**What Was That Roar?**

Imagine if you will our sleepy, lush green, 265 acre Hart Park with its farm animals and buffalo herd, covered with wandering minstrels, roving cowboys, mountain men, a Native American village, civil war reenactors, rides for children, non-stop top-notch western music and poetry, authors reading and signing books, panel discussions on western history, special movie screenings, authentic western mercantile shops and all kinds of food and drinks. I’m running out of words just trying to describe it. Can you guess what I’m talking about? Yes, it is one of the valley’s biggest events of the year, the annual Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival. It rolled into town for the 22nd time and this year the headliner was, believe it or not, William S. Hart Park!

The Festival is usually held at Melody Ranch, Gene Autry’s old movie ranch in Placerita Canyon, but because of prior movie commitments, the event had to find a new location. The decision was unanimous: William S. Hart Park was chosen as its home for 2015.

It is a little known fact that this is actually a return to the Park. Back in 1992, before the Cowboy Festival was an official event, Hart Park played host to a little experiment conducted by our fair City. A borrowed hay wagon was brought in and Don Edwards and the Sons of the San Joaquin were hired to perform for a sort of trial mini-festival. The event was successful enough that a commitment was made to turn it into an annual event, but on a much larger scale. The next year, when an earthquake rocked the chosen location, Melody Ranch became available and the rest is history.

The event this year was amazing. An estimated 10,000 people poured into the Park April 17-19 for the event. In addition to the activities in the lower park, the top of the hill was alive with activity too. The Mansion itself had an incredible 1,500 visitors come through to view Bill Hart’s many artifacts, valuable paintings and to learn of the legacy that he left for generations to enjoy. There were so many visitors that the regularly guided tours had to be expanded in order to accommodate the crowds.

The Gift Shop down below, which is always loaded with hard to find western CDs, movies, jewelry and books, was expanded for the Festival to include a complete, new dedicated book store in the adjacent log cabin. Becky and Roger Basham, Sherron and her author-husband Bill Blowers and Carol Frost really had their hands full with the record crowds.

Yes, we had our special living room concerts as well! The sounds of the incredibly popular Cow Bop rang out loud and clear on Friday night in the Mansion to an almost filled house. They managed to put a smile on everyone's faces, including renowned Hollywood stuntman Diamond Farnsworth, the newest inductee to have a saddle placed on Newell's wonderful Walk of Western Stars. Lead singer Pinto Pammy and the boys gave the crowd 2 forty five minute sets of jazz, blues and Western swing. We even found out that group leader Bruce Forman played on the score of Clint Eastwood's Academy Award winning film “Million Dollar Baby”. It was an evening of great music and kick up your heels fun.

Saturday night brought out a capacity crowd to enjoy a performance of actor/author Peter Sherayko's fantastic "Cody: An Evening with Buffalo Bill". It could not have been a nicer evening. Peter, dressed in Buffalo Bill's finest leathers, boots and hat took his audience on an amazing journey through the frontiers men’s life, the good and the bad. I think everyone came away with a new and better understanding of what it must have been like to stand in Cody's boots as the face of the American West was changing around him. He certainly played a major role in keeping the west alive for generations. We are so lucky to have Peter keeping it alive for all of us.

The many activities up at the house were made possible by a truly great group of Friends Of Hart Board Members and Volunteers. Along with museum staff Margi Bertram and Rachel Barnes, John Bertram, Eileen and Chris Blankenhorn, Jody Chalek, Bill Crowl, Evan Decker, Phyllis Dozier, Barbara Eisenman, Vanessa Foreman, Gary Haider, Ron Hopkins, Evelyn Novak, Lee Osterloh, Diane Slauson, Mike Smith, Diane Whetze, Bill West, Jack Stewart, Laurene Weste and Jeff Wheat were all on hand throughout the weekend to keep things running smoothly.

Mike Fleming and the City of Santa Clarita should also be applauded for all the hard work it takes each year to put this Festival together. It is no easy task.

One of the nicest things to come out of having the festival at the Park was that it was a great opportunity for the community to see it and appreciate it, many for the first time. Park Superintendent Norm Phillips and his staff worked tirelessly around the clock to make sure the grounds looked spectacular… and they succeeded!

Oh, I almost forgot, that roar I spoke of. That was the unanimous roar of approval that came from the many new visitors who swept through the gates of William S. Hart Park this year and enjoyed the triumphant return of the Cowboy Festival to it s little known place of origin. It was a flawless weekend that we will all long remember.