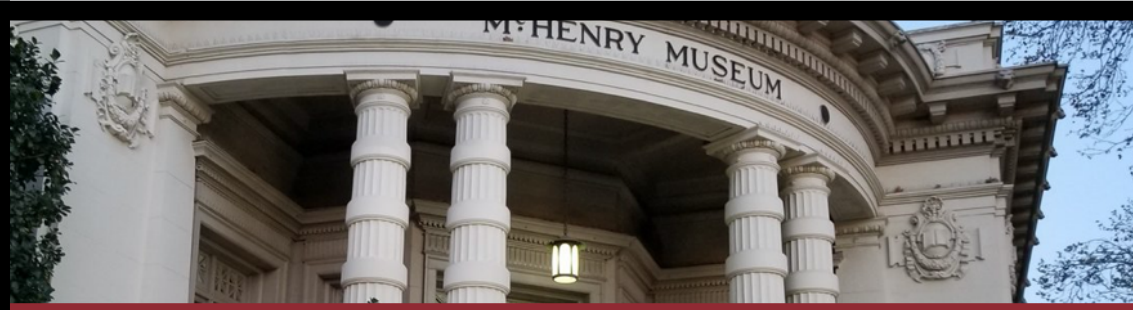




**McHENRY
MUSEUM**
& Historical Society



Newsletter

November 2021

Please call us at:
(209) 618-5387

HISTORY AT THE MUSEUM



In an uncertain world, bad news seems a common everyday occurrence. Good news does not come often, so when it happens it needs to be celebrated. For this newsletter, it is time to celebrate good news. Rather than discuss the rich history of Modesto, for this newsletter the McHenry Museum & Historical Society would like to highlight a recent event which made history in our beloved Museum.

Though not the most obvious place to begin a love story, the McHenry Museum did just that, host the beginning of a love story. On October 31, 2021, Modesto resident Justin Alvarez decided to propose to his longtime girlfriend Briana Castrejon in the diner area in the basement of the Museum. This is their story.

To the surprise of the MM&HS, Mr. Alvarez connected us to set up a time to pop the question to the woman he loved. Our historical society and the City of Modesto were delighted to oblige. Justin Alvarez moved from San Jose to Riverbank at the age of four around 1996. Ironically, he lived just down the street from Briana's family. He is pretty sure the two families' paths crossed. Following his parents' divorce at age 15 Justin found himself moving from different Central Valley towns including Escalon and Modesto.

His life changed when he began attending Modesto Junior College and became actively involved in the Drama Department working for Michael Lynch. He also joined the Music Department and worked with the choir where Briana sang. Briana Castrejon is a Riverbank native and an accomplished singer. Though they were involved in the same activities, their paths had yet to cross.

Though they shared mutual friends, they never seemed to connect. On a whim two years ago, they ran into each other at a Starbucks where he gathered the courage to ask her for coffee. Prior to the pandemic, Briana began traveling abroad and had planned a trip to Israel. Heart and Soul Coffee became their regular meeting place where they would grab a coffee and walk Downtown Modesto. Inevitably, they ended up at the McHenry Museum. Briana had performed at the Museum with her choir previously. Valentine's Day 2020 ended in the diner area in the Museum. They listened to the 1950s music and slow danced as no one watched. Thus, making this location the perfect place to profess his desire to marry Briana.

Halloween might seem an odd day to propose marriage, but not for Justin. Justin has a name for himself in Modesto on his own. A costume and prop designer by trade, since he was 18 years old has dressed in various costumes to entertain the youth of Modesto. What is his most famous incarnation? He dresses as Spider-Man. He is known to the local community as Modesto's Spider-Man.

*Information for this article was taken from an interview conducted with Justin Alvarez October 27, 2021.

Continued on Page 2 >



On a whim, he was asked to dress up for a child's birthday party. He realized the fulfillment in bringing joy to a child. He began dressing up for charity events, he visited children in hospitals, and for a decade dressed as Spider-Man for several Modesto events.

Justin only ever took his mask off at one event for a moment, Briana was in the crowd and remembered his face. On the day they ran into each other where he asked her for that first coffee he was dressed in his costume but was not wearing his mask. Their story is cemented in the basement of the McHenry Museum. After weeks of careful planning with the MM&HS and taking the person touch to include both her parents and siblings, Justin popped out of the elevator to ask the woman he loved to be with him for the rest of their lives.

By David Seymour



SHE SAID YES!!!



OCTOBER 31, 2021

In Memoriam



Merlin Nomann
"Mel"

Jun 9, 1928–Oct 21, 2021

With a heavy heart, the McHenry Museum & Historical Society would like to pay tribute to a man who not only aided our organization for several decades, but who also was a friend to the City of Modesto. On October 21, 2021, Merlin John Nomann known to everyone as "Mel" passed away suddenly at his La Loma area home at the age of 93. With him was his partner and husband of 55 years, John Crabb. Mel Nomann was born in Palmer, Iowa on June 9, 1928. He led an extraordinary life. Mel and John generously agreed to be interviewed for the June 2021 MM&HS Newsletter, which is available on our website. Mel was a veteran of the Korean War and settled in Modesto in the late 1950s. He worked for many years in the medical field until his retirement. Mel and John also started and owned Modesto Estate Sales. Mel and John dedicated much of their time working in acquisitions for both the McHenry Mansion and the McHenry Museum along with their dear friend, Wayne Mathes. Many artifacts in the basement of the McHenry Museum come from Mel's family home in Iowa. Mel Nomann personally procured MM&HS's last acquisition prior to the pandemic, a finial from the original courthouse in Modesto. On May 18, 2021, Mel was honored by the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors as the Outstanding Senior Citizen of the year for Stanislaus County District 4. On August 8, 2021, Mel and John attended the opening weekend of the McHenry Museum, it would turn out to be their last visit together. Mel was a friend to Modesto, an advocate for the LGBTQ Community and a light to each life he touched. He always had a kind word, wisdom, and a tight hug for the people he met. To highlight all his accomplishments would take several newsletters. We share in mourning the loss of this incredible man along with his husband John and yet we are content in knowing he is now with his son Craig who departed from this earth at the early age of 10 in 1963. Mel lived by the motto that truth and love gets you a long way in life and ended each encounter with his fellow human beings by reminding them they were loved. We Loved you, Mel! We are going to miss you!



August 8, 2021 with the Finial.



August 8, 2021 John and Mel
in the Museum Store.



June 10, 2021. Mel and John and dog Max
reading their story in the MM&HS Newsletter.



Updates



Matilda and Robert McHenry



New Security Cameras

- The McHenry Museum is open Friday-Sunday 12pm-4pm.
- Kaye Osborne and Margie Neder will be holding a docent training at 10am November 4, 2021, in the Museum.
- The MM&HS is still looking for volunteers to help run the Museum Store. The store is not open consistently due to a lack of staffing, but November looks promising. We would like to thank Janice Lane and Richard Cato for their help in running the store in the month of October.
- Life-sized and to scale mannequins of Robert and Matilda McHenry made an appearance at the October Docent meeting. The brainchild of former Cultural Services Manager, Wayne Mathes, will eventually be placed on display in the McHenry Mansion.
- Security cameras are currently being installed in the McHenry Museum by Wilson Technologies to add extra protection to our precious building. Cameras are paid for by the McHenry Museum & Historical Society.
- The McHenry Museum was proud to once again hosted the Tuolumne Wood Workers in the basement of the Museum in the month of October, it was a great success.
- Due to the precarious nature of the pandemic the annual December Soup Super will once again be postponed.
- The next board of directors meeting of the McHenry Museum & Historical Society will be November 16, 2021, in the Museum and via *Zoom*.



The MM&HS would like to acknowledge the passing of longtime McHenry Museum Docent

Diane Venturini

(Jun 11, 1932-Oct 23, 2021)

A memorial mass will be held at St. Joseph's Catholic Church at 10:00am on November 15, 2021. Our next newsletter will include a more detailed tribute, thank you Diane for all your dedication, you will be missed!

*Photos by Doug Nutson from his "Docent Doin's" Newsletter.