



Perris News

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City's Historic Train Depot

Perris officials, residents and out-of-town visitors dedicated the City's historic train depot this week, a reminder of the importance the railroad played in the development of Perris and the surrounding communities 120 years ago.

But Wednesday's dedication, which drew more than 200 people and dignitaries, was not just about honoring the past.

With a new Metrolink station and Riverside Transit Authority bus stop adjacent to the Depot, Perris officials say they are poised to meet the transportation needs of the region well into the 21st Century. The bus stop is expected to be open in the next two years and the Metrolink station by 2011.

"We will be a hub," said Perris Planning Commissioner Dave Stuart, who also served as the project manager for the restoration of the 1892 Depot.

Stuart said the Depot's restoration, along with revitalization of D Street and planned improvements along 4th Street will spur business development in the City's Downtown and will bring jobs and shoppers to Perris.

"If you want to attract quality businesses, it's paramount that you keep and restore your historic buildings," he said.

Money from the City's Redevelopment Agency and federal grants paid for most of the \$1.8 million restoration, along with a donation from the Orange Empire Railway Museum. Major improvements included earthquake retrofitting, a new roof, new flooring and brickwork and installing air conditioning. The guest of honor was Lloyd Higginson, 86, who served as the last Perris Depot station manager. Higginson, who flew down from Cloverdale in Northern California with his wife, Gloria, to attend the dedication, served from 1952 to 1972.

Also in attendance were Higginson's son, John, and daughter, Dorene Turray, who both grew up in Perris and attended local schools.

"Perris is a great City that is getting greater, especially when they make the former Santa Fe Railroad Depot into the great Santa Fe Railroad Depot," Lloyd Higginson said. "I see a lot of friends here. I won't say they're old because they're all young to me. I am really proud I was a station agent here."

Riverside County Supervisor called Higginson "a living piece of Perris history" and said the commitment to restore and reopen the Depot as a museum shows the City's commitment to remembering and honoring its past.

"During his 20-year tenure at Perris, Mr. Higginson was a jack-of-all-trades at this station, responsible for operating the Western Union telegraph wire, selling tickets, handling baggage, dealing with customer complaints—in short a little bit of everything."

Perris was the center of a potato-growing region half a century ago, Ashley said, and the train brought the goods to market. Nine potato-packing companies dotted the Perris Valley, including one operated by Ashley's dad. Ashley said he worked in that business as a youngster and met Higginson on many occasions when he came to the Perris Depot.

The dedication included an appearance by a steam engine from the Orange Empire Railway Museum. Heritage High School sent a contingent from its marching band to perform patriotic tunes and a color guard from the California Military Institute raised Old Glory.

Two great-grand-daughters of Fred T. Perris, the railroad surveyor whom the City is named for, also attended. Marjorie Pratt, 89, came in from Carpinteria for the event. Bee Henisey, 79, drove from Acton in Los Angeles County. Both pronounced the newly refurbished Depot a gem that will attract train buffs and area historians, young and old.

Members of the City Council beamed at the rededication, which included cutting the ribbon that symbolically reopened the Depot and dedicating a plaque to Lloyd Higginson. Mayor Daryl Busch called the dedication a "red-letter date in Perris' history" and said the City remains committed to preserving its past while looking forward to becoming a mass-transit hub.

Other council members voiced similar sentiments.

"This is a beautiful day for Perris," said Councilwoman Rita Rogers. "We have preserved our history and we are proud of that."

Councilman John Motte praised the authentic feel of the restored building, saying it gives the visitor the appearance of a train station when life moved at a slower, more comforting pace.

"It's a throwback in time," Motte said. "I am amazed at how authentic it is. It's great for the City."

Councilman Mark Yarbrough said the cooperation of the City, the Perris Valley Historical and Museum Association and the Orange Empire Railway Museum made the restoration possible. The museums will share space when the Depot opens to the public, sometime in January.

"Most cities would give anything to have the history that we have," Yarbrough said.



Lloyd Higginson and the great-granddaughters of Fred T. Perris, who the City is named after, appear with an old steam train. Marjorie Pratt, 89, and Bee Henisey, 79, both loved the renovated Depot.

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