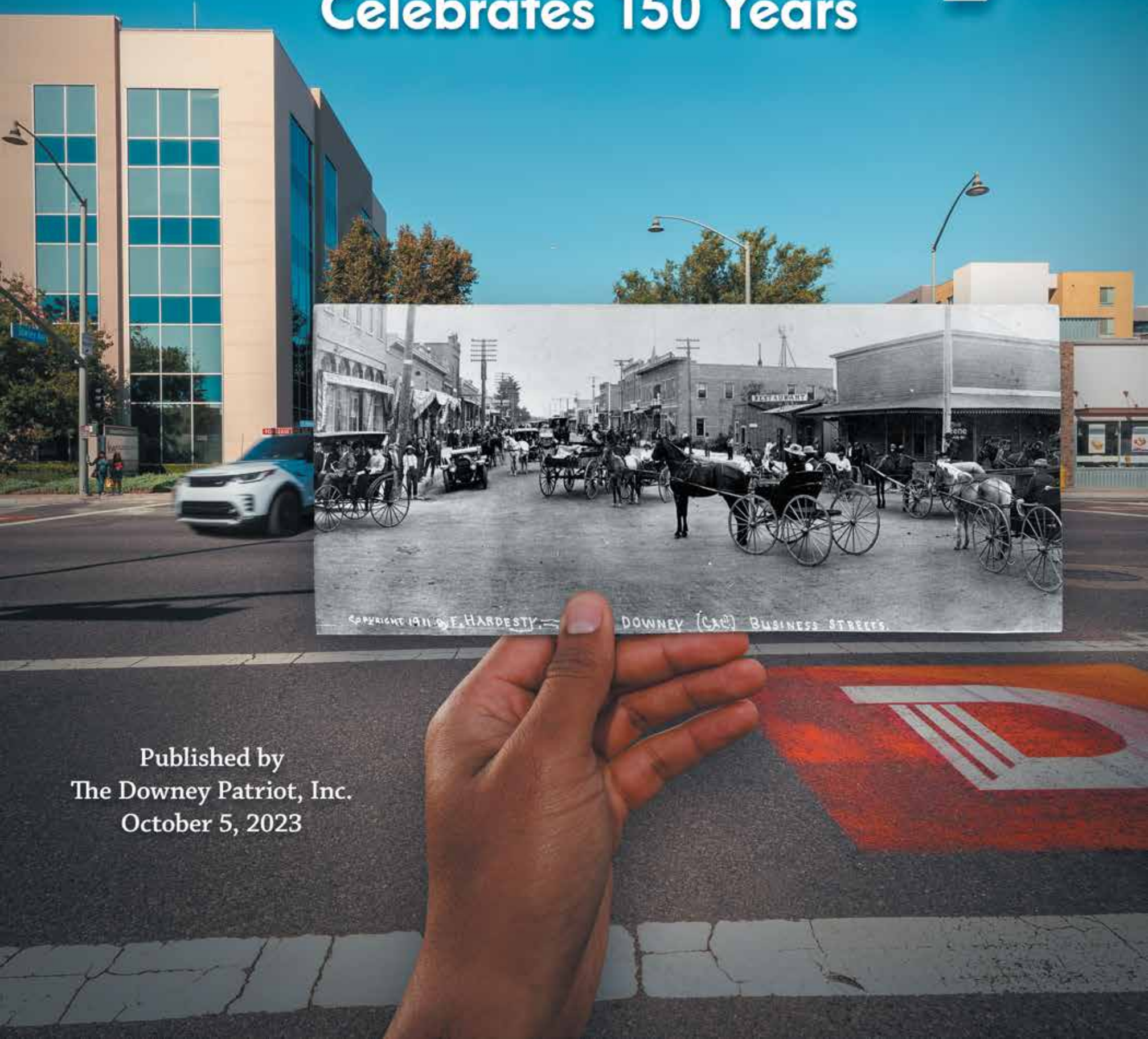


Downey

Celebrates 150 Years



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Introduction

BY ERIC PIERCE

In the town of Downey, California, life in 1873 was simple yet vibrant. Surrounded by fields and hills, the beauty of nature blended with the progress of the community. The scent of citrus orchards filled the air, while the chirping of birds created a peaceful ambiance.

Downey was an agricultural community where hardworking farmers cultivated the land, resulting in abundant crops. The main street in Downtown Downey was lined with modest shops, offering a variety of goods. The local schoolhouse buzzed with the laughter and curiosity of children eager to learn.

The arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad brought excitement and opportunities to the town. The railroad station became a gateway to the wider world, connecting Downey to distant places and fostering a sense of adventure.

Life in Downey embodied the simplicity and charm of rural living. Nature's beauty and a tight-knit community were central to the town's identity. It was a time when people appreciated the slower pace of life and the bonds they shared with their neighbors.

The United States in 1873 was a nation in transition, poised on the cusp of industrialization and rapid growth. Its cities showcased the expanding reach of human ingenuity and ambition. Bustling metropolises such as New York City and Chicago soared skyward with towering buildings, testaments to the architectural prowess of the era. Streets thrived with the incessant activity of horse-drawn carriages, weaving through crowds of determined individuals who navigated the urban landscape with purpose.

Agriculture played a central role in the nation's economy, with vast expanses of fertile soil fueling the agricultural engine that drove the nation forward. Farms dotted the countryside, their fields a patchwork of vibrant crops, testament to the labor of hardworking farmers who toiled under the sun. The heartland thrived, producing an abundance of grains, fruits, and livestock that fed a growing population and fueled the nation's economic engine.

The United States in 1873 was also a nation grappling with the lasting scars of its tumultuous past. The echoes of the American Civil War, which had ended just a few years prior, reverberated through the collective memory of the nation. The wounds of division and strife were not yet fully healed, as the process of reconciliation and rebuilding continued to shape the nation's identity. The aftermath of the war also presented challenges in the form of social, economic, and political transformations, as the nation sought to redefine itself in the wake of unprecedented change.

In this era of transformation, the United States experienced both the blessings and challenges of progress. The railroads, a symbol of modernity and connectivity, crisscrossed the nation, linking communities and facilitating trade and travel. This vast network of steel tracks brought people, goods, and ideas closer together, transforming the very fabric of the nation and fostering a sense of unity amidst its diversity.

However, progress was not without its setbacks. The Panic of 1873, an economic crisis triggered by the collapse of financial institutions and the subsequent stock market crash, cast a long shadow over the nation. It led to widespread unemployment, business failures, and economic hardship for many Americans. The crisis revealed the fragility of a nation in the throes of rapid change, underscoring

the importance of resilience, adaptability, and collective action in overcoming adversity.

Despite the challenges, Downey in 1873 embodied a spirit of optimism, innovation, and the relentless pursuit of a better future. It was a community brimming with entrepreneurial spirit. The foundations of modern America were being laid, setting the stage for the remarkable advancements and achievements that would shape the nation in the years to come.

The town remains a cherished part of America's story, a testament to the power of dreams, the embrace of nature, and the bonds of community that transcend time.



Queen Elizabeth tours Rockwell Aerospace in Downey on February 28, 1983.

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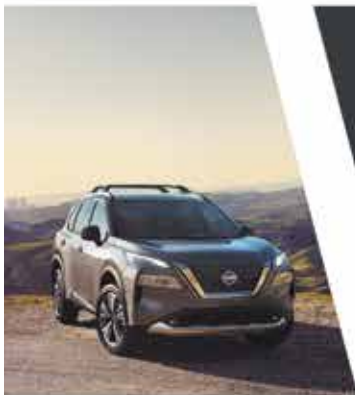
Cover features 1911 photo of Downey Avenue (then Crawford St.) by F. Hardesty. All Downey history photos courtesy the Downey Historical Society.



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Who is John Gately Downey?

BY ALEX DOMINGUEZ

Who was Downey’s namesake?

John Gately Downey was born in the county of Roscommon, Ireland in 1826 to parents Denis Downey and Bridget Gately.

At the age of 14 in 1842, Downey and his family emigrated to the United States, settling in Maryland. He was forced to halt his education at the age of 16 due to dwindling family resources, and started working to become independent. He apprenticed at an apothecary in Washington, D.C. until 1846, when he then moved to Cincinnati to take charge of an apothecary store.

Downey wouldn’t arrive in California until 1850, drawn by the glitter and opportunity of the California Gold Rush, landing in San Francisco. Finding little success, he moved on to Los Angeles where he co-partnered with Dr. James P. McFarland in the drug business. That partnership lasted until 1856, when McFarland moved to Nashville, Tennessee.

In the meantime, however, Downey began his political endeavors, elected to the Los Angeles Common Council (the predecessor to the Los Angeles City Council) for a one-year term in May of 1852 and 1856. In 1859, he was asked to be running mate for Milton Latham’s ultimately successful governorship campaign. In 1860, five days after being sworn in as lieutenant governor, he assumed governorship after Latham was sworn in to the senate to replace recently deceased David C. Broderick.

Downey was the seventh governor of California, the first (and only until Arnold Schwarzenegger was sworn in in 2003) foreign-born governor of the state.

During his term, Downey was crucial in California’s alignment with the Union during the Civil War, including authorizing and raising six regiments.

He served as governor from 1860-1862.

In 1859, Downey – along with McFarland – had purchased the over 17,600-acre Rancho Santa Gertrudes, paying \$60,000. When his term as governor ended, Downey returned to Los Angeles and, by 1865, began subdividing the property.

Formerly an open cattle range, Rancho Santa Gertrudes was split into agricultural plots and the community began to grow. The construction of a rail line by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1873 further laid the foundation for what would eventually be called Downey City.

In his life, Downey was married twice, first to Maria Guirado, the daughter of a prominent Mexican gentleman of Sonora. Guirado perished in 1883 in a train accident at Tehachapi Pass, after their train plunged into a ravine. Downey survived, albeit injured and suffering from “nervous shock” (likely what would now be known as post-traumatic stress disorder) for the remainder of his life.

He married his second wife, Rose V. Kelly, in 1888. He never had any children.

Downey died in his Los Angeles home in 1894, leaving behind an estate of over a million dollars, including a private library estimated to be worth around \$5,000.

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How Downey streets got their names

BY ERIC PIERCE

For Downey's earliest settlers, life wasn't always easy. In fact, many took long and arduous trips across the country in order to get to the Golden West. Families, in essence, started from scratch -- building new homes, tilling new fields, harvesting new crops, overseeing brand new communities.

While many people today would consider such a task insurmountable, 19th century pioneers took on the challenge, confident that their effort would produce thriving cities where their names would be remembered. Over time, the orange groves, dairy farms and family ranches vanished, but the names of Downey's pioneering families never faded away.

Today, these men and women share a living legacy -- the very streets, roads and boulevards that still bear their names.

According to historical records, Downey's first three streets were Dolan, Crawford and Venable; all named after men who helped establish the city, which initially cultivated near the intersection of Downey Avenue and Firestone Boulevard.

Dolan Street was named in honor of John Dolland, an early Downey rancher who migrated to the U.S. from Ireland in 1841. Dolland served as secretary of the Downey Land Association, the organization founded by John Gately Downey to help him both facilitate the new Southern Pacific Railroad and develop the community of Downey.

Crawford Street took its name from Matson Duke Crawford, an

early attorney and judge who also partnered with John Gately Downey. It remained Crawford Street from 1873 until 1935 when a group of local realtors launched a campaign to have the name changed to Downey Avenue, in honor of Downey, who served as governor of California from 1860-62. Nevertheless, Crawford's name still lives on through Crawford Park, a small residential park located at 7000 Dinwiddie Street.

Prominent resident Judge J.W. Venable also had a street named for him, but the road soon became referred to as Depot Street because it led to the local train station. Eventually, the street became known as La Reina Street.

For many of Downey's roads, the names gradually changed over the years to reflect the people, places and events that shaped the town. Old River School Road, for instance, got its name from the school respectively. Similarly, Gallatin Road, formally known as Gallatin School House Road, was named after the old Gallatin Schoolhouse built in 1893 near Brookshire Avenue.

Telegraph Road, which runs along Downey's northern border, didn't really have its name changed, it was just shortened. The roadway was originally known as Anaheim-Telegraph Road because of the telegraph lines that connected Los Angeles to Anaheim. For a time, there was also a stagecoach line operated along the route. In 1952, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved the abbreviated name.

Just south of Telegraph is one of Downey's principal highways, which has taken several names since its development and remains a busy thoroughfare today: Florence Avenue. Florence runs through the cities of Inglewood, Los Angeles, Huntington Park, Bell, Bell Gardens, Downey, and unincorporated parts of Los Angeles County bordering the

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City of Whittier.

Originally, the road was called Mayes Street after Robert Henry Mayes, a prominent pioneer in the region. Later, it became known as Easy Street, reportedly because farmers who lived along the street often referred to themselves as living on “easy street.”

According to an early account, a telephone operator called asking for the street’s proper name, which was going to be included in a new phone book. Residents answered, “we have always just called it Easy Street.” But it was also known as Hunt’s Crossing. Mr. and Mrs. Hunt had a small ranch on the north side of Downey where Old River School Road ended.

Later, the street was permanently changed to Florence Avenue in honor of a woman who was a member of one of Cudahy’s founding families.

Firestone Boulevard began as an old ranch road, surveyed in 1870 and first called Santa Gertrudes. Subsequently, the road took many names including Front Street, First Street and Manchester Boulevard.

Lakewood Boulevard used to be called Cerritos Avenue. It served as the primary route to get from Bellflower into Downey, but stopped at Firestone Boulevard. Years later, the road was extended north. Today, the street is a state highway that connects the eastern parts of Long Beach to Pasadena through the Whittier Narrows.

Paramount Boulevard was once known as College Avenue due to the early college, Los Nietos Collegiate Institute, located at the southeast corner of Alameda Street. It was once the main thoroughfare between the two communities of Gallatin and College Settlement. The settlements would later merge with Downey in the 1870s. When the road’s name was changed to Paramount, Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Squire put a short street

in their apple orchard, just north of Third Street between Myrtle and Paramount, named College Avenue to perpetuate the memory. The road still exists today.

Brookshire Avenue was once known as Church Street, named because of a Nazarene church, which sat at the corner of Firestone and Brookshire. The street originally ran down from Gallatin and stopped at Cherokee Drive. However, the road was later extended and renamed in memory of James Brookshire, an early resident, who had a small ranch on the east side of Brookshire, just north of Cherokee.

Cherokee Drive, once Ball Road, was renamed for the Cherokee roses Albert Ball planted along both sides of the lane that used to lead up to the two-story Ball residence.

Tweedy Lane, named for the Tweedy family, runs from Telegraph Road down to Florence Avenue. It was the street that led into the Tweedy ranch holdings, which exceeded 100 acres. Prior to being called Tweedy, the street was known as Telegraph and Jaboneria Road. Jaboneria was the name of a soap factory in the early 1900s that operated near the Rio Hondo River.

In 1895, Tweedy partnered with Albert Ball and the two began packing their own fruit as well as citrus they purchased throughout the valley. The two families created and jointly operated the Ball and Tweedy Sunkist Packing Co. The Tweedys are also credited with planting the row of stately palm trees along Tweedy Lane.

In 1911, James K. Tweedy and his wife planted the Washingtonia palms along the street in front of their Tweedy Ranch and encouraged the owner of the Ball Ranch to do the same so they would extend along

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



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**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7**

the street. Years later, the County tried to remove the palms on the lane, but Tweedy protested and County officials conceded.

Wiley-Burke Avenue, which runs from Suva Street down to Firestone Boulevard, gets its name from both the Wiley and Burke families. Frank Burke had large holdings (more than 88 acres) from Rives Avenue to Old River School Road while William K. Wiley owned land from Third Street to the railroad tracks near Firestone Boulevard.

Second Street, west of Paramount Boulevard, used to be called Burke Lane because it was the best roadway to the Burke Ranch.

Stewart and Gray Road also took its name from two families who lived on opposite ends of the street. Joseph Henry Stewart, who opened the first blacksmith shop in Los Nietos Valley, lived on the west side of the road. He moved into the region in 1869 and purchased 33 acres of land near the Rio Hondo River with his wife, Mary Rule Stewart.

The other end of the road was named for Algernon Sidney Gray, a farmer, businessman, and municipal judge who moved to Downey in the early 1870s. He served as an active community leader and justice of the peace in the early years of Downey's history.

As Downey began to develop and prosper, the city's population grew exponentially and large farm fields soon became thriving subdivisions, full of new homes and families. But despite the addition of new streets and roads, many of the original family roads kept their original names.

Rives Avenue, for example, once known as Old Wagon Road, bordered the 75-acre estate of James C. Rives. A successful lawyer and newspaperman, Rives was elected to serve two terms as the district attorney of Los Angeles from 1898 to 1902. Although the large estate was subdivided, the street remained, taking its name from the pioneer family.

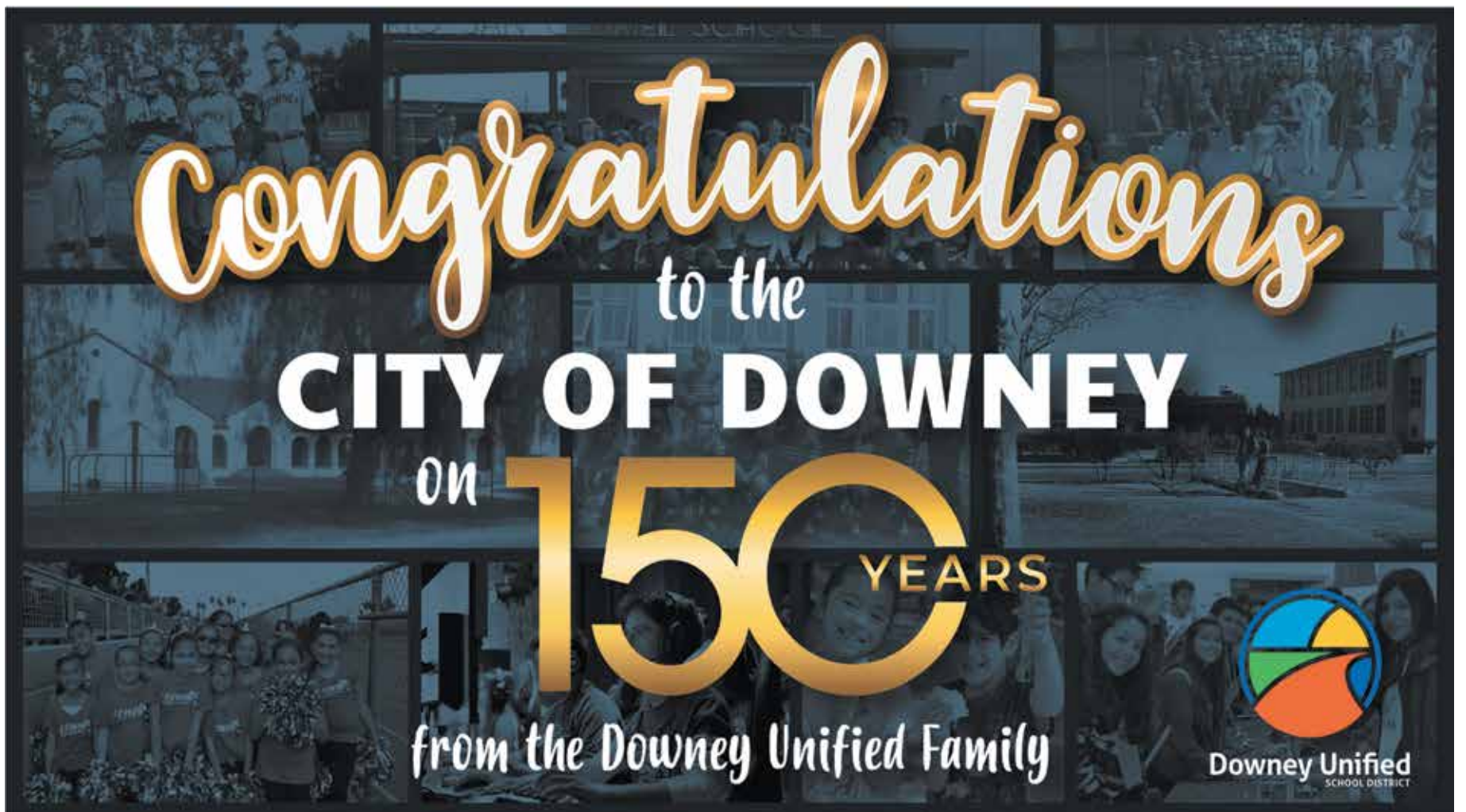
Just south of Imperial Highway, east of Bellflower Boulevard, is Ardis Avenue, named after the Ardis family, chiefly the Rev. John C. Ardis who came to Downey in 1867. Ardis helped establish Alameda Elementary School and College Settlement. The street pays tribute to his contributions to the community.

Rev. Ardis' son, Julius, became a prominent local attorney and the first president of the Downey Kiwanis Club. Julius Avenue, which runs north to south from Suva Street to Quill Drive, is named in his honor.

Otto Street, which runs east to west in segments across the city, was named for Frank Otto, who had a small orange grove northeast of Florence and Downey avenues. He served as principal and administrator of Downey High School from the early 20s until the mid 40s.

Stamps Avenue, which sits near the corner of Gallatin Road and Downey Avenue, is named for the Stamps family, early settlers, who also had a home near the northeast corner of Downey and Florence avenues. One of the Stamps, James, became the city's first mayor.

All of these streets are a living memory. While the great pioneers who once lived along these routes may be gone, their names were indeed remembered. It may not be much to commemorate all that these men and women have accomplished, but it's definitely a start down the right road.





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As Downey grew, so did the Downey Fire Department

BY ERIC PIERCE

Haygood Ardis did his best on that tragic spring day but, in the end, the flames were just too much for anyone to fight.

“I was carrying a tubful of water with Freddie Robinson when suddenly the truck blew up,” recalled Ardis. “The blast showered us with burning gasoline and set off the big tank trailer that was hitched onto the rear of the truck.”

While many people rushed to fight the spreading blaze, Ardis remembers others standing on nearby rooftops, watching in horror. The date was April 21, 1922 when a small static spark set off a gasoline tanker that was refueling Downey’s main gas station, owned by Newbold and Speaker, near Downey Avenue and New Street, now the site of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church.

Nine were killed and 20 residents received disfiguring burns in the desperate attempts to control the flames that followed. The whole town went into mourning over the catastrophe, deciding at that moment to invest in a full-time fire department.

By December 1923, the Downey Fire Protection District began to take shape. Community leaders purchased one new fire engine

and hired two professional firefighters to assist and instruct the small volunteer crew that had served the community up to that time. Housed inside a makeshift station at 8313 Firestone Blvd., the new fire district, funded by Los Angeles County, would ultimately spearhead a courageous task that thousands of men and women have taken up since the pioneer days: fighting fires.

Downey’s local fire company, as part of the LA County Consolidated Fire Protection District, consisted of a fire chief, assistant fire chief, six part-time firemen and one chief mechanic who was responsible for the truck and team training. Another six or more men served as substitutes without pay.

Local shoe store owner Carl A. Krueger served as the district’s first fire chief. Sparing no expense, Krueger’s first order of business would be the purchase of a new \$10,800 fire truck with the words “Downey” and “Los Angeles County Fire District No. 10” painted on the side. During the fiscal year of 1928, the district received just 38 alarms, but held 72 drills in preparation for future emergencies.

Focusing on fire prevention, firemen visited schools and businesses inspecting buildings for potential fire hazards. Through local advertising, town residents were urged to call the “fire department” or “phone 199” during an emergency and they did. According to the Downey Live Wire newspaper, the causes of most Downey fires varied including the “careless burning of weeds, defective chimneys, children playing with matches, clothes near stove, overheated water heaters, short circuits, tobacco, electric wires in palm trees, and even

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spontaneous combustion.”

After several years in the Firestone firehouse, a new \$40,000 station was built near the corner of Downey Avenue and Phlox Street by James Stamps, one of the 1922 gas station burn victims who later became Downey’s first mayor. From the new site, the county continued providing protection for Downey with updated equipment including a 1000-gallon pumper and tank Mack truck, a resuscitator unit and the city’s original American La France 750-gallon engine.

In order to keep up with the growth of the community, the station soon employed a brigade of 15 full-time firefighters. In the case of multiple emergencies, the firemen called on an auxiliary force consisting of more than a dozen 16 and 17-year-old boys from Downey High School. The small group of teenagers was trained to man the station and respond to local calls when the full-time crew was overwhelmed.

However, despite the proficiency of the county district, Downey, which incorporated in 1956, was soon ready to set up its own municipal fire department. With the assistance of the personnel board and the fire chiefs of Santa Monica, Los Angeles and Burbank, Robert W. Gain was selected as Downey’s first fire chief.

Gain, who took the helm on June 16, 1957, was given just six months to organize the fire department. After Gain completed his basic planning, a contract was awarded to Crown Coach Corp. for the delivery of four 1,250 gallon per minute pumpers. Beyond this, little

had been accomplished. But through the co-operation of surrounding city fire chiefs, pumpers, hoses and other fire equipment was made available. Santa Ana, Vernon, South Gate, Glendale, Huntington Park, Long Beach, and Los Angeles were generous in helping Downey during this period. Burbank and Montebello also assisted, lending sufficient radio equipment for firemen until Downey received its own.

When the fire department began taking applications for new firefighters, more than 300 qualified men eagerly applied, seeing in the development of a new city the opportunity for advancement and expansion. Examinations were given and selections from the successful candidates were made. Ultimately, the Downey Fire Department would start off with 48 firemen, many of whom migrated from other local fire departments.

The first major problem facing Gain during his tenure was finding a suitable place to store equipment. Downey’s first fire station, the original county fire district headquarters on Downey Avenue, would serve as the department’s main station for 17 years until a new Fire Station No. 1 was built at 12222 Paramount Blvd in September of 1974. When Downey took over fire services, Stations No. 2 and No. 3 were in the construction phase. Borrowing plans from the Riverside Fire Department, Gain would pattern the new Downey stations after those in Riverside.

In the interim, Trinity Baptist Church, located at Florence and Downey avenues, offered classroom facilities that would serve as

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Fire Station No. 3 while a garage inside the Southern California Gas Company on Washburn Road would serve as Fire Station No. 2. Today, Fire Station No. 2, now located at 9556 Imperial Hwy, and Fire Station No. 3, located at 9900 Paramount Blvd., are both still in operation. Fire Station No. 4, located at 9349 Florence Ave., was dedicated on November 17, 1959 and also remains in service.

Known as the “Father of the Fire Code” for his leadership in the development of the Uniform Fire Code, Gain also helped establish the minimum set of fire prevention standards for the city to safeguard life, property, and public welfare. On November 4, 1972, after 33 years of fire service in both Burbank and Downey, Gain retired, handing the reigns over to Assistant Chief Don Warren who served for a period of 9 months. On July 1, 1973, Battalion Chief Edwin Wood, one of Downey’s original firemen, was promoted to fire chief. Wood would retire after five years on the job, leaving Don Davis to assume command of the department until his promotion to city manager in December 1985.

Chief Ron Irwin was then promoted to lead the department and would do so for the next 15 years, retiring in January of 2000. Under Irwin, the duties of the fire department expanded to encompass more than firefighting and prevention. The city soon looked to the fire department in cases of search and rescue, health and hazardous materials, and emergency response to chemical, nuclear, and biological threats.

In 2000, Mark Sauter was named Downey’s sixth fire chief, but left the post in 2008 to head the city’s emergency preparedness efforts. Jeff Turner served as interim chief for more than two years until Donald L. Croom, a 26-year veteran of the Downey Fire Department, was promoted to fire chief. During his three and one half years, the department’s ambulance operators became fire department employees and was challenged with economic recession issues.

Croom retired in 2014 and was replaced by Mark Gillaspie, a 25-year department veteran. Gillaspie remained in the position until his retirement in 2021.

Dan Hurlock was installed as the Downey Fire Department’s 10th fire chief. The ceremony was conducted virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Today, the Downey Fire Department consists of approximately 85 employees providing a variety of comprehensive fire and life-safety services to the community. Altogether, the four fire stations contain four engine companies, one truck company, two paramedic squads, one basic life support ambulance, a Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) unit, and one command vehicle. From 363 fire and rescue calls in 1957 to nearly 9,000 emergency incidents each year, the Downey Fire Department has grown considerably since its inception, turning tragedy into triumph every day when brave firefighters save dozens of businesses, hundreds of homes, thousands of lives.



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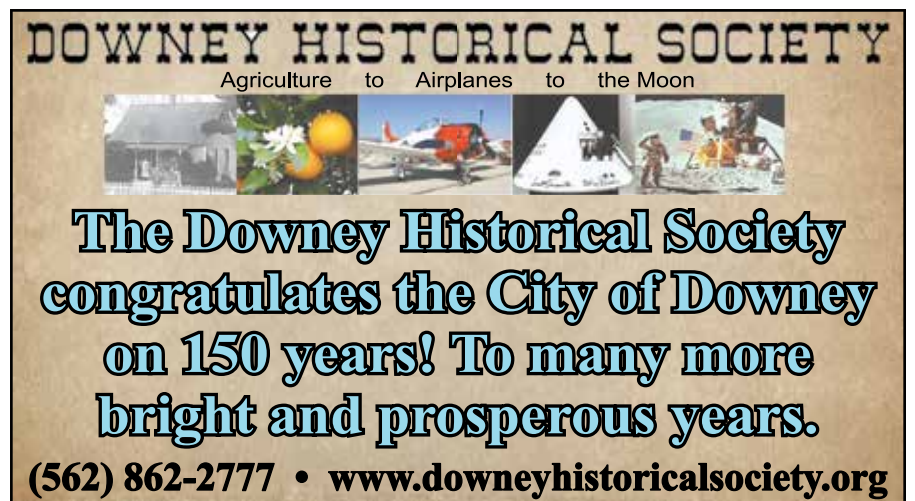
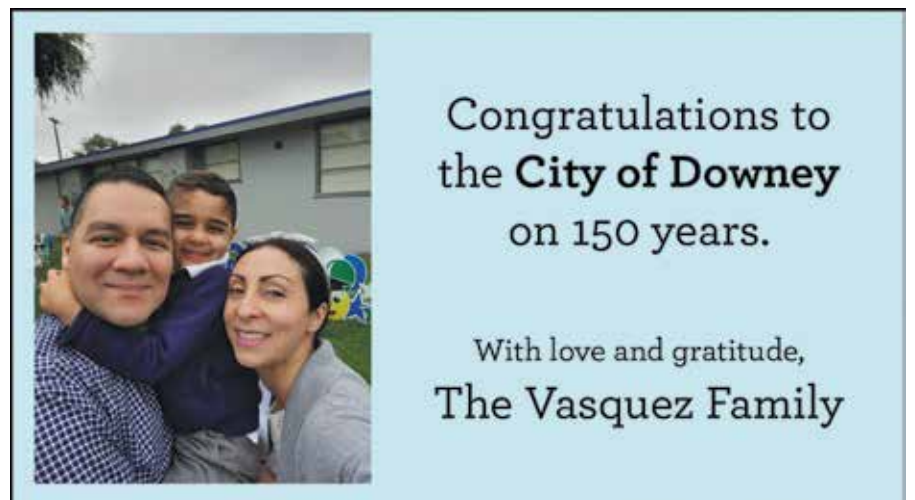
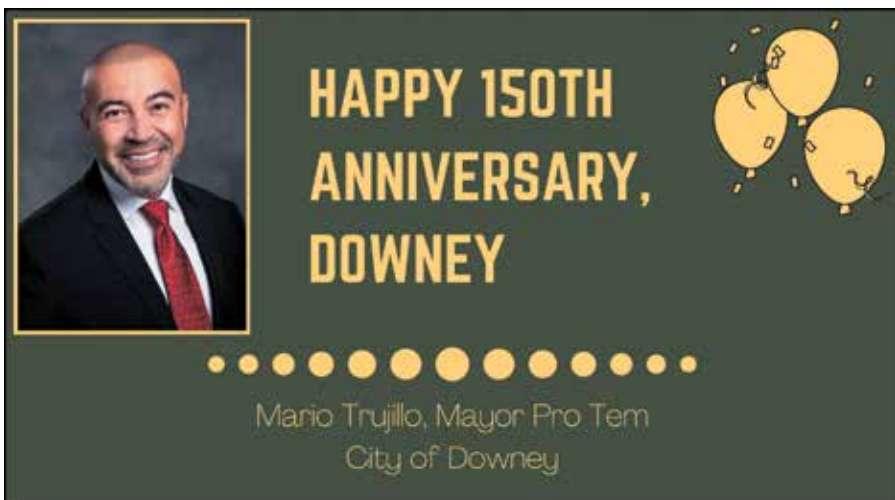
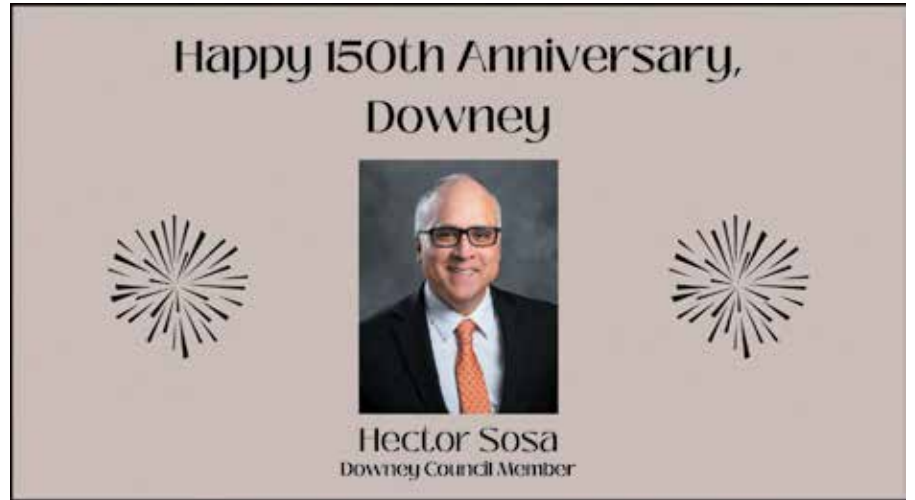
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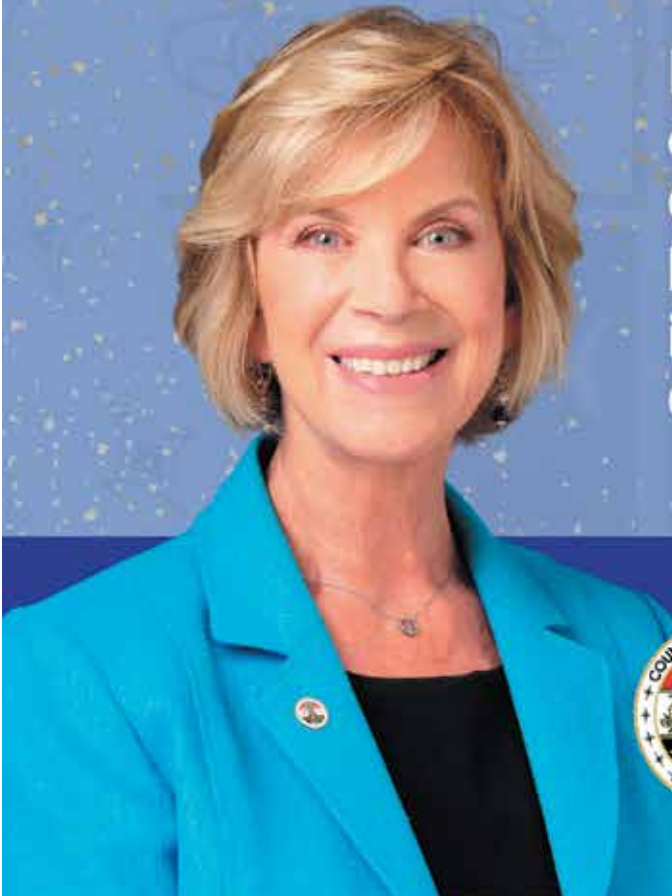




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Casa de Parley Johnson: Downey's most enchanting home

BY ERIC PIERCE

It was the summer of 1955 and Don Frieze, fresh out of Downey Union High School, was looking for a summer job when he received an offer to work for Geline Gates Johnson.

"I was hired by Mrs. Johnson for one month during that summer," said Frieze. "I took the place of her gardener, chauffeur and handy man while he went back to Mexico to visit his family."

After interviewing Frieze for the position, Johnson showed Frieze her property at the intersection of Florence and Rives avenues.

"She also took the time to give me a lengthy and personal tour of her home and also of her yard that I would be taking care of," Frieze said. "It was very impressive, part of that being because I could tell she was very proud of it all."

Today, the Johnson home is still a source of pride as the 6,000-square-foot residence, originally built for Mr. Parley Johnson and his wife, Geline, continues to serve as both a testament to incipient Southern Californian architecture and as a city landmark, documenting Downey's rural beginnings.

Casa de Parley Johnson, as it was originally named, was built in the late 1920s for prominent citrus rancher Parley Johnson, born in Riverside, California in 1890, who became interested in ranching after World War I. Parley's interest in orange groves was understandable. The Johnson family had extensive citrus holdings during the early 1900s and concentrated on the development of the Valencia strain of oranges.

After attending college in Los Angeles, Parley Johnson was very influential in the community and later became one of the founders of the Automobile Club of Southern California in 1900. In 1925, Parley married Geline Gates Richardson (her friends called her Gypsy) and shortly thereafter hired well-known architect Roland Coate, who is recognized today as a major proponent of Southern California's Monterey style homes, to design a Downey residence for the couple.

Originally centered in 50 acres of orange groves, the Parley Johnson home sported formal gardens in its front yard that were designed by landscape architects Florence Yoch and Lucille Council who designed gardens for classic Hollywood movies, such as the 1939 blockbuster "Gone With the Wind." Today, the front gardens remain intact with many of the same rose bushes and orange trees that were planted more than 80 years ago. Similarly, the inside of the house has

not changed much either.

After walking through the front door, the main floor features a tiled, two-story entrance hall that bears an L-shaped stairway with a wrought iron banister. On the floor, hand-made red tiles imported from Mexico line the ground with different patterns in each room.

Walking down a side hallway leads to the 24 by 36 foot living room, which features a ceiling made of hand-hewn wooden beams. In addition to the large fireplace in the room, each window is draped with Fortuny cotton, which was woven especially for the house.

Another hallway reveals a door that leads to the large basement underneath the house where the original machinery from Parley Johnson's orange orchards still resides. Also in the basement is the innovative furnace system used by Johnson in the 1920s to heat any room of his choosing at the click of a button upstairs.

On the second floor there are three bedrooms, one master bedroom with his and hers bathrooms for Parley and his wife, and two smaller guest bedrooms, also with their own bathrooms. Each bathroom is covered with tile, which was a great luxury in the 1920s.

Both sides of the second floor have access to wooden balconies that line both the back and front of the house. In Mrs. Johnson's den, all of the original furniture is still in place as she left it, including her French daybed which dates back to the 1700s and dozens of books from the 1800s.

A second staircase leads to the laundry room and kitchen on the first floor where irons and ironing boards are built into the walls for easy accessibility.

Parley Johnson died in the late 1940s, and Gypsy lived in the house until her death in 1986. At that time it was bequeathed to the Assistance League, a national, non-profit, community service organization that came to Downey in 1976. Gypsy had many friends who belonged to the all-female organization at the time of her death.

The Assistance League of Downey raises money year-round for its community philanthropic projects including Operation School Bell, which provides clothing for needy students and H.O.M.E. (Housing of Medical Emergencies), which is a facility that houses the families of patients being treated at Rancho Los Amigos.

Moreover, the Johnson home is a rare medium of exquisite architecture and subtle elegance that represents an erstwhile era where the wealthy and prominent people in society were the local businessmen and women.

Despite Downey's parochial beginnings in the mid 1800s, by the early 1900s, the small community was home to very influential people who helped cultivate its potential as a city of innovation.

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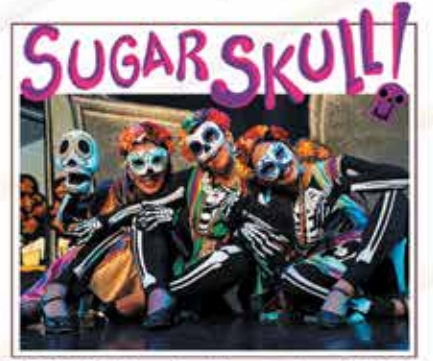
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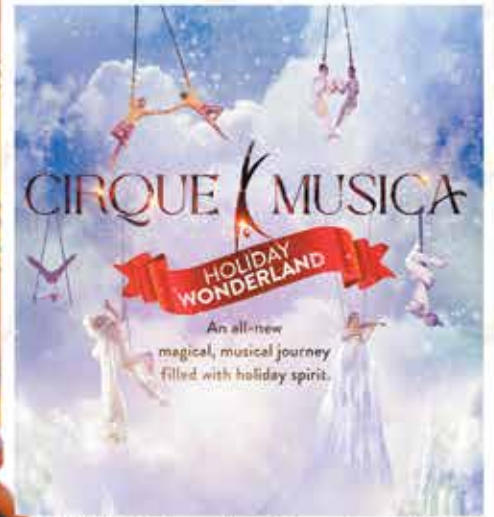
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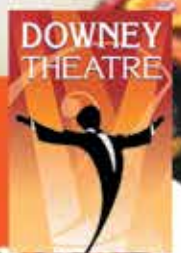


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The history of Downey parks

BY ERIC PIERCE

The year was 1930 and after several failed attempts to establish a neighborhood park in the growing community of Downey, many residents had simply given up hope.

For years, a number of civic organizations and prominent individuals had tried to build a small, community playground but with little help - and even less money - no formal plans were ever finalized. But some hope came in April of that year, as community leader Roy L. Jenison, who owned an extensive portion of land in east Downey, decided to tackle the challenge.

After working on a comprehensive plan for months, Jenison offered a 10-acre tract of his own land, near the corner of Firestone and Lakewood boulevards, for the development of a community park. Jenison would provide the land so long as the county agreed to pay for the ground improvements and the equipment.

But with park acquisition low on the county's priority list, Jenison's \$67,000 plan was rejected by the L.A. County Board of Supervisors, who managed many of the community's city-like services before Downey was incorporated in 1956.

Although Jenison's proposal was denied, his attempt to bring a quality park to Downey sparked a movement among residents who would soon band together to launch a series of community parks that, more than 90 years later, still encourage residents, both young and old, to swing, slide, run, jump, jog and picnic.

Downey's first park, Imperial Park (now Apollo Park), is truly a story of collaboration as several organizations and residents worked together to bring it to pass. In January 1949, the County Board of Supervisors sold two acres of Rancho Los Amigos land, on the corner of Rives Avenue and Quill Drive, to the Old River School District, which at one time ran three elementary school in southwest Downey before the Downey Unified School District was formed.

Working closely with the county parks and recreation department, the Old River School District, with help from the Downey Chamber of Commerce, was able to further secure the nearly 18 acres of land along Rives Avenue, from Quill Drive to Imperial Highway.

According to an October 1949 article in the Downey Champion newspaper, "it was understood [that] the...remaining five acres to Imperial Hwy. would be developed by the county as a park."

With development funds slowly rolling in from the county, work began on Downey's first park, which was to be named Imperial Park. However, in 1950, the county withdrew the funds necessary to complete the park because of pressure from other county-supported cities, who insisted that urbanized areas pay for their own park and recreation services.

Abandoned by the county, Downey residents, mainly the fathers and mothers of Old River School students, took up the task themselves. By 1951, Imperial Park was dedicated and a Magnolia Grand de Flora tree, which still stands today, was planted by the Old River School Mother's Club.

After its completion, the community, ready to establish more parks in the city, formed the Downey Recreation and Park District,

The advertisement for Cindy's Jumpers features a central logo with the name "Cindy's" in a stylized, bubbly font above a circular graphic containing a yellow and red slide. Below the logo, the word "Jumpers" is written in a similar bubbly font. Surrounding the logo are images of various carnival and arcade games, each with a label: "TRACKLESS TRAIN" (a colorful train), "GAME TRUCK" (a van with a radiation symbol and "TOXIC CLEANING TRUCK" text), "CARNIVAL / ARCADE GAMES" (a red and white striped booth), "MARGARITA MACHINES" (a blue machine with a margarita glass), "WATER SLIDES" (a blue and purple inflatable slide), "JUMPERS" (a pink and blue inflatable jump), and "INTERACTIVE GAMES" (a red and white arcade game). At the bottom, the phone number "562-841-7719" is displayed in large, bold, red and blue digits, and the website "www.cindysjumpers.com" is written in a blue, bubbly font.

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www.cindysjumpers.com



an autonomous agency charged with establishing and supervising the community's parks. The new Downey park district, founded in 1953 even before the city was incorporated, originally covered all of Downey, but also a small portion of Bellflower.

Popularly elected as the first Park Board of Directors were Mignon Caughran, Fannie E. Weiss, co-owner of the Downey Livewire newspaper, George Miller, Reno Serrine, and Scott Temple, one of Downey's first councilmen. The district's first superintendent, who was responsible for getting the program off the ground and initiating recreational programs in each park, was former county parks and recreation manager, Daniel Furman.

In December 1953, the district saved nearly \$150,000 when the county transferred vacant land to the new agency. In addition to Imperial Park, which would later be renamed Apollo Park after the successful space missions, the county also donated a 15-acre "undeveloped" parcel of land at 10419 Rives Ave., now Furman Park in recognition of Daniel Furman's leadership and contributions to the Downey Recreation and Park District.

With one park in the north, and another in the west, the district decided to establish a new park in south Downey. City limits were less defined before Downey was incorporated. As a result, many maps included a section of modern-day Bellflower within the park district's boundaries. Consequently, in the mid-50s, the district acquired a 12-acre lot at 14001 Bellflower Blvd.

The recreational area, dedicated as Caughran Park, was named after board member Mignon Caughran and was known for its large, 50-by-100 ft. indoor swimming pool. With a 25-cent admission

for kids and daily swim lessons for adults, the park was popular with Downey and Bellflower residents. However, when Bellflower incorporated and launched its own parks and recreation department in the early 1960s, Caughran Park was transferred to the city of Bellflower. It since has been renamed, T. Mayne Thompson Park, in honor of one of Bellflower's first councilmen.

In 1956, the park district acquired 16 acres of land in east Downey near the San Gabriel River. Rio San Gabriel Park, located at 9612 Ardine Street, would be established here as one of the city's largest parks. By 1957, the district, now operating four park sites, had bought more land in northeast Downey from the State Division of Highways at the intersection of Lakewood Boulevard and the Santa Ana Freeway. Six years later, the land would become Dennis the Menace Park at 9125 Arrington Ave.

In the early 60s, hoping to replace the loss of Caughran Park in south Downey, the park district leased, and then purchased, eight acres from the Downey Unified School District for public park use. The property was later opened in 1965 as Golden Park at 8840 Golden Ave.

That year brought much change for the park district as it was then officially absorbed into the municipal services offered by the city. Now referred to as the Downey Park and Recreation Department, the new city division began establishing a string of community parks.

In 1967, Treasure Island Park at 9300 Bluff Road was dedicated.

Named in honor of Councilman Scott E. Temple, one of the early supporters of the park district, Temple Park, a quaint, half-acre at



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

7132 Cole Street, opened in 1968.

Crawford Park, located at 7000 Dinwiddie Street, followed in April of 1970. Set on a triangular 2-acre plot of land, previously owned by the Edison Company, Crawford Park commemorates the life of Downey pioneer Judge Matson Crawford who helped establish this community.

Brookshire Children's Park, at 12520 Brookshire Ave., opened next in 1971, followed two years later by Wilderness Park, Downey's largest park at 26 acres.

In 1975, Independence Park was established and later updated with a skate park in 2002.

The newest city park, Discovery Sports Complex, an 11-acre park with two large baseball diamonds and athletic fields, was dedicated in 2008.

All in all, Downey has grown tremendously. Now complete with 12 separate parks, a community and senior center, and gymnasium, the Parks & Recreation Department offers dozens of recreational programs and classes for both residents and non-residents

Looking back, Downey can be proud of its early founders who despite major setbacks and shortfalls embraced each other, came together on one accord, and offered their best for this community.

When visiting a Downey park, have fun, get dirty, but remember the people, remember the names. Though somewhat forgotten in history, these pioneering citizens deserve this appreciation for thinking of us before we ever arrived.

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Stonewood Center, a shopping mecca

BY ERIC PIERCE

During the mid-20th century, Huntington Park was the place to shop. Adorned with high-end department stores, popular auto dealerships and first-rate cinemas, Pacific Boulevard, a swanky, Beverly Hills-like thoroughfare in Huntington Park's downtown district, offered fine merchandise to a constant stream of working-class locals in the 1940s and early 50s.

With few national fashion retailers available in southeast Los Angeles County at the time, Pacific Boulevard became what the New York Times referred to as an "apotheosis of the postwar California dream."

Eager to live out their middle-class aspirations, working-class families from the neighboring cities of South Gate, Bell, Cudahy and Downey often found themselves shopping in the busy downtown commercial district.

However, with community leaders always striving to elevate Downey to the forefront of innovation and quality of life, Mr. and Mrs. William Lansdale took on the task of establishing Downey as the next mecca of fashion, entertainment and retail business. In February 1953, the couple announced their intentions to construct, design and develop a nearly 63-acre shopping center near the corner of Firestone and Lakewood boulevards.

The almost \$12 million venture, known today as Stonewood Center, would eventually become the largest commercial and professional development in the community's history, one of the first regional shopping centers in Southern California, and the seventh shopping mall facility built in Greater Los Angeles.

Though it may be difficult to imagine the large acreage as anything but a shopping center, Stonewood was at one time a forested tract of land, filled with gourds and sugar beets, owned by one of Downey's pioneer families: the Jenisons. It was 1877 when John E. Jenison, co-founder of a thriving general merchandise business, arrived in

Downey, purchasing extensive plots of land throughout the newly-formed community, including more than 100 acres from Florence Avenue to Firestone Boulevard, between Lakewood Boulevard and Woodruff Avenue.

By the early 1950s, the majority of the Jenison land had been subdivided into residential developments, while the original Jenison Ranch, acquired by Jenison's daughter-in-law, Jewell, in the 1930s, sat undeveloped for years. However, in 1953, after spending years declining numerous offers for the prized land, Jewell Jenison signed a 99-year lease agreement with the Lansdales, a young Downey couple, who immediately envisioned a large, open-air retail business center on the property.

Following the example of newer retail centers, like the Lakewood Shopping Center, which opened in the city of Lakewood in 1951, Lansdale and his partner, E. Morris Smith, began designing the Downey mall, originally referred to as the Lansdale Shopping Center. Later, the name changed to Stonewood, an abbreviation of the shopping center's location - Firestone at Lakewood, once one of the busiest intersections in the world.

In February 1956, construction began with a 24-hour coffee shop and restaurant, which was eventually named Stonewood Restaurant. The \$750,000 eatery was followed by the addition of Downey Stonewood Community Bank and a 40,000-square-foot Shopping Bag supermarket. When the 390,000-square-foot, open-air shopping center opened on Thursday, October 9, 1958, it featured nearly 40 stores including a new J.C. Penney, W.T. Grant, F.W. Woolworth's, Thrifty Drug Store, Hardy Shoes, Miller and Miller West Men's, Downey Music and Hollander Cafeteria.

By 1966, Stonewood Center was being advertised as a "city within a city" as the number of stores jumped to nearly 65 with the addition of Farrell's Ice Cream Parlour, Showcase Cinemas, a small twin theatre, Radio Shack, and a 3-level, 143,400-square-foot Broadway department store, which opened in 1965. The Broadway also originally featured a restaurant and coffee shop, but they were later closed and utilized as additional shopping space.

In the 1970s, Stonewood continued to grow, consuming more of the original 63 acres, offering almost 80 stores at the shopping



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Stonewood Center was originally an open-air when it opened in 1958, and was remodeled as an enclosed mall in 1990.

center. In 1981, Stonewood constructed a new 2-story Mervyn's on the north side of its lot, adding yet another nationally-recognized anchor to its list of competitive stores.

Stonewood, which slowly took the place of Downey's once vibrant downtown, eventually played host to Hollywood. With its classic 60s architecture and ambiance, the shopping center proved perfect for an early episode of the TV show "The Wonder Years," which filmed inside Stonewood Center in 1988.

Nevertheless, the late 80s proved to be a transitional period for the still open-air mall, which was becoming less appealing as new, fully-enclosed venues were increasing in popularity. In December 1986, the property was sold to Newport Beach-based Hughes Investments, which promised a completely remodeled and expanded Stonewood Center. Hughes' \$100 million proposal came to fruition during the fall of 1990 when a fully-enclosed, Post-Modern shopping center opened its doors. Along with it came a brand new 2-level, 150-square-foot May Company, 40 to 50 other new stores and two popular eateries, Acapulco Restaurant and Olive Garden.

Despite the extensive remodel, Stonewood maintained many of its original tenants, but soon trendier stores began to emerge including Foot Locker, Warehouse Records, Charlotte Russe and Champs Sports. With more than 150 stores inside, Stonewood Center

had garnered nearly 940,000 square feet by the mid 1990s.

In 1993, the May Company became Robinson's-May while The Broadway, Stonewood's first major anchor store, folded in 1996; Sears acquired the location and later constructed a freestanding Sears Auto Center nearby.

In August 1997, Santa Monica-based Macerich Company purchased Stonewood after buying Lakewood Center almost 20 years prior. Macerich acquired Los Cerritos Center in 1999. Today, Macerich markets the three malls as a regional group of unique yet related shopping experiences.

When Robinson's-May folded in 2006, Macy's soon replaced it. In September 2009, Kohl's opened at Stonewood after the Great Recession tanked retail giant Mervyns. Sears closed Nov. 14, 2021.

Today, Stonewood caters to a much younger, trendier consumer base than ever before. The 21st century has brought with it new names in retail such as Aldo, Aeropostle, Hollister Co. and Forever 21. In 2009, the shopping center welcomed BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse.

Moreover, William Lansdale's simple business idea has become just what he envisioned: a modern shopping convenience, a hub of entertainment and dining options, and a valued regional staple that brings back treasured memories for generations of Downey natives.



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Downey High School's humble beginnings

BY ERIC PIERCE

Fred Peritore was just 14 years old when his parents told him he was moving to California.

As a native New Yorker, Peritore always dreamed of living in the Golden West where sunny oranges and shady palm trees seemed plentiful. Although Downey proved far from the warm, sandy beaches of the coast, Peritore's new school, Downey Union High School, was surrounded by vast, rich orange orchards, which stretched as far as the eye could see.

"That's what I remember most about Downey High School - the smell of the orange trees," said Peritore. "Growing up in Downey in the 1950s was really special. It seems like only yesterday, but so much has changed - it's not the same."

Peritore is just one of the thousands of people who at one time called Downey home and now refer to Downey High School, located on the corner of Brookshire Avenue and Firestone Boulevard, as their alma mater. Founded in 1901, Downey High School, like many other secondary schools in California, was established as a result of a state mandate.

Enacted by the State Legislature in 1891, the Union High School Act required all public schools throughout California to accommodate 12 grade levels. During this time, most communities had several grammar schools that taught up to only ninth grade, offering little to no secondary classes for older teenagers. Downey was no exception. While the small, agricultural community sported many primary schools, including Gallatin, Alameda and Downey grammar schools, no formal high school existed.

However, with nearly 45 students of high school age in the city, a group of residents got together and organized what was then called the Union High School District. The school district was composed of the five grammar schools (Alameda, Downey, Gallatin, New River, and Old River) with one trustee from each school making up the high school board.

On Aug. 16, 1901, Los Nietos Valley High School became the eleventh high school established in Los Angeles County. Classes began in September 1903 in the wooden auditorium of Downey Grammar School on Second and Dolan streets and continued there until a new building was ready for occupancy.


The faculty consisted of one principal, A.E. Farlington, who earned a salary of \$120 a month, and one teacher, Miss Gertrude Smith. Cloth sheets served as partition walls between the makeshift classrooms. The first graduating class of 1904 included just four students.

By 1905, a new high school facility, at Second Street and Brookshire Avenue, was completed. The building, which faced Brookshire Avenue, was soon replaced by a two-story, white-washed structure in 1912

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that featured large columns and numerous windows on the facade.

By 1919, the name of the school had changed to Downey Union High School. The following year, the school got its first bus, since the only previous transportation had been supplied through a Mrs. Van Matre, who used her car to bring students who lived within a mile of the school.

In 1922, a new two-story administration building, facing Firestone Boulevard, was built on the property and the original building was condemned as a fire hazard and torn down. In 1926, a gymnasium was built on the site that also contained both the boys and girls dressing rooms. In addition to evening basketball games, the gym also provided space for school dances.

By 1930, the first building for junior high school students was built. Today, that original structure serves as the "R" building.

In 1932, Downey High School adopted the name of "Vikings" for its athletic teams hoping to emulate the same spirit of adventure, boldness and vigor found in the early sailors.

The 40s and 50s brought much change to Downey High School as the population gradually increased and the school became responsible for every junior and senior high school student. From 1940 to 1960, Downey's population grew from 12,000 to 86,000. With this influx of new students, new junior high schools were needed.

On May 1, 1952, South Junior High School was dedicated as the first separate junior high school, teaching about half the students

in grades seven, eight, and nine. The remaining half of the students stayed in what was then called Central Junior High School.

In 1953, these students moved away to become North Junior High School, now Griffiths Middle School. The following year, a third junior high school, East Junior High School was formed.

In 1957, a second senior high school, Earl Warren High School, named for Chief Justice Earl Warren, and a fourth junior high school, West Junior High School, opened their doors. In turn, the original gymnasium was demolished in 1958, and Walker Hall, the current administration building, was constructed in its place. It was named in honor of William H. Walker, a retired teacher and former superintendent.

On July 1, 1961, the Downey Union High School District was merged with the four elementary districts to form the Downey Unified School District. Today, Downey High School has an enrollment of more than 4,200 students and maintains over 150 faculty and staff members.

Since 2006, the school has completed several renovations, adding modern classrooms, science labs, a large, state-of-the-art theatre, and a new track and field stadium. Moreover, Downey High School, which started in a small auditorium on Dolan Street, has grown into a celebrated institution of learning that has produced world-renown scientists, athletes and musicians.

One only can imagine the future yet in store for this cherished high school.



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Stox is longest standing restaurant in Downey

BY ALEX DOMINGUEZ

Businesses have come and gone over the years, but Stox Restaurant has stood the test of time.

It could be because of the menu, which hasn't changed much since opening. Or maybe, it's the staff, some of whom have worked at Stox for 30 plus years.

Owner Jack Wannebo thinks it's a combination of both.

"It's just a family place; good food," said Wannebo. "What else can I tell ya?"

Located at 9518 Imperial Highway, Stox has been a Downey staple for over half a century.

Stox's began as a hamburger stand in Huntington Park. Founded by Harry Fahnstock in 1954, the restaurant became known for its homemade pies. Five years later in 1959, Fahnstock introduced his food to Downey, opening a new location on Downey Avenue.

The new location found great amounts of success, quickly outgrowing its original location. It moved to its current location on the corner of Imperial Highway and Bellflower Boulevard in 1962. By 1967, another location, this time, in Anaheim, would open.

In 1974, Fahnstock would sell the Downey location to Ken Babajian, then the Anaheim location to Ron and Chick Marshall three years later.

Wannebo took over from Babajian in 1991.

It hasn't always been easy on Stox, as the restaurant has endured its fair share of challenges; from recessions, to a city-wide water scare, and even road construction.

At its worst moment during the pandemic, Stox was forced to turn to GoFundMe to help support its staff. The community rallied, raising \$25,000.

The restaurant's loyal customers have also come and go. While the city's demographic changed to more diverse ethnicities and backgrounds, so too did the clientele. As older generations passed on, children have grown and returned, often times bringing their own



families; all "good people" according to Wannebo

"It's like family," he said. "They'll bring in candy. They'll bring gifts for the waiters and waitresses. You don't see that, generation after generation."

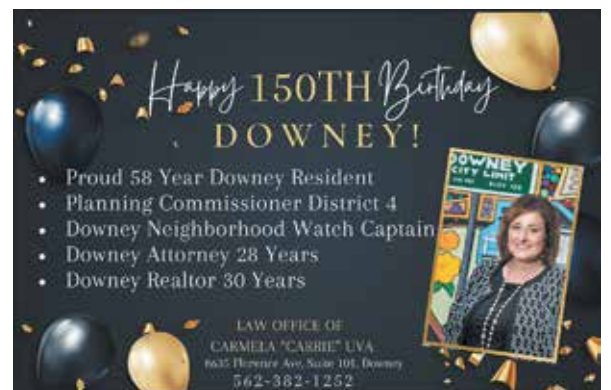
There are a few things Stox will need to do in the near future to ensure the legacy lives on, mainly being more active online and on social media, as well as starting to replace servers and other staff as they begin to retire in the coming years.

Wannebo says his biggest hope for the restaurant is that it "keeps going."

"If I'm not here, maybe somebody else, family or somebody," said Wannebo.

He's thankful for the community's continued support.

"All the customers, thanks for all your loyalty through the years and everything else," said Wannebo.



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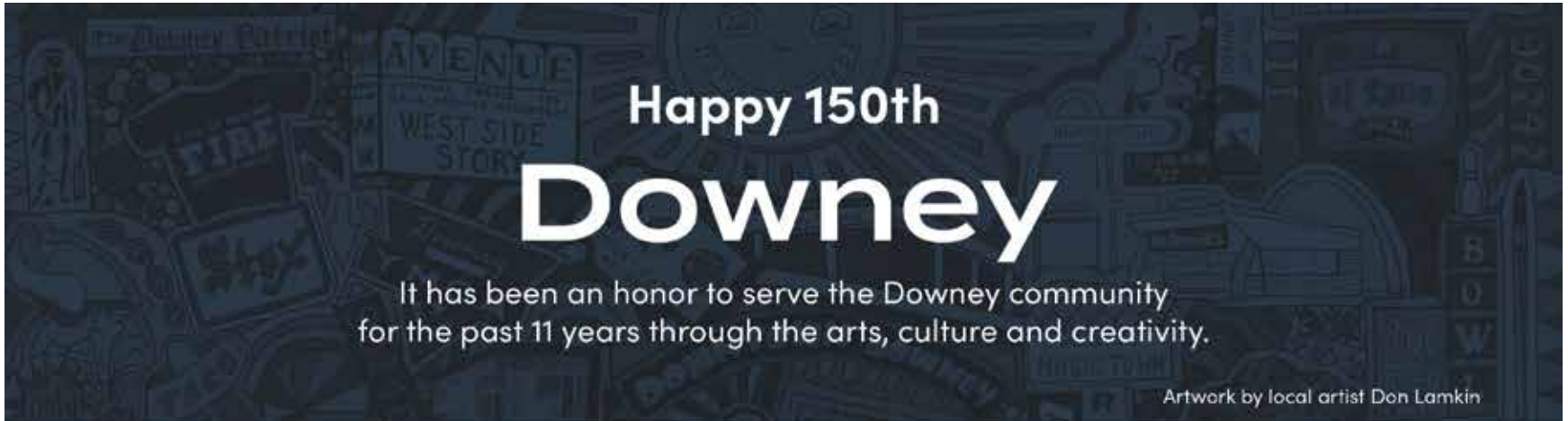
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