

Fifty years ago, 1964 was an eventful year

By **MICHAEL VAUGHAN**

Guest commentary

Over the weekend, I was watching a college football game on television. At halftime, a group of old athletes took the field to celebrate a national championship won 50 years ago. For me, the scene not only brought back memories of the championship, but the halftime show provided an occasion to reflect on other memories from that year 50 years past, 1964.

Some years flow almost seamlessly into the next. Things inevitably happen, but the nature and character of events isn't markedly different from prior years. In other years, the import and speed of events resembles a tectonic shift. The year of 1964 was the latter type of year.

The year 1964 saw political events with consequence that would ripple for decades. President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. Johnson also announced that he was declaring a war on poverty, and he laid the groundwork for the Medicare and Medicaid programs. These two programs now comprise more than \$1 trillion of the U.S. budget.

Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that would fully commit the United States to the Vietnam War. The country's formal involvement with the war would not end until the fall of Saigon on April 03, 1975. Interestingly, the United States now sends almost half a million tourists to Vietnam every year.

In another part of the world, the Palestinian Liberation Organization was established. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison.

Malcolm X announced that he was breaking ties with the Nation of Islam. Martin Luther King Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Back in the United State, three young civil rights workers were murdered in Mississippi while registering African American voters.

Activism on college campuses grew, and the multi-day protests on the Berkeley campus spawned the Free Speech Movement.

In the sports arena, UCLA won its first national basketball championship. It would go on to win 9 of the next 11.

Some of the year's sporting events were influenced by the social and political themes of 1964. Cassius Clay knocked out Sonny Liston to win the heavyweight title. Two days later, he announced that he was changing his name to Muhammad Ali.

The Beatles made their first visit to the U.S. and appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show." They were paid a total of \$10,000 for their appearance. Later that year, the Beatles released the movie "A Hard Day's Night."

The Beatles were followed by other British bands. Notably, the Rolling Stones released their first album in 1964.

Ogden witnessed a number of interesting events in 1964. A 21-year-old Bobby Fischer came to Ogden to play a series of chess games. One Ogden resident, George Girton, who played on the Harvard chess team two decades earlier, beat Fischer. When asked about a rematch Girton replied, "I think I'll quit while I'm ahead."

In April, people flocked to Ogden's Ford dealer to get their first look at a car named the Mustang. Customers who had \$2,400 could drive away with one of the cars.

Ogden's Orpheum, Paramount and Egyptian theaters exhibited the movies that have become part of the nation's collective memory. These included Mary Poppins, Dr. Strangelove, My Fair Lady, A Fistful of Dollars and Goldfinger.

At the 1964 commencement ceremony, Weber State awarded its first bachelor's degrees, marking its transition from a junior college to a four-year institution.

At that time, a member of the Board of Trustees predicted Weber State would one day change its name to Weber State University. In response to the growing campus, the 1,800-seat Browning Center for the Performing Arts was opened, and ground was broken for what would become the Stewart Library.

From the perspective of geopolitical events, 1964 wasn't the most momentous year of the 20th century. Most would place 1914, 1941, 1945 and perhaps other years on the list of the most important years of the century. Yet, 1964 was certainly an eventful year and it produced an abundance of lasting memories.