from 1938-40. Most of the streets are the same as today but Bunker Hill was 30 feet higher and full of housing. The freeways hadn't been built. There are two places on the model that help orient you: City Hall, which was the city's tallest building, and the Biltmore Hotel on Pershing Square. For years, when we'd have



a dinner for friends of the Museum and elected officials, I would start their tour with this model. It captured everyone's imagination.

#### **What keeps you involved with NHM?**

NHM is a real public asset, and I've always found important ways to contribute to its vitality. Plus, I'm passionate about the preservation of history in a city that hasn't always valued its past. This Museum is a repository of information on how L.A. got to be what it is. Our new exhibit, *Becoming L.A.*, will do a very good job of showing this.

#### **You've given a lot to NHM. What has NHM given you?**

I've learned a great deal about the natural world and curatorial work. I've gotten to peek behind the scenes in places like the beetle room. That's where the taxidermists put the remains of what they're working on, and the beetles chew the bones clean. It's fascinating. I encourage more people to partake of what this Museum can offer, and I remind them to tell the County Board of Supervisors how valuable NHM is for our community.