



CALTRANS NEWS

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News

Siren Saved by Caltrans District 7 Staff Department Donates 1951 Artifact to Museum

By Noah M. Stewart
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Early last year, while widening State Route 1 (Lincoln Boulevard) in the Westchester area of Los Angeles, Caltrans engineers Eloy Castillo in Construction, Anthony Ng in Design D, and Gabe Hamidi from Project Management, found what looked like an old civil defense siren in their project area, and they were concerned it might have historic value.



This civil defense siren was discovered by Caltrans engineers on State Route 1 (Lincoln Boulevard) in the Westchester area of Los Angeles.

Castillo, Ng, and Hamidi contacted District 7 cultural resources staff in the Division of Environmental Planning (DEP) to see if someone could determine what to do with the air raid siren. DEP's staff immediately visited the site and discovered that indeed the siren was of historic vintage.



Three architectural historians from District 7 (from left): Noah

Stewart, Kelly Ewing-Toledo and Claudia Harbert, work to identify and preserve California's historic resources.

Contacting the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the state regulatory agency responsible for historic resources, Caltrans staff proposed donating the siren to a local museum. SHPO agreed, and the siren was given to the Fort MacArthur Museum located in San Pedro's Angels Gate Park. When restored to working condition, the siren will be part of the museum's display commemorating Fort MacArthur, a U.S. Army post that guarded the Los Angeles harbor from 1914 to 1974.



Before delivery to the Fort MacArthur Museum, the siren was stored at the Caltrans Field Office. The Department preserves and enhances California's resources and assets as part of its commitment to good stewardship.

The artifact was one of a 200-strong siren system when it was installed in early 1951 as part of the City of Los Angeles' fledgling civil defense program. Long-time Angelenos remember hearing the two-minute wailing that started at 10 a.m. on the last Friday of every month. The siren's historical value speaks volumes even though it's simply a large yellow speaker at the top of a telephone pole. It was part a national effort to prepare civilians for a potential Soviet attack on the United States following the Soviet Union's first successful atomic bomb test in the fall of 1949. The system ultimately grew to approximately 400 sirens throughout Los Angeles County. In 1985 the city stopped operating the sirens, but left most in place because funds weren't available to remove them.



In March 2008, the air raid siren was successfully relocated from the project site to the Fort MacArthur Museum in San Pedro.

Greg King, Chief of Cultural and Community Studies Office, Headquarters Division of Environmental Analysis, praised Castillo, Ng, Hamidi, and district cultural resources staff, for their stewardship philosophy towards resources. King said, "That buys a lot of credibility with our partnering agencies, and reflects very well on our Department as a whole."

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