

# Pizarro: Brandenburg gift gets San Jose Fire Museum's engine running

By Sal Pizarro | [spizarro@mercurynews.com](mailto:spizarro@mercurynews.com)

1 COMMENT



The San Jose Fire Museum celebrated a \$1 million donation from the Brandenburg Foundation during a ceremony in front of their new home at old Fire Station One in San Jose, Calif., Thursday morning Feb. 26, 2015. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group) (Karl Mondon)

Most people receive gifts on their wedding anniversary. But for their 63rd third anniversary on Thursday, Lee and Diane Brandenburg gave a gift to the San Jose community -- and a giant one, too.

The Brandenburgs signed an oversize check symbolizing their family foundation's \$1 million donation to the nonprofit San Jose Fire Museum for the purchase of old Fire Station No. 1 at Market and St. James streets. Now comes the hard part of raising \$14 million for design and renovation of the 1951 building to house the museum's extensive collection of firefighting equipment, documents and photographs.

"This is just the beginning," Lee Brandenburg said during a ceremony outside the station. "With this dedicated crew of retired firefighters, everything's going to happen."



Lee Brandenburg dons a fire helmet given to him by the San Jose Fire Museum after he and his wife, Diane, donated a \$1 million gift during a ceremony outside old Fire Station One in San Jose, Calif., Thursday morning Feb. 26, 2015. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group) (Karl Mondon)

Brandenburg, always a fan of the standards, used the occasion to serenade his bride at the podium with a few refrains from two songs appropriate to the occasion: "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire." But they didn't leave empty-handed, either.

John McMillan, president of the San Jose Fire Museum, presented the couple with a few gifts, including a white fire chief's helmet emblazoned with the name "Brandenburg" and a beautifully engraved "Muster Team

Exemption Certificate" made out for the Brandenburg Family Foundation. Back in the old, old days those certificates kept firefighters from having to serve on juries or in the military and exempted them from poll taxes.

Advertisement



For the ceremony, the Fire Museum brought over a few of its vintage vehicles, including a 1905 fire chief's Cadillac. McMillan said the white touring car is Lee Brandenburg's favorite in the collection and it stood in stark contrast 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.

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 registers of historic places. The city finally approved the purchase last month, prompting Thursday's official celebration, which drew more than 100 supporters.

Mayor Sam Liccardo and many members of the City Council were there, along with interim Fire Chief Curtis Jacobson, Santa Clara County Supervisors Dave Cortese and Cindy Chavez, San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce CEO Matt Mahood, History San Jose CEO Alida Bray, and former San Jose Mayor Tom McEnery.

McMillan says the goal is to have the museum ready by August 2019, which would be the 100th birthday of Sam Seibert, the retired fire captain who's considered the museum's "founder emeritus." Keep tabs on the progress at [www.sjfiremuseum.org](http://www.sjfiremuseum.org).

**NOW THAT'S A FIESTA:** One of the top auction items at Sacred Heart Nativity Schools' Fiesta Night fundraiser last Saturday was a 10-person class on tamale making, with Beatriz Coterro, that went for \$7,000. Coterro, the mother of Sacred Heart Nativity Schools President Sonya Arriola, even offered to do a second party for the same price.

The fundraiser didn't result in just work for Coterro, though. She also happened to be holding the winning ticket out of 100 for a week in Cabo San Lucas. At least she'll be able to rest between parties.

**PLAYING GOD:** Bellarmine College Prep is opening its production of "Monty Python's Spamalot" on Friday, and fans of the Arthurian musical comedy -- with heavy nods to the film "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" -- features the voice of God as a role. The Jesuit boys school isn't shying away from the part and plans to have a different school "celebrity" in the role for each of the performances.

The Bells are even being progressive: One of the "Gods" is Campus Ministry staff member Missy Scott-Lorentz. The rest of the lineup includes Principal Chris Meyercord; the Rev. Robert Shinney; Dean of Student Discipline Scott Swensen; former theater program chair Tom Alessandri; Christian Service Program Director Steve Pinkston and Associated Student Body President Drew Descourouez.