

Palm Springs Sun | Friday, August 17, 2007

Many clamoring to see Elvis Estate

By Katie Ruark

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Hundreds have taken a tour of the Elvis Estate and calls are coming in from all over the country, owner Reno Fontana said this week.

"This has taken off like I never imagined," he said.

The estate, featured in The Desert Sun on Saturday, is one of two homes Elvis owned when he died in 1977.

Fontana said he wants to re-vamp the house to make it a tourist attraction, or the "Graceland of California," after winning a two-year legal battle for ownership in November.

Fontana said he had 200 visitors on Saturday, 75 to 100 Sunday, and 50 on Monday.

Mark Rose, a spokesman for "It's Your Call with Lynn Doyle" of Philadelphia, called The Desert Sun on Tuesday hoping to find Fontana to feature him on an Elvis special.

The story about the Elvis Estate was picked up by msn.com, the New York Times, and publications as far away as Algeria and the U.K.

The reopening of the estate could be good news for Palm Springs tourism.

"I get asked probably six times a day to see the inside of the Elvis house," said Bill Davis, owner of Celebrity Tours in Palm Springs.

"In fact, last week I had a woman from Poland, and all she could say was: 'inside Elvis house,'" he said. "People want to see what's inside."

More than 600,000 people visit the Graceland mansion in Memphis annually — making it one of the five most-visited home tours in the United States and the most famous home in America after The White House, according to Elvis Presley Enterprises.

Elvis already has a place in Palm Springs' history and a presence in its tourism industry.

The Elvis Honeymoon Hideaway, at 1350 Ladera Circle, brought in 600 guests for this year's Elvis Weekend. The three-day event celebrating Elvis and Priscilla Presley's honeymoon in Palm Springs enticed a woman to travel all the way from England, according to Leonard Lewis, the hideaway's caretaker.

"There are Elvis fans of all



Reno Fontana owns the Elvis Estate, which he plans to remodel before opening it up again for tours. Fontana was photographed in the music studio of the Elvis Estate on Aug. 1 in Palm Springs.

Marilyn Chung
Palm Springs Sun

ELVIS WEEKEND

Another home with Elvis ties is having a celebration this weekend to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the King's death.

Who: The Honeymoon Hideaway will have a "30-Year Tribute to Elvis," featuring an indoor gospel concert by Elvis tribute artist James King and Rockabilly Hall of Famer Glen Glenn, plus a tribute to the late Elvis eyeglass maker Dennis Roberts.

Where: 1350 Ladera Circle, Palm Springs.

What: Gospel concert 6 to 9 p.m. House tours 3 to 5 p.m.

\$45 for the concert and house tour, \$20 house tour only

Information: 322-1192

ages that go places other than Graceland," said Palm Springs Bureau of Tourism spokesman Jim Dunn. "He's always had that following."

What you'll find

Elvis and Priscilla Presley bought the home at 845 W. Chino Canyon Road for \$85,000 in April 1970. The Presleys and their young daughter, Lisa Marie, lived there part time.

When the two divorced in 1972, Priscilla signed over the home to Elvis with a quitclaim deed. After his death, Elvis' personal lawyer, who represented him during his divorce, took control of the estate.

Visitors won't find a jungle room like Elvis' animal-themed play room in Graceland. The

READ THE DEED

See property deeds Elvis and Priscilla Presley signed for their Palm Springs home at mydesert.com

five-bedroom home with a pool and stunning eastern views is surprisingly understated. The most outrageous part — if one can even call it that — is a sunken tub with red-and-black tiles in one of the seven bathrooms.

Today, if someone knocks on the door, Fontana will show them around the house for free.

There's no furniture, yet. When it's decorated — in the King's style — formal tours will be given for a fee.