



Don Van Hooser

Keeping our History Alive

The department owes a great deal of gratitude to Don Van Hooser, who researched and archived its history for several years. Without him, the current Sheriff's Museum in Old Town would not exist, as he paved the way for a formal museum with his diligence.

In 1995, Sheriff Bill Kolender officially swore Don in as the department historian, but he had been gathering historical memorabilia under Sheriff John Duffy for many years. Duffy believed in preserving the department's past for future deputies to see, saying, "Pride in our past promises hope for our future."

As one of the original DSA members (back when it was called the Sheriff's Relief Association), Don has been a member of the DSA since 1954. He retired from the department in 1982, but his dedication and work did not end there. He spent the better part of two decades creating an impressive record of the sheriff's department that included photos, stories and historical items.

With a handful of volunteers, Don collected, preserved and maintained a museum collection, which was originally housed at the Communications Center. After eight years, it was transferred to the Santee Station, where it remained until the new museum in Old Town was built in 2000.

The San Diego County Sheriff's Museum and Educational Center officially opened its doors on Nov. 17, 2001, at 2384 San Diego Ave.

in Old Town. That day, Don Van Hooser received recognition from Sheriff Kolender, thanking him for his years of hard work making the museum a reality.

The museum still collects artifacts and photographs pertaining to the department, building on Don's collection. Ongoing and rotating exhibits highlight people, places and tools of the San Diego law enforcement community. The displays appeal both to the grade school children who tour it as part of their curriculum and to current and retired members of the department. Adding to the museum's charm are the volunteers, many of whom are retired from the department, who tell personal stories to visitors as they walk through the two-story building.

If you have a chance to visit the museum, take a few moments to remember the person who started it all—Don Van Hooser, the department's first official historian. Without him, many of the exhibits would not exist, and that doesn't even take into account the thousands of items not on display. ★

(photo) In 2001, Don Van Hooser receives recognition from Sheriff Kolender for his contribution to the Sheriff's museum. If you have any photographs or items you would like to donate to the museum, please consider doing so. Just be sure to identify the people in the photograph and the date if you know it. If there is a story that goes along with it, please include that with your photo. You can contact the museum at (877) 737-1850