

August 31, 2022

Dear Mayor Weste and Members of the City Council:

SCVTV respectfully requests a grant of \$300,000 from the City of Santa Clarita to fund the migration of the SCVHistory.com website to a content management system that will enable City staff to take ownership of the site and manage it.

SCVHistory.com is the only comprehensive, publicly accessible compendium of Santa Clarita Valley history. Always free to the public, SCVHistory.com started in 1996 and has grown into a body of tens of thousands of local history photographs and documents spanning 5,000 years of human habitation of our valley. It provides source material used by educators and students from third-grade teachers to college and university classes, local history book authors, documentary filmmakers, local media, writers of environmental impact reports, and the lay public. It has facilitated the preservation and sharing of historic materials that would otherwise have been lost. It has spurred our local historical and other nonprofit institutions to work closely together to preserve their own history. It voluminously documents everything from the victims of the St. Francis Dam Disaster to the genealogy of our local Native American ancestors and has even reunited long-lost siblings who hadn't seen each other in 50 years.

SCVHistory.com was one of the first online archives of local history and remains one of the largest such archives in California. Today, SCVHistory.com is owned and operated by SCVTV, the 501(c)(3) operator of the City of Santa Clarita's public television channel.

It is customary for the digital history of a community to be hosted by cities, counties, universities, and libraries. For example, the online history archives of the cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego are maintained by their respective Public Library systems. (One difference between the others and SCVHistory.com is that the others typically display images without the research and narratives that SCVHistory.com includes for the comprehension and education of the visiting public.) SCVHistory.com needs to be owned by the public and institutionalized like its online cohorts. The City of Santa Clarita is the logical owner-operator and is well suited to take custody of our digital history.

In recent years, the City has demonstrated its commitment to preserving our history. The City has worked collaboratively with the operators of SCVHistory.com and has championed local history in the planning of Old Town Newhall; taken charge of the restoration of the Pioneer Oil Refinery; established a

vested interest in Heritage Junction; incorporated historic features into planned public facilities at Vista Canyon Ranch; and is preparing to receive other local historical properties along with their associated collections of artifacts. Importantly, the City created and filled the position of Local History Librarian within the Santa Clarita Public Library and has established systems that make our City Library system a ready and capable steward of local history collections.

But SCVHistory.com is not currently in a format that the City or anyone else would be able to manage.

In 1996, it could not have been anticipated that SCVHistory.com would become the one-and-only place on the Internet where the SCV Historical Society and other organizations including the City of Santa Clarita would make their historic archival material readily available. In essence, in 1996, the choices for creating a website were making it a subset of America Online (AOL) or knowing how to code in HTML. SCVHistory.com chose the latter path. Dreamweaver came out in 1997 and made it a little easier to create web pages (SCVHistory.com didn't use it), but the big change came in 2003 with the advent of the content management systems WordPress and SquareSpace. No longer did website creators need to know HTML to create a website or add pages to it. SCVHistory.com never made the switch – but not for lack of trying.

In 1996, SCVHistory.com was hosted by a local Santa Clarita company. In the early 2000s, the company switched gears with an eye toward getting out of the web hosting business and focusing on coding. At its suggestion, SCVHistory.com changed web hosts at that time – and returned to the original host several years later when the firm's focus again shifted. Soon thereafter, SCVHistory.com worked with the host's coders to transition SCVHistory.com to WordPress, the content management system used by the City of Santa Clarita. Much time (five years) and donated money were spent on this process, only to fail in the end. SCVHistory.com was too large, with thousands of web pages, and its problems too complex for an easy migration. Meanwhile, SCVHistory.com continued to grow exponentially as thousands upon thousands of new materials were added to the site.

The problems grew exponentially, too. The oldest coding is antiquated; various Internet tools return error messages. The Internet keeps changing. Left in stasis, the old pages will no longer be readable. We've seen it happen with certain 14- and 15-year-old applications on the SCVTV.com website. As layer upon layer of coding is added to SCVHistory.com, only one person has the know-how to manage it. When that individual is gone, SCVHistory.com dies – unless steps are taken now to fix it.

The other problem with stasis is that new historical information comes to light every week, often altering the factual details about a given topic. Corrections

need to be, and are, made regularly to the information presented on SCVHistory.com. It's not like a printed book. It's the source material for books. It's a real-time compendium, relied upon by everyone to be as up-to-date and factual as possible. If the site is no longer maintained, it atrophies. If the site is no longer maintained, corrections can't be made when new and better information is discovered.

In 2018, SCVTV initiated discussions with the City of Santa Clarita to work toward the migration of SCVHistory.com and the eventual transfer of ownership to the City. It is SCVTV's understanding that at the time, the scope and complexity of the project was infeasible.

In 2019, SCVTV initiated a concerted effort to fast-track the migration of SCVHistory.com. Many web firms and IT professionals were consulted, and it was determined that only a major global web development firm would be able to handle a conversion as large and complex as SCVHistory.com. After a relatively brief Covid-related delay, SCVTV published a request for proposals in 2021 and elicited about a dozen responses. Many firms wouldn't tackle the project without a minimum \$1 million buy-in. Ultimately, SCVTV selected one of the top global IT firms with a resume that included building architecture for Pantheon, Rolling Stone, and WordPress itself. Not only was the firm – XWP – one of the lowest bidders, but it also expressed a genuine affinity for helping a nonprofit community organization like SCVTV. It's a sentiment that proved true in early 2022 when SCVTV made a \$30,000 investment with the company (including a \$5,000 Community Services grant from the City of Santa Clarita) to analyze the problems with SCVTV's antiquated websites – SCVHistory.com, SCVTV.com and SCVNews.com – and develop blueprints for solutions. XWP's proposal for the migration of SCVHistory.com bears a \$300,000 price tag, well within the anticipated range when SCVTV contracted with the company.

There are certain things nonprofit agencies such as SCVTV can do much more cost-effectively today than a local government agency could do later, and this is one of them. XWP's process for the migration of SCVHistory.com will require a substantial commitment of time and hands-on collaboration with the current operators of SCVHistory.com, which will be provided by volunteers at no cost. It is SCVTV's opinion that the migration of SCVHistory.com should be performed prior to transferring the site to the City of Santa Clarita, which SCVTV is willing to agree contractually to do.

Over the past decade, SCVTV has identified a variety of funding sources to support SCVHistory.com. It has received many private donations and charitable foundation grants to that end. Earlier this year, SCVTV began the process of applying for a large federal grant for digital infrastructure that can fund personnel and hardware needed down the line and provide for the future growth and

sustainability of SCVHistory.com. The federal agency has responded positively about our prospects, especially if the City is supportive with funding at this stage. The grant requires a local match, which would be partially covered by the City's \$300,000 investment. SCVTV is also working with professional grant writers who are working on several other government and private foundation grant opportunities.

Regardless of whether SCVTV is successful in its pursuit of supplemental grant funding, time is of the essence. The migration of SCVHistory.com must be performed as soon as possible. As a community, we cannot allow the preservation and accessibility of our history to continue to be intertwined with the life expectancy of one individual.

At \$300,000, the migration of SCVHistory.com to a manageable and sustainable Internet architecture will never cost less than it costs today – not to mention the years and the untold millions of dollars it would cost the City to compile a comparable compendium of local history “from scratch.”

It would be quite a challenge. Santa Clarita's history is remarkably rich. At times we've called the SCV the “Birthplace of California History” with the state's first documented gold discovery, the first successful oil operations on the West Coast, the rail linkage that joined Los Angeles with the rest of the country, and a film history that spans more than century. SCVHistory.com is well known by museums and academicians across California.

Closer to home, SCVHistory.com chronicles our tragedies and triumphs, from earthquakes and wildfires to the birth and growth of a City. It has provided a home for the history of our local African American community that was so important during a sad time of segregation in Los Angeles; it helped put names and faces to the victims of a monumental dam disaster who were previously known only in numbers; and it has brought forward our indigenous history by connecting it to tribal citizens who walk among us. (Genealogical information on SCVHistory.com has even provided resources some individuals have needed for tribal enrollment.)

For 26 years, the community response to SCVHistory.com has been overwhelmingly positive. The variety of users and the breadth of the applications of materials found on SCVHistory.com has been staggering – guiding local elementary school students, parents and teachers in their explorations of our valley's historic locations; providing raw materials for PBS documentaries; decorating the walls of local restaurants with historic images; and everything imaginable in between.

Above all, SCVHistory.com has created a sense of place – that almost intangible quality that is the hallmark of a healthy community. SCVHistory.com

plays an important role in fostering civic pride by making the public aware that Santa Clarita is a special place, worthy of their engagement and participation.

It is our hope that SCVHistory.com will outlive us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'L' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Leon Worden
President, SCVTV
Email: Lworden@scvtv.com