Pizarro: Brandenburg gift gets San Jose Fire Museum’s engine running
By Sid Pizarro • spizarro@mercurynews.com 1 COMMENT

The San Jose Fire Museum celebrated its 40th anniversary at the San Jose Convention Center last month, with a fund-raising brunch and silent auction. The museum turned 40 in 2012, and this year, it continued its mission to preserve San Jose’s fire history.

The museum’s collection includes fire engines, fire axes, and other firefighting equipment. The museum also houses a research library and offers educational programs for children.

The gift from John McMillan, president of the San Jose Fire Museum, and his wife, Lisa, is a major boost to the museum’s efforts.

John McMillan, president of the San Jose Fire Museum, presents the couple with a gift, including a white fire chief’s helmet, as fire chief’s helmet Pennsylvania

For the ceremony, the Fire Museum brought over a few of its vintage vehicles, including a 1955 fire chief’s Cadillac. McMillan said the white fire chief’s helmet is one of the museum’s treasures in its collection and it had been lost to the modern equipment at the new fire station next door.

The effort to turn the firehouse into a museum has been going on since it went out of service more than 15 years ago. There were plenty of times when things looked bleak, like in 2007 when the city’s Redevelopment Agency considered selling the property, perhaps to build a new venue for live theater, and again when the Redevelopment Agency was dissolved and there was a chance the museum would lose the opportunity to attempt a purchase.

Some things started turning around in 2012 when the City Council finally declared the station a landmark. It has since been added to the state and national registries of historic places. The city finally approved the purchase last month, prompting Thursday’s official celebration, which drew more than 800 supporters.

Mayor Sam Liccardo and many members of the City Council were there, along with interim Fire Chief Curtis Jacobson, Santa Clara County Supervisor Dave Cortese and City Councillor, San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce Matt Mahood, History San Jose CEO Aldy Rea, and former Mayor Sam Liccardo in the McMillan.

McMillan says the goal is to have the museum ready by August 2019, which would be the 100th birthday of him himself, that retired fire chief who considered himself the museum’s “founder’somentary.”

The museum will focus on the history of the city’s fire department and the evolution of firefighting techniques. It will also feature a collection of antique fire engines, helmets, and other memorabilia.

The museum is located at 555 South San Carlos Street in downtown San Jose and is open to the public on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

NOW THAT’S A FIESTA: One of the top auction items at Sacred Heart Infants’ Hospital’s Friends’ Night fundraiser last summer was a very private piece of antique china, from a private collection that the museum’s “unofficial curator” says tops the ledger on the museum’s web site.

The fine china set is valued at $1,000, says the mother of Sacred Heart Infants’ Hospital President Suza Amato, even offered to do a second party for the same price.

The fundraiser didn’t result in much for the museum, though. She also happened to be holding the winning ticket out of 1,000 for the week of the San Jose Earthquakes. At last she will be able to be cut between parties.

PLAYING GOD: Bellarmine College Prep is opening its production of “Mounty Python’s Spamalot” on Friday, and fans of the Arthurian musical comedy—hailing through the film “Monty Python and the Holy Grail”—will consider the show to have a voice in God’s role. The Jesuit school isn’t doing any work from the past, and plans to have a different school “celebrate” the role in the time of each performance.

The Bells are even being progressive: One of the “Gods” in Campus Ministry staff member Lane Scott, Scott, the city’s master of Sacred Heart Infants’ Hospital President Suza Amato, even offered to do a second party for the same price.

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