**Cowboy Festival's in Hart Park this Year!**

*by E.J. Stephens, author and FOHP Board Member*

It’s that time of year again!

Time to wake up and smell the grits! Time to trade in our business casual for chaps, our hardhats for Stetsons, and ride into town on a paint instead of a Pontiac.

That’s because, saddle-pals, once again here comes the Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival! And this year, Friends, Hart Park will be at the “Hart” of the action!

Can I get a *Yee-Haw?*

The 2015 Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival will take place this year between April 15 and 19. Unlike previous years, the festival will make downtown Newhall its home. And when we say “downtown Newhall,” we really mean the William S. Hart Park.

Most folks associate the festival with the Melody Ranch Motion Picture Studio, which is a couple of miles as the confused crow flies from downtown Newhall. This is understandable since Melody Ranch is one of the premier western sets left standing in California and was home to the festival for over two decades. Melody Ranch is off-limits this year for the best possible reason: production. Currently the ranch is back doing what it was created to do: hosting Hollywood filmmakers. This is a great thing for our local economy, which desperately needs a victory in the fight to keep film production in Southern California. (I’m not sure if we can tell you the title yet, but the production that moved in promises to be a biggie.)

But no need to fret. Most folks forget that the Cowboy Festival (then known as the Cowboy Poetry Festival) actually began in downtown Newhall at Hart High School. In the 20+ years since the festival moved from downtown to Melody Ranch much has changed in these parts. Old Town Newhall was created, Hart Park saw many improvements, we got a new roundabout outside the gates, and “Yahoo” went from simply being a cowboy cry of triumph to an internet search engine.

The festival is simply returning home for a spell.

And what a home it is! Much of the festival will be centered inside Hart Park, which is only fitting as it was the site of silent Western star Bill Hart’s retirement home. Hart Park will host living history entertainment with Buffalo Soldiers and Native Americans, Western shopping with vendors peddling their wares along Sutler’s Row, lots of cowboy cuisine available from chuck wagons, and a mechanical bull. Four stages will host performances inside the park on Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, including the talents of Sons & Brothers, Carolyn Sills Combo, Old Salt Union, Allegretto and Espinoza, The Get Down Boys, Haunted Windchimes, The Band of the California Battalion, Joey Dillion, Mikki Daniel, Pop Haydn, Joe Harrington, Youth Poetry, and poet Chris Isaacs, and Kristyn Harris. All these shows are included as part of the General Admission ticket.

The Friends of Hart Park is especially proud to host two very special nights of entertainment starting with “An Evening With Cow Bop” on Friday, April 17 at 8:00 PM, when Western Swing masters Cow Bop make their only Cowboy Festival appearance in an intimate living room concert from inside the William S. Hart mansion. The following evening at 8:00 PM, Peter Sherayko performs his one-man production of “An Evening With Buffalo Bill” from the same special venue. Tickets for both performances are currently on sale at cowboyfestival.org.

Several other venues in and around Newhall will be hosting events as well. Things kick off on Wednesday, April 15 when SCVTV presents *The OutWest Concert Series* at the Repertory East Playhouse on Main Street.

My out-of-my-league wife Kimi and I will again be hosting bus tours around Santa Clarita and Hollywood for those interested in Western film history. Our first foray will begin on Thursday, April 16 at 2:00 PM when we will host a tour of popular filming sites throughout the Santa Clarita Valley. Our tour will end in time for patrons to enjoy *Senses*, a block party featuring line dancing, Country music, gourmet food trucks, Western vendors, and the unveiling of the newest members of the Walk of Western Stars in Old Town Newhall. *Senses* runs from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM.

Kimi and I will host our second bus tour on Friday, April 17 at 9:00 AM, when we will take our show on the road to Hollywood to show our guests where Southern California’s Western films were born.

Popular Western musician Don Edwards will entertain his fans at 12:30 PM on Friday, April 17 at Rancho Camulos in Piru. At 2:00 PM on the same day, Miles Swarthout will discuss John Wayne’s final film, *The Shootist*, in downtown Newhall at the Repertory East Playhouse.

My friend and *SCV In The Movies* co-host (and *Hart of the Matter* editor) Bill West and I will host *Friday Night Flickers* inside Hart Park at Heritage Junction that same evening. We will show 1954’s *Suddenly*, which stars Frank Sinatra, and prominently features the Saugus Train Station, the same building from which we will be presenting the film. We will also be showing a William S. Hart short before the feature film presentation.

On Saturday, April 18, Heritage Junction inside William S. Hart Park will host a “Dinner and Show with Marie Wise Hawkins” at 6:00 PM.

On Sunday, April 19, Cowboy Church will kick off at 8:00 AM. That same morning, the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society will host a bus tour of historic sites around the SCV at 9:00 AM.

As always, Western music will be featured prominently at Newhall venues. Western musicians and poets will perform throughout the day on Saturday, April 18 and Sunday, April 19 at the Canyon Theatre Guild on Main Street. The featured lineup includes Ian Tyson, Don Edwards, Waddie Mitchell, Dave Stamey, The Sons of the San Joaquin, Chris Isaacs, The Haunted Windchimes, Kristyn Harris, and Mikki Daniels.

Another exciting change happening this year will be the performances of other types of American music that have been influenced by Western acts of yesteryear and today. The Reperatory East Playhouse on Main Street will host Bluegrass, Folk, and Alt Country acts throughout the weekend, including James Intveld, Rosie Flores, The Lucky Stars, The California Feetwarmers, Susie Glaze and the Hilonesome Band, Deke Dickerson, Tiny and Mary, and Savannah Burrows.

The Vu Bar and Lounge on 8th Street will be home to some of the finest rockabilly acts (most who were undoubtedly influenced by Newhall’s own rockabilly hero Gene Vincent of *Be-Bop-A-Lula* fame). The current lineup features The Chop Tops, Three Bad Jacks, Kim Lenz and Her Jaguars, The Rhythm Shakers, Blue Collar Combo, Karling and the Kadavers, Hard Six, Silver Tooth Loos and the Witch, Galactic Polecats, and Six Silver Bullets.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. And as the organizers like to say, this year’s Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival will be a “New Location, Same Unforgettable Experience.” And with a little help from the Friends of Hart Park, we can make it the best one yet.