

# NOTES FROM BOX 2851

## Officers

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	Stuart Sprung Cal Fire Deputy Chief
	Dave Duca Fire Etc.
	Bill Black Safety Components
	Kevin Ester SDFD Assistant Chief
Newsletter	Michael Watson

## The Legend of the SDFD Fireboat Bill Kettner

by: Stu Sprung



(This is the first part of a short series for the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Museum- Notes of Box 2851 Newsletter on the infamous SDFD Fireboat Bill Kettner.)

Many of our members are aware that the SDFD Fireboat, Bill Kettner was built at what is now the San Diego Firehouse Museum, however there are interesting details in its history that make the boat one of the most fascinating pieces of “apparatus” in the department’s history. The series will cover the concept and creation of it, its service, its mysterious disappearance, and the search for its current whereabouts.

On Sunday, October 5, 1913, a spark from the furnace of a passing locomotive was believed to be responsible for what would arguably remain the City of San Diego’s most significant fire at least through the mid-1950’s. The spark ignited a 250,000 gallon tank of distillate oil at the waterfront yard, which created a chain-reaction of tank fires culminating in the massive explosion of a tank holding 1.5 million gallons of black oil. The blast was heard across the county as burning oil rained down on neighboring lumberyards, setting them alight as well. The Great Standard Oil Fire exhausted all city and neighboring resources and burned steady for three days.

## PIONEER HOOK AND LADDER FIREHOUSE MUSEUM

As the inferno burned unabated with the limited water supply, SDFD Fire Chief Louis Almgren stood on the docks and gazed not at the fire, but out towards the unlimited untapped resource of water in the San Diego Bay. His mind was on a boat built to put out fire.

There were fireboats already in existence in cities like San Francisco and New York, but they had thick steel hulls, were steam-powered and cost-prohibitive to buy or operate for the San Diego Fire Department in 1913.

Chief Almgren knew he had a secret weapon, though. He knew many of his firefighters were skilled tradesmen before they were hired with the SDFD. In fact, that was his preference when hiring new personnel. He felt that a dedicated group of them could build a boat on their own. Not only that...they could build a boat that would be more cost-efficient than the steam-powered ones, which were currently the standard throughout the world. Along with the help of some local civic-minded engineers he drafted plans for a wood, gas-powered, internal combustion fireboat capable of pumping larger quantities of seawater.

Though his vision was starting to take shape, there was one major conceptual obstacle: There were no other gas-powered fireboats in existence. So in 1914 the chief rolled up his blueprints and brought them out to the International Association of Fire Chiefs convention in New Orleans. He figured if anywhere, it would be there he would find a group of like-minded supporters. To his shock his own peers openly ridiculed him. In the age of iron steamers, none of them could imagine a wood-hulled fireboat full of gas whose purpose was to fight fire.

Chief Algren rolled up his plans and returned to San Diego, undaunted. If anything, it motivated him to prove his fellow chiefs wrong. Pressing forward, the next year he would be able to put the pieces together to bring his plan from the drafting board to life with the opening of SDFD Fire Station 6 in Little Italy.

It was there his plan would come together. The corner lot at Columbia and Cedar Streets would have the space to build the scaffolding required for such an undertaking, and the firefighters who would staff the new station would be required to be skilled craftsmen in carpentry, mechanics, welding, as well as painting and finish work.

Soon, where the dining hall and BBQ area are now, a keel would be laid for what would become the first gas-powered fireboat in the world.

*(Next, The Building of SDFD's 1st Fireboat.)*



*Above: The Great Standard Oil Fire*



*Above: SDFD Fire Station 6*

## President's Notes

Kevin McWalters

It's with great pleasure to share with that your Firehouse Museum continues to prosper and expand in many directions. We continue to improve our facility, host numerous social events and participate with the Little Italy community toward improving the district.

In the past year we have replaced several of the front roll up doors, painted the exterior of the building and added a new communications display. We also are hosting more community events in conjunction with the Little Italy Association and this past November we were the County voting/polling location for the district.

The family Christmas party at the museum and Firefighters Ball were another hit, enjoyed by many members and their families. We also participated in the fire service entry for the Holiday Bowl Parade honoring first responders. We are tentatively looking at 12-16-17 for the next years Christmas Ball.

The mission of the PH & L is to preserve the past, capture the present for the future and this is all accomplished by your support and membership. The driving force behind the museum is the "Volunteers". If you or know of someone that has the desire to become apart of our team please contact Mike at the museum.

Additionally we are seeking corporate sponsorship at the museum to assist us with capital improvements. If you have a company or organization that may be willing to support the museum please forward the contact information to Mike.

Until next time stay safe and may you and your family have a great 2017!



*Above: Holiday Bowl Parade*



***Christmas Ball Photos  
can be downloaded for  
free from the website:***

***[sandiegofirehousemuseum.com](http://sandiegofirehousemuseum.com)***

*left: 2016 Firefighter's Ball*



*From left to right: Pioneer Hook and Ladder Board: Bill Black, Stu Sprung, Jack Gosney, John Fisher, Dale Wineteer, SDFD Chief Brian Fennessy, SDFD Assistant Chief Kevin Ester, Mike Colafrancesco, Robert Harris, Dave Duea, Kevin McWalters*



FOR INFORMATION  
on membership and/or  
these events, visit

[www.sandiegofirehousemuseum.com](http://www.sandiegofirehousemuseum.com)

or contact us at:

phone:

619-232-3473

email:

[sdfirehousemuseum@gmail.com](mailto:sdfirehousemuseum@gmail.com)

## Executive Director's Report

Captain Mike Colafrancesco

It is hard to believe 2017 is here! Happy New Year!

2016 was a momentous year at the Firehouse Museum. In addition to display updates, we put a new Mobile Canteen into service, had several successful events, replaced our apparatus doors and increased community involvement in the Little Italy area.

Our membership's support is what allows the museum to function. We are currently conducting a membership drive for active duty San Diego Fire-Rescue Personnel. Membership dues are \$4 per paycheck. This is a tax deductible donation to a non-profit (501C3) organization. In addition to preserving our department's rich history, members receive free admission, free events (such as Movie Night, Family Christmas Day) and discounted hall rental fees. Non-members will be receiving a letter, mailed to their homes, in the month of January. Please direct any questions to me at [sdfirehousemuseum@gmail.com](mailto:sdfirehousemuseum@gmail.com). I look forward to your support!

The upcoming year will be busy at the museum. Please mark your calendars for the upcoming events:

February 7, 2017  
Firehouse World  
(please see attached flyer)

February 25, 2017  
Movie Night  
(please see attached flyer)

March 11, 2017  
Emerald Society St. Patrick's Day Parade Breakfast

April 7, 2017  
Historic Landmark Plaque Designation

I hope to see you at the museum!

# FIRE ETC

## ANNUAL NETWORKING PARTY

TOGETHER WITH THE  
San Diego Firefighters and Local 145

### ALL FIREHOUSE WORLD ATTENDEES ARE WELCOME

Admission included with Firehouse World badge.  
Food and drinks provided.

**WHEN:**  
Tuesday, Feb. 7th  
Time: 6:30-10:30pm

**WHERE:**  
The San Diego Firehouse Museum  
1572 Columbia St.  
San Diego, CA 92101

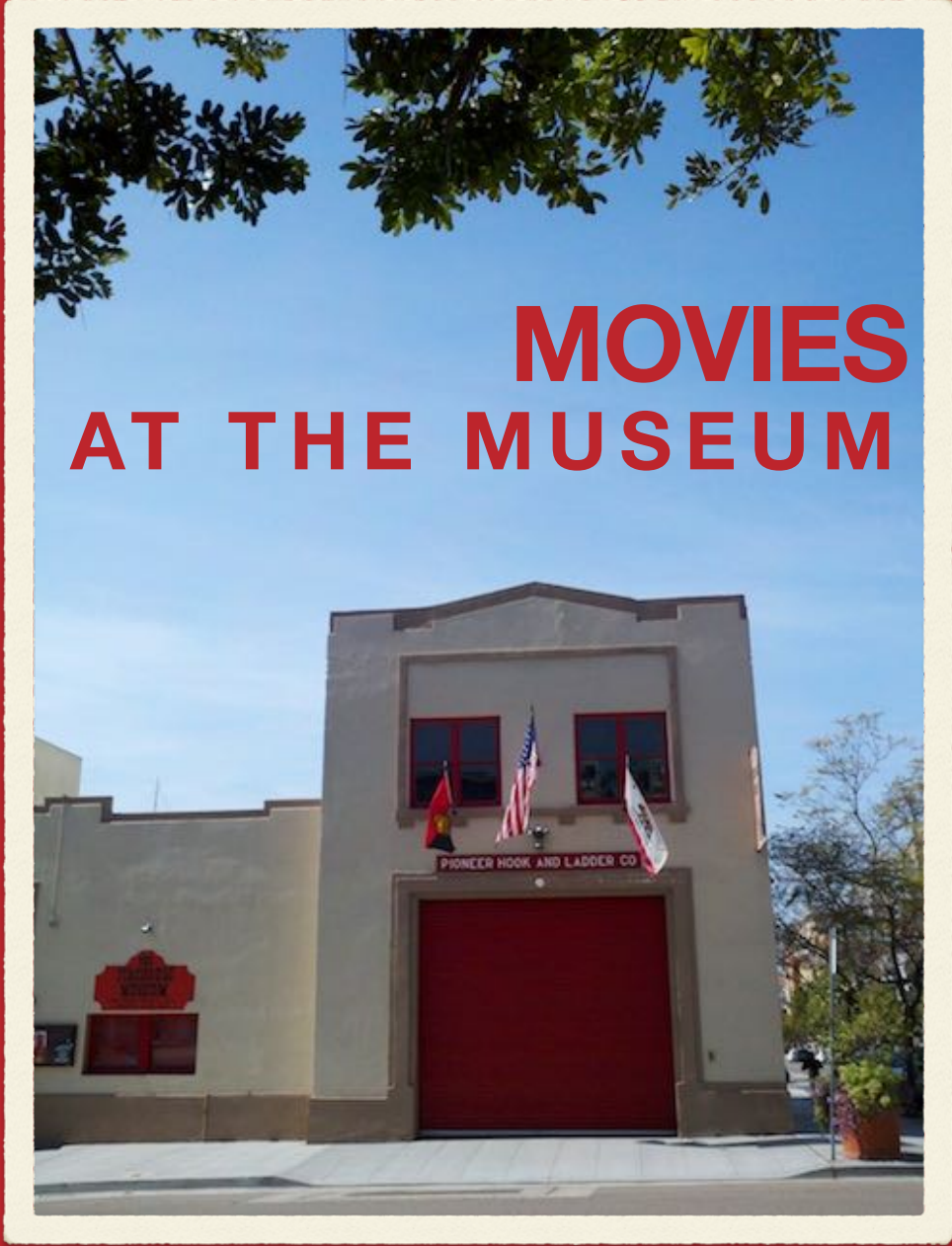
**Come Visit us at Booth #1627**

Shuttle pick up from the convention center to start at: 6:15 pm



FOR MORE INFORMATION: 619.525.7286 • WWW.FIRE-ETC.COM





# MOVIES AT THE MUSEUM

## Kids Movie Night

### The Secret Life of Pets

- Date: February 25th, 2017
- Doors Open at 5pm, Movie Starts at 5:30pm
- Pizza, Popcorn & Soft Drinks will be Provided

Free For Members  
(\$10 per Non-Member)



date: 02/25/2017	location: SAN DIEGO FIRE- HOUSE MUSEUM	time: 5:30PM	Movie: The Secret Life of Pets
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