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Community News

Sunnyvale Heritage Museum finishes entrance after a decade



Sunnyvale Heritage Park and Museum staff salvaged this gate from the Mardesich orchard in Sunnyvale before the site was redeveloped into housing and recently installed it at the entrance to the museum complex, marking the first time in its 10-year history that visitors can enter from the front. (Photo by Victoria Kezra)

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For the first time in the history of the Sunnyvale Heritage Park and Museum, visitors are finally able to walk through the entrance to the complex—just in time for the museum’s 10th anniversary.

“Our patience paid off; the new entrance is so spectacular,” museum director Laura Babcock said. “We really have to say the wait was worth it.”

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Until now, visitors had to park and then enter the complex from a side path rather than through the area that was intended as the entrance. A maintenance shed was placed in front of the museum, blocking the building from view and sometimes causing confusion for guests. Babcock said that they first requested the shed be moved 11 years ago.

“It was always a joke that we were the best-kept secret in town,” Babcock said. “We were the most well-hidden museum in the county, to the point where we had to walk to the parking lot and wave our arms for PG&E or Comcast to find us; even some city staff could not find us.”

Once the shed was finally bulldozed in February, Babcock said, the museum staff made a champagne toast to celebrate the destruction of the eyesore.

In October a stately iron gate weighing 900 pounds was installed at the entrance of the museum complex. The gate is more than 100 years old, according to Babcock, and was salvaged by the Historical Society from the Mardesich orchard in Sunnyvale before the site was redeveloped into housing. With the help of 12 volunteers, the gates were transported to their new home.

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“We have done that from time to time when old properties are being redeveloped,” said Babcock. “We take whatever we think should be saved for Sunnyvale history because otherwise it goes to the landfill.”

Now that guests are encouraged to come through the front entrance of the pavilion, a number of new features have been added to the museum courtyard.

“It’s really spectacular. You may have noticed when the new gates are open, along the righthand side of the path you walk up to a bunch of new outdoor exhibits,” said Babcock.

New exhibits include an El Camino Real bell that was rescued in the 1920s and used to be one of many that marked the route along the El Camino Real, as well as a sundial from Sunnyvale’s original city hall.

Now, after more than a decade of waiting, everything is exactly as the museum had originally been envisioned, and Babcock said the museum staff couldn’t be happier.

“It was a long, long process of waiting, but when you are doing something like a whole history center and museum site, doing it correctly is more important than doing it quickly,” said Babcock.

The Sunnyvale Heritage Park and Museum is located at 570 E. Remington Drive and is open Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to 4 p.m.

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Victoria Kezra Victoria Kezra is a reporter covering Sunnyvale. She is a Syracuse University alumna and has previously written for The Syracuse New Times, The Daily Beast and The Jerusalem Post. She never seems to have enough milk in her house.

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