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News

Hundreds attend opening of new Sunnyvale museum

By **CODY KRAATZ** | Sunnyvale Sun, Los Gatos Weekly-Times, Saratoga News, Cupertino Courier, Bay Area News Group
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Sunnyvale recently opened its brand new Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum, culminating a six-year, \$3 million effort.

The museum is an 8,000-square-foot replica of Bayview, a stately home built in 1850 by Martin Murphy Jr., an original Sunnyvale settler. The much smaller and decaying Victorian was demolished in 1961, “a decision we’ve regretted ever since,” said Mike Malone, a member of the 26-member museum team. “We [Sunnyvale] began to feel the loss of the past.”

Malone, master of ceremonies for the opening, credited museum chair Laura Babcock’s “superhuman, tireless efforts” in orchestrating the project.

Babcock, who received a standing ovation from the crowd of about 700, said she felt a “tremendous relief, pride and a good sense of accomplishment.”

Among the crowd that toured the exhibits — some were turned away because the 450 tickets available ran out in 90 minutes — were about 50 people of all ages with ties to the Murphy family, including Ann Derby Joy, 98, the oldest known living descendant. Martin Murphy Jr. was her great-grandfather, and she came from Bakersfield for the ceremony.

Visitors lingered in several period rooms, including a parlor with an original piano, a kitchen and a bedroom.

“This is based on photographs of what it looked like in the original house,” said Mike Coggiola, a docent and a volunteer with the Sunnyvale Historical Society, which has a museum in a nondescript building at Murphy Park.

“Sunnyvale has got so much history. The old museum was so cramped and didn’t get much attention,” said Coggiola. “This is going to attract so much more attention and get people to connect with the heritage in Sunnyvale.”

Mary West, the oldest living charter member of the historical society, said she remembers it forming in 1956 to try to save the original Murphy house.

“It was just not the right time,” said West, awed by the museum after driving in from Santa Rosa. “I never figured on anything like this.”

With an old agricultural barn and a working apricot orchard next door, the historical museum gives the community a repository not only of valuable local artifacts dating back nearly 3,000 years to the Ohlone who lived here, but also an engaging and lively way to present them.

A few exhibits look at transformational moments, such as the arrival and settlement of the Murphy family, the arrival of the train, San Jose developer Walter Crossman’s decision to buy 200 acres around the “Murphy Station” stop and sell them for as little as \$67 per acre.

Others point out old time Sunnyvale businesses such as the Libby, McNeill and Libby cannery, the Joshua Hendy Ironworks and The Radio Shop, Coggiola’s favorite exhibit about one of the earliest commercial radio producers in the early 1920s.

Many of the museum’s artifacts were archived and stored at the park building, and will slowly be transferred, said Jeanine Stanek, a major force in curating the historical exhibits. People saved “ordinary things from their lives, from those times,” she said. “You may not have pivotal, huge events, but you can exhibit the way people lived.”

Ranga and Lakshmanan Vasumathy, with their 4-year-old daughter Swetha, were particularly impressed with the period rooms. They featured some items, such as a pincushion and pendulum clock, that remain common in India, said the five-year Sunnyvale residents. The maps and photographs from times gone by also caught their eye, helping, as they did for other visitors, to make the history palpable.

The Vasumathys said they were looking for the “Then and Now” room, where a dazzling mural unfurls Sunnyvale’s history — and pre-history — across four walls.

The lively display was painted by muralist Ali Pearson, whose husband Bill Stockton is a Murphy descendant, and it drew all the “wows” it was supposed to.

The museum is not complete, Babcock said, because it focused its funds on building a high-quality building and ran out of money before it could finish all the exhibits it plans to make. Future plans include working with technology companies to put together displays about that chapter in Sunnyvale’s history, as well as coordinating with various cultural groups, she said.

The museum, at 550 E. Remington Drive, will be open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. For more information, visit www.heritageparkmuseum.org.

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