

The Woodlands History

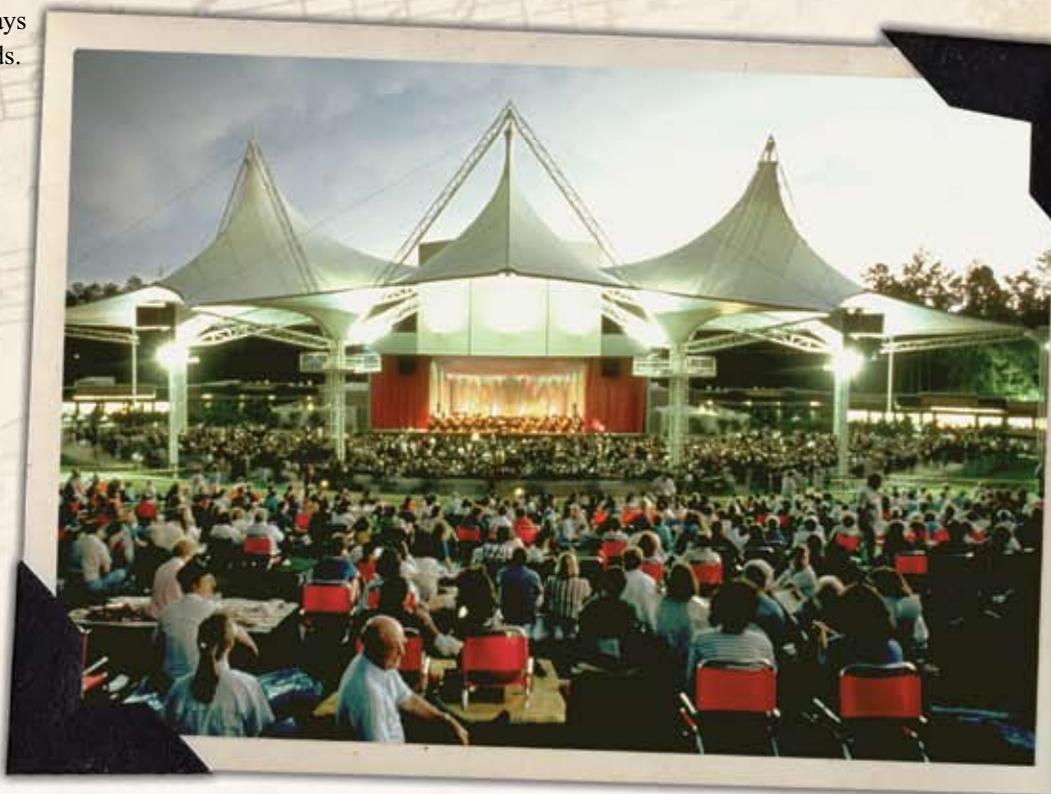
THE WOODLANDS, THE INSIDE STORY OF CREATING A BETTER HOMETOWN

The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion

By Roger Galatas

A performing arts pavilion was always part of the plan for The Woodlands. It was on the menu of things that Dick Brown, one of the original consultants and later the head of planning at The Woodlands, thought was important. It was part of George Mitchell's vision of the town and it was a passion of Cynthia Mitchell. But it took a long time to come to fruition. Following the early years of financial setbacks, the proper conditions for the pavilion's realization finally appeared.

The actual genesis of the pavilion came with improvements to the former Tournament Players Course golf course where the Houston Golf Open was played. The Houston Golf Association and the Professional Golfers Association wanted the development company to build stadium seating on the golf course. We spent a lot of time on that project. We visited Ponte Vedra, Florida, to look at the Sawgrass Course, which was the first stadium seating course built under the sponsorship of the PGA. Sawgrass included mounds around the greens and tee boxes, and along fairways to make golf more of a spectator sport. We constructed the same kind of stadium mounding around the greens on The Woodlands TPC. Several weeks before the first tournament was scheduled to be played on that course, Dick Brown and I went to lunch at the Tournament Players Clubhouse. We each bought a hot dog. It was a beautiful sunny day so we decided to eat our hot dogs on the mound at the 18th green, a perch from which we could envision how the tournament might look when it was played there in a few weeks.



Pavilion Opening

Lightning caused by a passing squall line provided a dramatic, celebratory backdrop for the inaugural concert at The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion by the Houston Symphony on April 27, 1990.

I don't remember who started the conversation, Dick or myself, but we decided if the golf green could be duplicated in another location, but with a concrete surface, and if the mound was slightly bigger and a tent mounted over the green, we could create a small community pavilion. Perhaps that would be the start of this music pavilion that George and Cynthia had envisioned for The Woodlands. The economy was turning around in Houston and the fortunes of The Woodlands were getting a little better. Business was increasing and revenue was growing, so we approached George

about the concept. He suggested we talk to Cynthia to see how she felt about it. We did, and she embraced it.

Dick had done some research on pavilions. He had already contacted an architect who had suggested a Teflon-coated tent structure to cover the stage. We met with Pace Entertainment, which was at the time the leader in booking outdoor entertainment events in the United States on the "shed circuit." The first thing Pace pointed out to us was that construction of a facility for 1,500 people, which is what we had planned to build, was not commercially viable. To attract commercial

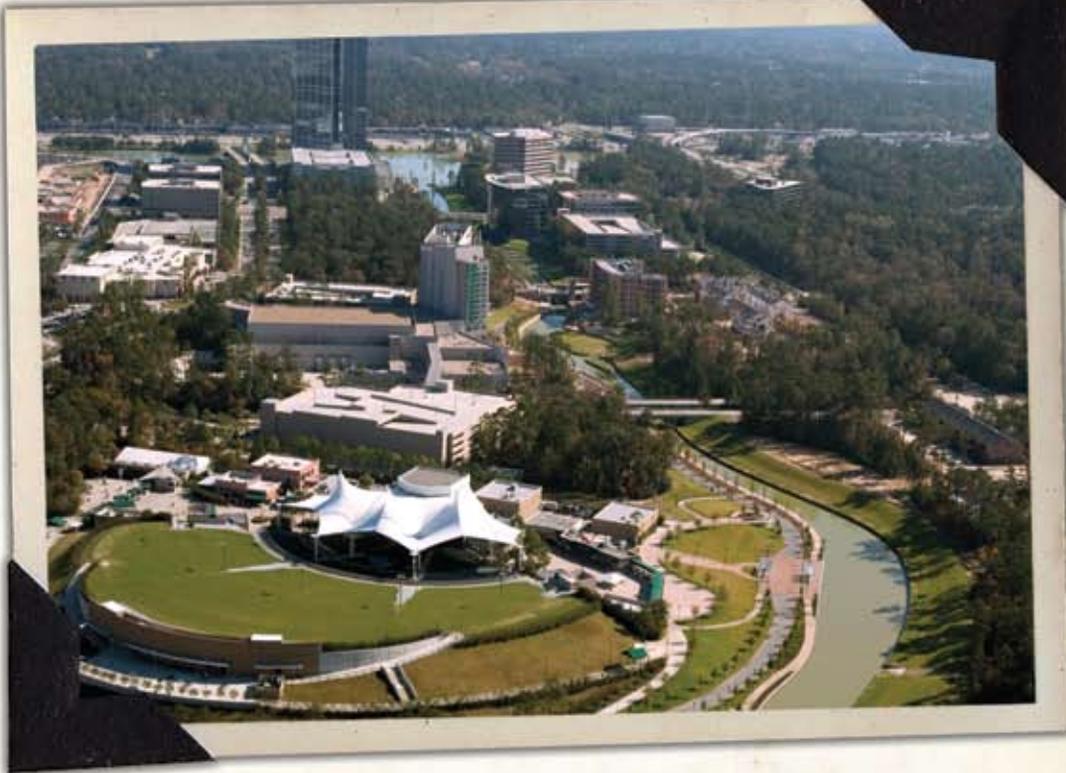
artists whose performances might help pay for the symphony, opera and other non-profit cultural events, we needed seating for at least 10,000. Well, that was considerably more than we thought we would build. The smaller venue might cost maybe a million dollars. Cynthia immediately became the champion for the bigger pavilion. So we built it.

We established a 501(c)(3) corporation as “owners” of the pavilion, something we found that worked for The John Cooper School and would work here. We recruited knowledgeable people from the both The Woodlands and the greater Houston region to serve on the non-profit board.

Fill material excavated from the adjacent Town Center waterway system was used to build the mounded seating. We did it during the second wettest season in the history of The Woodlands. The wettest season was when Plato Pappas, senior engineer for the development company, was trying to build Woodlands Parkway. The second one was when he was trying to compact 300,000 cubic yards of fill material to make the mounded seating for the pavilion. He did it. Construction was completed and the facility opened in April 1990. Instead of \$1 million, the pavilion wound up costing \$10 million, all paid by The Woodlands Corporation as a gift to the community. Those were \$10 million hot dogs Dick Brown and I had for lunch on the new 18th green.

In addition, George and Cynthia Mitchell personally donated \$5 million to the Houston Symphony to make the pavilion its summer home. They also gave money to the Houston Ballet and the Houston Grand Opera to help stage productions in The Woodlands in the summer.

The Houston Symphony presented the first performance in the new pavilion on a Friday evening. A squall line arrived just about the time the symphony started playing. There were flashes of lightning and thunder and trees were blowing. The light in the trees made them vivid. It was just a wonderful experience for that opening night, if you were sitting



Aerial View

The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion is uniquely positioned within The Woodlands Town Center as shown in this aerial view. The Pavilion, The Woodlands Waterway Marriott, the Anadarko Petroleum building and The Woodlands Mall are connected by The Woodlands Waterway®.

under the tent. For those on the lawn it was a drenching experience. The second night saw a Frank Sinatra performance and the third night the group Alabama played. Since then, about 50 touring acts each year perform at the pavilion and the profits from their appearances help support cultural events like the symphony and ballet.

Since its inception, the pavilion has twice been expanded and now seats 18,000. Those are the kinds of things that were done in The Woodlands that went beyond what had to be done. It was done because George and Cynthia thought it was the right thing to do. Over a long period it could add to the profitability of The Woodlands Corporation and enhance the value of its properties. It's a very long-term investment and other developers would likely have chosen a different approach, but it made The Woodlands a better place, an achievement that holds great value for the Mitchells and the community. In addition to its entertainment value, the pavilion has made The Woodlands a regional destination for special events and expanded our economic base.



Frank Sinatra was the second headliner to perform at the Pavilion Grand Opening weekend in April 1990. Alabama performed on the third night.



Roger Galatas

Roger Galatas is the former president of The Woodlands Corporation and the author, with Jim Barlow, of the popular book, The Woodlands, The Inside Story of Creating a Better Hometown. For more information, please visit www.rgiwoodlands.com.

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