



Perris News

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New Perris Transit Center to Honor Ward Kimball *Phase 1 Grand Opening January 11, 2010 at 2 pm*

Ward Kimball earned his living as a pioneering animator and cartoonist for Walt Disney, but his real passion was trains.

Kimball, who created the characters Jiminy Cricket and worked on such ground-breaking animated pictures like "Fantasia" and "Dumbo," became so fond of the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris that he donated two of his own steam engines to the repository of historical railroad equipment.

So City officials say it's only appropriate that Perris' new Transit Center on C Street will be dedicated to Kimball and decorated with some of the iconic characters he created.

Those include panels decorated with the likenesses of Jiminy Cricket, the Mad Hatter and Tweedledum and Tweedledee, light posts carrying a silhouette of Jiminy Cricket and a bronze plaque honoring Kimball's career.

"Ward Kimball was a great support of our rail museum and of this valley," Mayor Daryl Busch said. "The art that will be on display is an outstanding representation of his work and will make our Transit Center unique. This Transit Center will be a vital hub of mass transit in southwest Riverside County."

The grand opening of the Perris Station Transit Center takes place at 2 p.m. on Jan. 11.

Phase I of the \$5 million Transit Center includes eight bus bays and 141 park and ride spaces. Phase II, set to open in 2012, includes the development of a Metrolink station for the Perris Valley Line. The project is jointly funded by the Riverside County Transportation Commission and the Riverside Transit Agency using state, local and federal monies.

Busch credits former Perris City Councilman John Motte with helping bring Kimball's work to the Perris Transit Center.

Motte met Kimball on a couple of occasions, learned about his career and thought that his artwork would make a great addition to the Perris Center. Motte served on the board of directors of the Riverside Transit Agency, who also broached the idea with Disney.

Motte said obtaining permission from the Disney executives to use Kimball's drawing was a major coup for the City. The Walt Disney Co. is extremely protective of its brand and legacy and often denies use of its images on schools, walls and other public venues.

Kimball's son, John, stepped in and threw his support behind the City's efforts and Disney eventually agreed.

Motte and Mayor Daryl Busch drove to the Disney archives in Burbank and spent a day going through Kimball's illustrations and drawings in a climate-controlled room. They also saw drawings of one of Walt Disney's first cartoons, "Steamboat Willie," the film credited with introducing the world to Mickey Mouse.

"We had access to a lot of material," Motte said. "It was a really great experience. It's a great idea to dedicate the station in his honor."

Motte said he believes the Transit Center will help raise the City's profile and attract visitors to Perris. He envisions a day when visitors to Perris will board a train on C Street and travel in comfort to Disneyland in Anaheim. The artwork, along with the nationally recognized Orange Empire Railway Museum and the historic California Pacific Railroad Depot Building on 4th Street, will create a powerful magnet for rail and history buffs.

"If we can get a little Disney to come to Perris, that will be a major accomplishment, a very big kudo," Motte said.

Kimball provides an excellent link to the magic that is Disney.

Kimble went to work for Disney in 1934 in the very early days of movie animation. He earned the title as one of Disney's "Nine Old Men" as the studio's team of top animators was dubbed. He worked at Disney for 40 years, earning credits for films like "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," "Pinocchio," "Alice in Wonderland," "Cinderella" and "Mary Poppins." He won an Academy Award for the 1969 film, "It's Tough to be a Bird" and received numerous other awards in his long career.

In an interview about his long career with Disney, Kimball said his job was often a labor of love.

"We thought we were always going to be 21 years old. We thought we would always be putting goldfish in the bottled drinking water, balancing cups of water on the light fixtures, changing the labels on cans of sauerkraut juice. We were 21 years old, Walt was 30, leading the pack. Working there was more fun than any job I could ever imagine."

Kimball died in 2002 at the age of 88.

By that time, he already was well known to Perris train buffs. He donated his 1881 coal-fired "Emma Nevada" and 1917 wood-fired "Chloe" steam engines to the Orange Empire Railway Museum. Those engines formed the heart of the railroad he began on his property in 1938, a line he dubbed "Grizzly Flats."

In 1990, Ward and Betty Kimball announced the donation of their Grizzly Flats Railroad to the Orange Empire Railway Museum, along with the funding to erect a four-track engine house for the preservation and display of this historic collection.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held that same year, and in 1992 the new "Grizzly Flats Engine House" was completed to house the collection. In addition to the pieces donated by the Kimballs, additional related artifacts have been acquired by the Museum to help interpret a more complete history of 3-foot narrow-gauge railroads in the West.

City Councilman Al Landers, who was elected nearly 15 years ago, said he is "excited and delighted" that the Transit Center is opening. He said the Transit Center will help keep parents off the freeway by easing congestion, thereby providing more time to spend with their children. It will also turn Perris into a transportation hub in Riverside County.

And it continues the "City's vision of revitalizing Downtown," which also includes remodeling and reopening the historic Depot, renovating the nearly 100-year-old Bank, acquiring the Chief Theatre and continuing with the Commercial Façade Improvement Program to restore the historic look to century-old buildings on D Street.

"It completes another piece of the puzzle," Landers said. "Our wishes and wants are coming to fruition."

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough said he hopes the development of the Transit Center will spur City residents and visitors to use mass transportation like railroads and buses. He said it is most appropriate for the Center to come to Perris, which was founded as a stop on the California Southern Railroad and took its name from the chief engineer of that line, Fred T. Perris.

"Just to get the Transit Center and the recognition that comes with it is tremendous," he said. "Trains are part of our history. They are why Perris is where it is. The Transit Center will be a great asset to Perris."



Work crews are finishing up the last bit of work at the Perris Station Transit Center on C Street. The Center features five bus bays, 141-park-and-ride spaces and artwork from famed Disney animator Ward Kimball.



The Perris Station Transit Center lies near the historic Depot Building, which was renovated and re-opened last year.