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Gina Huntsinger, Marketing Director

Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center

(707) 579-4452, x268

Gina@SchulzMuseum.org

Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in
Santa Rosa, California
A Mecca for *Peanuts* Fans



Front of Charles M. Schulz Museum, Photo by Stephanie Shea

For more than sixty years a group of precocious, angst-ridden children and a beagle with a rich fantasy life have situated themselves into our national consciousness to such a degree that many of us are scarcely aware of when or how they first appeared in our lives. Still others have attributed life-changing influences to reading *Peanuts* and can remember that seminal moment when Charlie Brown and the Gang entered their personal landscape.

To be sure, the lexicon of *Peanuts* (“security blanket,” “blockhead,” and “happiness is a warm puppy”) and Schulz’s repertoire of images (Lucy’s psychiatry booth, Snoopy on the roof of his doghouse, and the kite-eating tree) are universally recognized. The *Peanuts* characters, images, and lingo can be found daily in all media forms as metaphors that reinforce ideas and provide mental images instantly understood by all. On TV’s *West Wing*, President Bartlett explains to the chief of staff that his expectations for a guided missile test can be compared to Charlie

2301 Hardies Lane • Santa Rosa, CA 95403 U.S.A. • 707.579.4452 • Fax 707.579.4436
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Brown expecting to kick the football held by Lucy. Ken Burns, in describing the effect of jazz aficionados' arguments, complains, "They're like Pigpen in the *Peanuts* comic strip: the dust of their arguments obscures what's going on."

As the cartoon strip continued to reach millions of readers (syndicated in more than 2,600 newspapers worldwide by 1999), other forces were at work to peel Snoopy and the Gang off the comic pages and reincarnate them in three-dimensional splendor. Books, calendars, figurines, plush toys, watches, wind-up toys, key chains, and all manner of kitschy, artsy merchandise began to be licensed in the late 1950s, and were avidly collected by fans happy to have a variety of representations of their favorite characters. Except for early books like *Happiness Is a Warm Puppy* and the video and film productions, Schulz was not the creator behind these *Peanuts*-inspired products. That distinction, however, was not always clear to consumers. Nevertheless, the plush Snoopys and other colorful *Peanuts* products served to reinforce audiences' loyalty to Charlie Brown and the Gang and, in some cases, even introduced new audiences to the fascination of the strip. In Japan, for example, *Peanuts* products, especially those with a Snoopy theme, were popular long before the comic strip was carried in Japanese papers. Once the strips began running in the nation's newspapers, a revered Japanese poet provided the Japanese translations.

Today, eleven years after Schulz's death, *Peanuts* continues to be rerun in many newspapers by popular demand. In fact, papers that conduct polls find that *Peanuts* consistently ranks #1 or #2 with their readers. *Peanuts*-themed merchandise is still selling well—especially in Japan—and new products are continually being developed. New television specials have been aired in the last decade and have been well received, with more in the planning stages. The art of *Peanuts* lives on in its many manifestations.

So, who was the artist behind this phenomenon? What were his sources of inspiration? How was he able to keep producing intriguing, funny, exquisitely drawn strips for half a century? Why do people love this comic strip and its characters so much? How did Charles M. Schulz revolutionize the art of the comic strip? These are some of the questions that are explored in the exhibitions and programs of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center, which opened to the public on August 17, 2002.

Visitors will find much more than answers to their questions about Schulz's art and influence when they pass inside the walls of what some may characterize as a Mecca for *Peanuts* fans. Nearly 100 original strips are on view at any one time to illustrate the development of Schulz's characters and line, a re-creation of his studio includes his well-used drawing board, and biographical materials chronicle his early artistic abilities as well as his devotion to family and friends.

The Museum also exhibits large-scale pieces to give visitors a keener sense of who Schulz was and an appreciation for the sheer magnitude of his body of work. An entire wall from Schulz's 1951 Colorado home, with a mural he painted for his daughter Meredith's nursery, is installed

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in the upstairs gallery. Downstairs, one of the works on view in the Great Hall is Yoshiteru Otani's mural that depicts Charlie Brown running to kick a football held by Lucy; it is made up of 3,588 2"x8" ceramic tiles, each with a different comic strip image. All these elements and more await fans and students of Charles Schulz's life and art.

ABOUT THE CHARLES M. SCHULZ MUSEUM & RESEARCH CENTER

The Charles M. Schulz Museum opened in August 2002 to fulfill its mission of preserving, displaying, and interpreting the art of Charles M. Schulz. The Museum carries out this mission through changing exhibitions and programming that build an understanding of cartoonists and cartoon art; illustrate the scope of Schulz's multi-faceted career; communicate the stories, inspirations, and influences of Charles Schulz; and celebrate the life of Charles Schulz and the **Peanuts** characters.

LOCATION

The Charles M. Schulz Museum is located 50 minutes north of San Francisco by car on Highway 101. The Museum is located at 2301 Hardies Lane, Santa Rosa, California, 95403.

HOURS

Weekdays Monday thru Friday (except Tuesdays*) 11am–5pm

Saturday & Sunday 10am–5pm

Closed Tuesdays*

*Open everyday throughout the summer (Memorial Day through Labor Day)

ADMISSION FEES

Free – Museum Members, Children 3 and under

\$12.00 – Adults

\$8.00 – Seniors 62 and over with ID

\$5.00 – Children 4-18, college students with valid I.D. card

For more information consult the Museum web site: schulzmuseum.org

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