



# DENVER POLICE

## MUSEUM

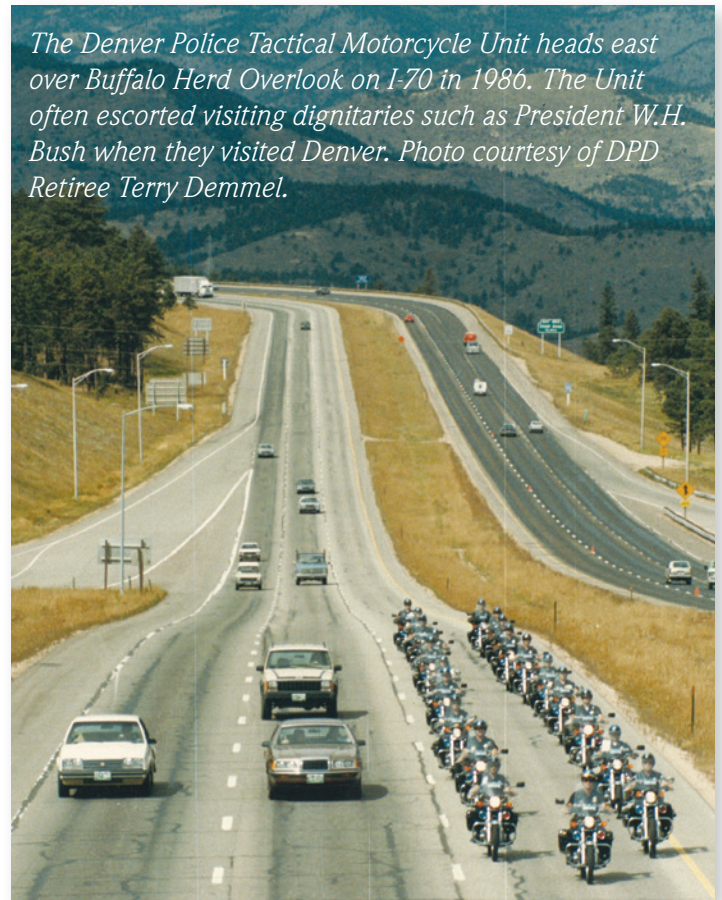
Spring 2013, Volume 2, Issue 1

## Early Supporters Help Museum Project

Assisting the Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum Board in its quest to open an actual police museum in Denver have been an energetic group of retired officers and widows and many individuals currently serving in the Denver Police Department. In addition, the project has received some much-needed support from private citizens who say they appreciate the role the law enforcement community has played in our city.

A plaque bearing a historical Denver Special Police badge from the 1950s has been presented to several of these citizens who have lent their assistance through contributions of money and their valuable time during these beginning stages. Board President Dean Christopherson said these original badges have been fashioned into unique awards and are being presented to thank those who saw the potential of establishing such a museum in the early stages. "We won't easily forget those who lent a hand when a museum was just an idea. Their early support has enabled us to get to the point we are today."

*Please see **EARLY SUPPORTERS**, page 2*



*The Denver Police Tactical Motorcycle Unit heads east over Buffalo Herd Overlook on I-70 in 1986. The Unit often escorted visiting dignitaries such as President W.H. Bush when they visited Denver. Photo courtesy of DPD Retiree Terry Demmel.*

## Message from the Board

March 15, 2013

The Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum Board is pleased to report a great deal of progress being made towards establishment of the museum since our Fall Newsletter. We continue to explore locations which can be used for storage and provide space for volunteers to begin archiving the many artifacts we are receiving for the museum.

In the meantime, we are stepping up our project to record the Oral Histories of as many retired police officers and widows as possible with great success. Dean Christopherson, Board president recently announced the appointment of DPD retiree Leo Bellio to head up the

recording project. Bellio retired from the force in 1988.

"We are recording wonderful stories about the history of the Denver Police Department in these sessions, which are an attempt to capture the personal memories of the individuals involved," Christopherson said. We plan to have a kiosk included in the Museum when it opens where as many individual officers as possible and their families can look up the personal history. In addition to the recorded Oral History, pictures of the officer throughout his or her career, relevant citations, newspaper articles and personal photos are being included in the individual Histories.

"Although we have set up several places to record the histories, including the Denver Firefighters Museum

*Please see **MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD**, page 4*

## EARLY SUPPORTERS, from page 1



*Left: David Caldiero of David Ellis Jewelers, was one of the earliest financial supporters of the museum.*

*Center: John Zakhem (left) and his law partner Charles J. Smith, flank Officer Dean Christopherson as he thanks them. Zakhem Law has donated hundreds of hours of legal advice to assist in the formation and operation of the Board.*

*Right: Retired Denver Police Officer Darrel Behrendsen has been collecting and archiving artifacts from retirees and families for several years. With the assistance of his wife Barb Sparks-Behrendsen, he has donated countless hours to go through historical records and the personal memorabilia and notebooks of his fellow officers.*

# Patrolman Edward Smerdel Added to the Wall

The Denver Police Department, in April of 2012, added four names to a memorial wall that honors officers who died in the line of duty — a reminder of the peril that cops live with each day. The wall now bears the names of 66 cops.

.....

The addition of Patrolman Edward K. Smerdel, to this wall represents his widow's long struggle to have her husband's death ruled accidental. Denver Patrolman, Edward H. Smerdel, whose death occurred on July 16, 1961, will now also be included on the National Law Enforcement Memorial and the Colorado State Memorial, as well as Denver Police Memorial.

In 1961, patrolman Edward K. Smerdel died after accidentally shooting himself while cleaning his pistol at a police substation. In his 11-year career, Smerdel received 16 commendations or commendatory reports, including one for saving a 3-year-old's life by administering CPR.

Patrolman Smerdel was hired on the Police Department on February 16, 1950. He was assigned to a one-man patrol car during the summer of 1961, patrolling East-Side City Parks, with his shift running from 4 p.m.-midnight, out of the Five-Points Station, 2607 Welton St.

During the course of his shift, he returned to the Station to



clean his service revolver for an anticipated inspection the next day. As a common protocol, officers were inspected at Roll Call prior to the start of their shift, with occasional inspections of their weapons. Patrolman Smerdel

was quoted earlier in his shift as stating "I haven't cleaned my gun for three or four months..., and if I don't clean my gun, I'm going to be gigged". He inquired early in his shift with personnel at a nearby Fire Station for some rags to use in cleaning his gun, and answered several calls during his remaining

shift. He was discovered at around 11:20 p.m., deceased, with a single gunshot wound, at the Police Station. Initial newspaper accounts indicated it was likely accidental; however, a Coroner's Inquest opted for a ruling of "suicide" which the Medical Examiner amended on the Death Certificate.

Officer Smerdel's Widow, Blanche, did not accept that decision, believing Edward would not have intentionally killed himself. She appealed the determination of his death through Denver Trial Court, the State Industrial Commission, and eventually the Colorado State Supreme Court. All of the

*Please see **SMERDEL**, page 4*

# Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum Donors

We are so appreciative of those who, very early on, believed this project is not only possible, but essential.  
We gratefully acknowledge your contributions. Together we can build a great museum!

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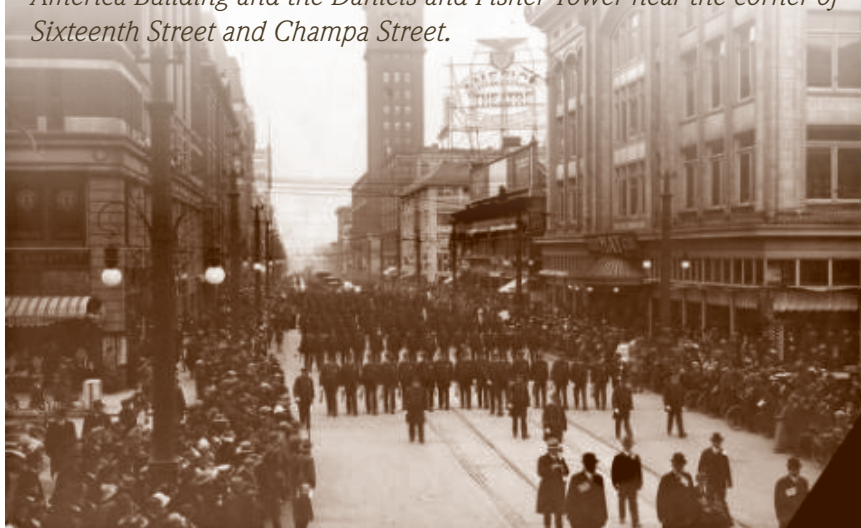
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*Denver police officers participating in the Denver Police and Firemen's Parade on May 17, 1921, march by The May Company, the America Building and the Daniels and Fisher Tower near the corner of Sixteenth Street and Champa Street.*



Contact us at

[www.denverpolicemuseum.org](http://www.denverpolicemuseum.org)

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**SMERDEL**, from page 2

rulings upheld that Officer Smerdel's death was in fact, "a result of an accident arising out of and in the course of his employment."

Based upon the Colorado Supreme Court decision of 1968, it was clear that Patrolman Smerdel's death was in the line of duty, as a result of performing duties related to his employment by cleaning his duty weapon, and during the course of his regular shift.

Blanche Smerdel, who never gave up, took his case to the highest court in the State, over the length of seven years, to clear his name. She still resides in the small house in Denver where she lived with Patrolman Smerdel at the time of his death over fifty years ago.



*Blanche Smerdel (left) and her daughter Susan at ceremony with Denver Police Chief Robert White.*



**You can support the Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum in the following ways:**

- I want to volunteer for the museum.
- I want to share my story about the Denver Police Department.
- I want to donate an artifact to the museum.
- I want to to underwrite an Oral History segment.
- I want to make a contribution to the museum. Enclosed is my contribution of:  \$25  \$50  \$100  \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ Other

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**MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD**, from page 1

downtown, and several of the Denver Police Department District Headquarters, we are also able to bring our recording equipment to individual homes to accommodate retired officers and widows," he said. "We have had a tremendous response thus far and hope to hear from many more retired offices interested in recording their history. Those who have participated have really enjoyed reminiscing with the other retired officers doing the recording about their time on the job. We are so pleased these wonderful stories won't be lost to history."

Anyone interested in the Oral History Project should contact Board Vice President Mike Hesse at **303-495-9718** or



Newsletter Editor Patty Price at **703-447-7125** to set up an appointment. They can also send you a sample questionnaire to illustrate the kinds of questions you can expect to be asked to jog your memory about your service and a sample of the memorabilia you might want to include in your History.

The **Denver Police Department Widows Organization** meets once a month for lunch and invites all police widows to join them, according to Claire Hesse, the organization's president. "We have a lot in common and enjoy meeting once a month and trying out different restaurants all over the metro area," she said. Anyone interested in joining the group should call Claire at **303-421-5386**.