



# DENVER POLICE MUSEUM

Summer 2013, Volume 2, Issue 2

## DPLEM Board Studies Other Successful Police Museums

In an effort to learn from the experiences of other cities that have established thriving police museums, the Denver Police Museum Board sent members Michael Hesse and Susan Smith, and Retired DPD Officer Leo Bellio to Los Angeles, California for the National Conference of Police Museums from April 29 to May 1, 2013.

The three attendees said they believe their interaction with more than 40 police museum officials from other cities and the informative speakers and presentations will help them guide the board of the Denver Police Museum in its efforts to establish a world-class facility befitting the city of Denver and the Denver Police Department.

Glynn Martin, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Police Museum, which hosted the conference, provided an insightful presentation on the formation of their museum which is housed in a 1920's era police station. It is the only remaining police building of its era in Los Angeles. Its annual budget is approximately \$500,000 a year. The facility is staffed by three full time employees. The exhibits are professionally presented and reflect the rich history of the Los Angeles Police Department. The museum has recently added what could be referred to as a large carport which contains a storage area

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*What started out as a police officer Halloween costume, has now become a passion for Jackson Gallegos. He stands in awe as the officers stand in formation and mimics all their actions. He watches his grandfather, Detective Mark Allen, intently at the May 17th Memorial ceremony at Police Headquarters. He is growing up in the shadow of a law enforcement family...watching, listening, and learning of his legacy.... from grandfather Mark Allen, to great-grandfather Tom Lohr to great- great- grandfather Albert A. Lohr...all who have served in the Denver Police Department. The preservation of this generational history is what the Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum project is all about.*

## Message from the Board

At long last, the Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum is planning on moving its collection of artifacts and memorabilia into space in Denver Police headquarters downtown in September. The location allotted for museum activities will be the former Juvenile Intake Center on the first floor, according to Board President Dean Christopherson.

"We are so grateful for Chief White and his Chain of Command's support in getting this space," said Christopherson. Now we can begin to archive and catalogue

the hundreds of historical items which have been donated by officers, their families, and private citizens. Many of the Department's artifacts have been collected for safekeeping through the years by Sharon Sekerak and Chris Hoag.

The Board is hoping to recruit retired officers to sort and identify artifacts because they will bring first-hand experience to the task. We will be putting out the call for a support team of people with unique skill sets to volunteer in this effort, and anyone interested in helping with this project should fill out the form on the back of this Newsletter and

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THEN AND NOW...

## Denver Police Widow Association Celebrates 40th Anniversary

The Denver Police Widows Association, formed in 1973 as an organization to bring together women who had lived their lives with the common thread of being a policeman's wife, recently commemorated the 40th Anniversary of its founding. The climax of the celebration was the serving of a beautifully decorated tiered cake baked by Widow's Association Secretary since 2008, Debi Libonati.

Current President Claire Hesse, said the widow's group had given its members the opportunity to make close friends with other women who knew the fears and worries of a policeman's life and the dangers that beset him and his family.

Although several of the members knew each other while their husbands were on duty, many others hadn't met until joining the widow's group. "We enjoy meeting for lunch once a month at different places all across the metro area," she said." About 20-25 members come to lunch at any one time.



We really enjoy each other's company." Please call Claire Hesse at **303-421-5386** if you are interested in joining.

Other officers elected at the meeting were: Doris Comstock, vice president; Debi Libonati, secretary and DPWS Newsletter editor; Lois Schafer, treasurer; Doris Coppersmith, chaplain; Donna Reiber, outreach; and Cleo Wickersham, article editor. Pat Hake plans the luncheons.

## Officer Killed in 1920 No Longer Lost to History

By Sadie Gurman, *The Denver Post*, May 18, 2013

Roy O. Downing was a 23-year-old part-time Denver policeman working on a cold morning in December 1920 when the open coal chute of a home on Park Hill's Bellaire Street caught his eye.

Downing had been patrolling on foot, wearing a badge he bought himself and a uniform he might have borrowed for his duties as a "night watchman." His job was to help fill the ranks for about \$40 a month.

Park Hill was his own neighborhood, so when he saw the open chute, and a missing window screen, he knew something was wrong. But before he could rouse the homeowner, a burglar fired five or six shots from the back door. As *The Rocky Mountain News* reported that day, "Downing crumpled in the shadows at the rear of the house," dead of gunshots to the chest and head. The gunman fled in a waiting roadster. "The uproar aroused the whole neighborhood," the *News* reported

But as the decades wore on, the news stories faded, and Downing's death in the line of duty was lost to time. Denver police officials revived Downing's memory recently as they unveiled the etching of his name on the city's police memorial downtown. They also added the name of the department's



69th and most recent fallen officer, Celena Hollis, killed during an outdoor jazz concert last summer.

District Attorney Mitch Morrissey told a gathered crowd that her death was "a sad reminder of just how dangerous it is to serve and protect the citizens of Denver."

It was also a dangerous job 93 years ago.

A crew of roving Park Hill bandits had been shooting lawmen and robbing banks around the country. Detectives believed they were the ones who shot Downing, though "the trail kind of goes cold," said Officer Dean Christopherson, who unearthed Downing's story by poring over state records, library archives and newspaper articles.

"He was 23, he left a young bride behind and no children," said Christopherson, board president of the Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum, which has added other officers' names to the wall decades after their deaths. "Who's going to tell his story 40 or 50 years from now? Just because they're lost to history until now doesn't mean they have sacrificed any less."

*"You risk your skin catching killers and the juries turn them loose so they can come back and shoot at you again. If you're honest you're poor your whole life and in the end you wind up dying all alone on some dirty street. For what? For nothing ... for a tin star."*

— HIGH NOON, 1952



# 2013 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!

Abe and Amy Alonzo	Manuel Hays	Barbara Nelson
Art and Itsu Arita	Carlyn Haze	Marc and Dee Northrup
Bear Valley Cop Shop Crew	Rich and Sue Jones	Deryl Novak
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Flora Louise Greene	William Myers	Dan Wyckoff
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David Haley		

We also wish to express our gratitude to all of the folks at Headquarters, the District Stations, and other well-wishers who continue to ask about the museum's progress, for their ongoing support of the effort. We also appreciate the many anonymous folks that have provided artifacts and other items along the way, but choose to stay out of the spotlight, silent but no less supportive.

The Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum wishes to express its condolences and appreciation to the Family of Retired Officer Wally McCreary, who passed away May 19, 2013. The family told us it was Wally's wish to have contributions in his memory sent to the Denver Police Museum. Thank you.



*Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum Board President Dean Christopherson presents appreciation plaques made from antique Denver police badges to major donors. Pictured top are Ret. Det. Rich Jones and his wife Sue who exhibit their lively interest in Denver and Colorado history through their continued support of the Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum. Pictured bottom is Patricia Blake who contributed to the museum to express her gratitude for the everyday work of the cops on the street after she was the victim of a crime. She believes she survived and was able to press charges thanks to the compassion and professionalism of the Denver Police Department, especially Det. Mark Allen.*



*Denver Police Officers are pictured on April 1, 1968 in a standoff with burglars who were reportedly holding employees hostage in the back of Lafittes Restaurant at 14th and Larimer.*

## DPLEM BOARD STUDIES MUSEUMS, from page 1

and an outside cover for eight vehicles. The vehicles include a "Paddy wagon," several period-specific police cars, the vehicle used by the shooters in the North Hollywood Bank shoot out, a bullet riddled police cruiser, as well as several armored vehicles.

One of the major points gleaned from the Los Angeles museum example is the importance of location which is obviously the key to maximum impact. While having a historic building is important, it can make the mission of the museum more difficult and cost a great deal to maintain.

While the Los Angeles museum is impressive, it basically is geared to a mostly adult visitor. They have very little hands-on opportunities for children. The fact that they are not able to host field trips—which could be underwritten by local donors and civic organizations—and are only open weekdays was

seen by the Denver delegation as weaknesses that should be considered carefully by our board.

The inclusion of interactive exhibits or scenarios, like rescuing hostages, driving simulators, scientific analysis in crime fighting such as fingerprinting and DNA, would appeal to a younger audience which may bring adults in the door. The Denver Board's Mission Statement includes developing a format that both young people and adults will find interesting, with interaction and education being essential.

Another subject of particular interest to the Denver delegation was the importance of establishing more interest in the museum among active police officers. The Cleveland Police Museum reports it has nearly 100% payroll deductions participation from current officers. The other museums said that retired officers, spouses and widows were their greatest source of volunteers which are essential to keep the museum running.

### 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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Contribute online at [www.denverpolicemuseum.org](http://www.denverpolicemuseum.org)  
or mail contribution to PO Box 9140, Denver, CO 80209.



**Denver Police Law Enforcement Museum**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD, from page 1

mail to P.O. Box 9140, Denver, CO 80209 or contact Patty Price at **703-447-7125**.

The headquarters location is not the permanent site of the



*This photo which appears to be members of the Denver Police force was recently found at an estate sale in Denver with the words "Uncle Frank Parello 1924" hand written on the back.*

museum, but will be the interim space where the museum's assets can be organized while the Board raises money and searches for the ideal site for the actual museum to open to the public. We are excited to be in police headquarters where officers and staff can monitor the progress of the museum and become part of it because it's their story the museum will tell.

Meanwhile, volunteers and retired officers Leo Bellio and Darrel Beherendsen continue to record Oral Histories of Denver Police officers and their families, including interesting personal perspectives of their careers. Those participating say they have thoroughly enjoyed reminiscing about the old days with their contemporaries while leaving living personalized stories for their families and future generations. Nearly 50 histories been completed. Please call Darrel at **303-771-1219** or Leo at **303-423-7871** if you want to learn more about recording your own Oral History.