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Historic bell found in storage

By Heather Murtagh

For two years the corner of Broadway and El Camino Real in Burlingame was missing something — a historic bell.

The Burlingame Historical Society recently discovered the 1906 bell, once thought to be stolen, is in a Caltrans storage area. The discovery will be a new piece in the city's anticipated history museum.

"People assumed it was missing and someone took it. Those assumptions turned out to be wrong," said Historical Society President Russ Cohen, also a Burlingame city councilman.

Though El Camino Real runs through much of San Mateo County, much of it elsewhere is Highway 101. Hundreds of historic bells have marked the 700 miles since 1906. Originally the 85-pound cast iron bells were placed to give distances between principal towns and directions to missions. One of the original bells was placed in Burlingame at Broadway and El Camino Real.

In 2004, California Bell owner John Kolstad was contracted by Caltrans to supply new bells. When Kolstad pushed on the pipe holding up the bell on Broadway it nearly fell over, he said. It was one of two bells removed. The city wasn't notified of the removal since Caltrans maintains El Camino Real. It has remained in storage ever since.

Kolstad revealed its location at the Burlingame Historical Society meeting on Sunday. Since then, Caltrans has agreed to donate the bell back to Burlingame to be part of its museum.

It cost \$25 for the bell in 1906. Organizations would donate the money then put up the bell. That same bell is worth \$10,000 today, said Kolstad.

A new bell costs just under \$2,000. Anyone can buy one. An anonymous donor has expressed interest in purchasing a new bell for Broadway and El Camino, said Cohen.

For more information visit www.californiabell.com.



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Daily Journal Quick Poll

Should the San Mateo Union High School District eliminate D as a grade?

- Yes, it will raise the bar and force students to be better prepared for the exit exam.
- No, it will disenfranchise students on the edge and force more dropouts.
- It won't make any difference.

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