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THINKING OUTSIDE THE UTILITY BOX

[Theo Douglas](#) Wed. September 23

Traffic signal control boxes in Bixby Knolls get all dressed up

Next time you're driving south on Atlantic Avenue—or east on San Antonio Drive—keep your eyes open for Welch's. The popular Bixby Knolls family restaurant, which occupied the northwest corner of the intersection when men still wore hats, is back: as artwork on a traffic signal utility box at the intersection's southwest corner.

This can only mean one thing: Bixby Knolls, under the aegis of the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association, is revisiting its midcentury past, with the help of the city's Redevelopment Agency.

It's a simple concept: the RDA has been spending a portion of its budget in recent years to retain a variety of artists who've painted scenes and abstracts on utility boxes across the city.

Bixby Knolls is the latest area to join the party, with the help of local artist John Culqui—apparently a frequent contributor to the program.

"I had him [paint] the upstairs bathrooms at the EXPO building, so I was familiar with his work," says BKBIA Executive Director Blair Cohn. "I don't think Bixby Knolls had ever thought about doing it here until we talked to the RDA."

Welch's—like Dimy's (Pacific Coast Highway and Walnut Avenue), another midcentury eatery I'm sorry to have missed—is just the beginning. Plans are to decorate another 17 Bixby Knolls utility boxes—six by year's end—with vintage, location-specific street scenes.

"I don't want to have the Queen Mary up here, but I want to have the Crest Theater," Cohn says, namechecking the famous Bixby Knolls moviehouse where pompadoured screenland stars like Edmund O'Brien once attended premieres.

Other subjects for assorted utility boxes include the Crest's competition, the Town Theater; The Tenderloin steakhouse, Harris Furs (now home to the Long Beach Historical Society), and Grisinger's Drive-In—designed by Sands architect, the late Wayne McAllister, and now home to George's 50's Diner.

And? Surprise us. The list isn't full yet, so if you've got an idea for a vintage shop, watering hole, restaurant, or theater that should be remembered on a utility box, let me know and I'll pass your thoughts along to Cohn and the BKBIA.

Tags: [bixby knolls](#), [BIXBY KNOLLS BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION](#), [blair cohn](#), [California](#), [Dimy's](#), [Edmund O'Brien](#), [George's 50's Diner](#), [Grisinger's Drive-In](#), [Harris Furs](#), [John Culqui](#), [Las Vegas](#), [Long Beach](#), [Long Beach Historical Society](#), [midcentury modern](#), [Redevelopment Agency](#), [Southern California](#), [The Crest Theater](#), [The District Weekly](#), [The Sands](#), [The Tenderloin](#), [The Town Theater](#), [Theo Douglas](#), [Wayne McAllister](#), [Welch's](#)