



Thursday, July 30, 2009

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Mayan Mysteries: Willis Peterson Photography At West Valley Art Museum March 20 to May 17**

Willis "Pete" Peterson's newest exhibit of photos telling the story of the Mayan culture, will open on March 20 at West Valley Art Museum, Surprise, and will run until May 18. An artist's reception is 5 to 8 p.m. on March 27.

Peterson's photographic career began at 14 when he received a box camera for his birthday. His mother motivated him to read "Lost Cities of the Mayas," which intrigued him from childhood. Years later, he and his family sought out those wonderful places where he photo-graphed his first impression of the Mayan culture. Later, he and Roberta, his wife of 56 years and chief supporter, in pursuit of the Mayan mystique also journeyed to Honduras, Belize and Guatemala to explore more Mayan cities now considered World Heritage sites.

He photographed the Jaguar Temple of Tikal with its myriad steps diminishing in size, which seemed to reach the sky. Roberta climbed the 217 feet of Temple IV. Beneath her a surreal scene of faraway temples protruded from the jungle canopy. This was the opening scene of "Star Wars."

For many years, he was a photojournalist and later a feature writer for *The Arizona Republic*, *Days and Ways*, Sunday magazine. As a successful full-time freelance photographer, his work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *Time/Life Encyclopedias*, *National Wildlife*, *Audubon Magazine*, *Natural History* and *Arizona Highways*. His work has been featured in many museums, including the Heard Museum, the National Wildlife Gallery, Washington, D.C.; and New York Museum of Natural History.

Peterson, who lives in Clarkdale, is an accomplished writer and author of the book "Colorado Kid: A Swedish American Boy Goes West." The story tells of his life as a 7-year old moving from Minnesota to Colorado Springs in the hope that the cold, dry mountain air would help his severe asthma attacks. From the years 1930 to 1943, Willis, in a detailed and delightful way, describes life in that troublesome era with skill and finesse. He covers the gamut from a boy's backyard zoo, cultural significance Of his

West Valley Art Museum is open 10 AM to 4 PM Tuesday through Sunday. The Museum is located at West Bell Road and 114th Avenue. With nine exhibition galleries, a Museum Store, and regularly scheduled education programs, the Museum welcomes all visitors. There is an admission charge for non-members. \$7 adults, \$2 students, ages 5 and under are free.

Scandinavian heritage, family political discussions, ex-periences of the Great Depression, significant teachers who influenced his life and the impact of World War II on the world and this small-town boy.

After graduating from Phoenix College in 1947, Peterson attended Arizona State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in visual technology. In 1968, he was selected to start a photography program at Glendale Community College. His artistic intuition and exceptionally high standards were major influences in the teaching of photography in the Southwest. The Petersons recently provided an endowment to phoenix College toward scholarships in photography. "Even with the downturn of economic events these days, we have to recognize that the arts are still important and are manifest in the betterment of our society," he said.

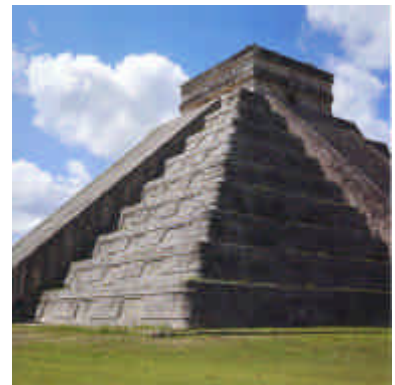
Written by Marj Swearingen



Corbel Arch Uxmal Ruins



Colossal Head Near Vera Cruz



El Castillo Chichen Itza Ruins

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