

Historic firehouse spruced up

Historic Buildings

10-4-14

Donations sought
for \$15,000
restoration project

By Donna Jones

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WATSONVILLE » Watsonville spent \$10,000 in 1924 to build its firehouse on Second Street.

Now, the city's spending the same amount to paint the historic building, and it's not enough to cover the cost of the \$15,000 project.

Freedom and Watsonville Rotary Clubs have stepped in to help, donating \$1,000 each, and issuing a challenge to the business community to match their contributions.

The clubs also are teaming up with the city and the Watsonville Firefighters Association to sponsor a benefit barbecue Oct. 18.

"History is important, not only to the fire station, the fire department, but to everybody else. The things people did should be recognized in some way," said Gene Friend, who was a volunteer firefighter and assistant chief for 50 years before retiring in 2001.

Friend has a special connection to the firehouse. He spearheaded the effort to turn a building that had fallen into disrepair into a repository of department history. Along with tackling renovations, he tracked down vintage vehicles that had been sold off and per-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Watsonville's historic firehouse is getting a new coat of paint with some help from Rotary.

suaded owners to donate the equipment back. In recognition of his work, the museum is named in his honor.

Upstairs in the two-story firehouse, in the former firefighter living quarters, archives include photographs dating to the 1890s and books that detail daily activities in decades past.

The firehouse also is home to the city's first mechanized engine, purchased in 1915, and an engine and ladder truck bought in 1928 after a massive fire on the city's west side destroyed more than dozen packing sheds and

several homes.

The firehouse had to be remodeled to make room for the two new pieces of equipment, Friend said. His father helped build the addition, he said.

"I had a feeling for the station after that," he said.

Friend often leads tours, and one he guided for Freedom Rotary sparked the club's interest in helping. Adults find people they know, long-gone relatives in some cases, in photographs, he said. The historic engines appear in city parades and at events. It helps forge connections between the department and

FIREHOUSE BENEFIT

What: Drive-through barbecue to raise funds for painting Watsonville's historic firehouse museum.

When: 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Oct. 18.

Where: Watsonville Fire Station 1, 115 Second St.

Tickets: \$15. Available online at <http://tinyurl.com/ndbeuzd> or at KBK Insurance, 1006 Freedom Blvd., or Integrity Lending, 444 Airport Blvd.

the community.

"It's just something that keeps people's interest," Friend said.