

THE MIRROR

The Richmond Museum Association Newsletter

Spring -- 2012

RICHMOND'S 1ST BLUE STAR MARKER INSTALLED AT SHIP

by Lois Boyle



In April 2002, the National Park Service announced that the Merchant Marine service flag would be flown at the Avenue of the

Flags at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial along with the five other flags of America's military service, where the flags from all 50 states and six U. S. territories proudly fly. Mount Rushmore was the first national monument where the Merchant Marine flag was displayed. Since then that act has been repeated across the country, acknowledging the valuable service provided by the American Merchant Marine.

It is with pride that the Richmond Museum Association joins these ranks by displaying this flag along with the other five military service flags at the dedication of a Blue Star Memorial By-Way Marker being installed at the dock alongside the *SS Red Oak Victory*. The El Cerrito Garden Club approached the Museum with the request to do this in honor of this area's military who have served this country. The dedication will be on Memorial Day, Monday, May 28, 2012, at 11 a.m., with El Cerrito Mayor William C. Jones III and Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin joining together with me, Supervisor John Gioia and Congressman George Miller in accepting the monument. We are hopeful that all who appreciate our military and merchant services will join us in giving our thanks to them.

The Blue Star Markers are a project of the National Garden Clubs of America. The two others in our district are at El Cerrito Veterans Memorial Park, San Pablo Ave. at Manila Street, and Arlington Park, also in El Cerrito. The Blue Star Memorial By-Way Markers were approved in 1994 for placement in parks, his-

CONTINUED ON P. 2

Celebrate with us....

...on Memorial Day, Monday, May 28 at 11 a.m., dockside. The ship is at 1337 Canal Blvd.

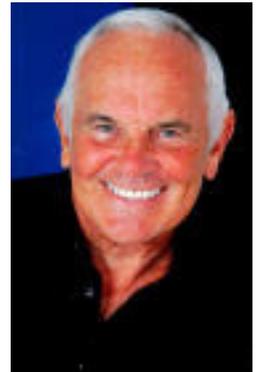
RONNIE SCHELL -- RICHMOND KID RISES

by John Ziesenhenn

Richmond's history is a very rich one as we all know. Native Son Ronnie Schell adds to our great history with his professional acting and comedic career as well as his daily interest in Richmond with his many local friends and fans.

Yes, "America's Slowest Rising Young Comedian," "Duke Slater" on "*Gomer Pyle*," playing opposite Marlo Thomas in "*That Girl*" or Goldie Hawn in "*Good Morning World*," or Andy Griffith on "*The Andy Griffith Show*" – but wait – hold that scene. Let's start at the very beginning of this fine young comedian's life.

Ronnie was born on Dec. 13, 1931, to Margaret and Dave Schell at Cottage Hospital on 9th & Barrett and lived for a short time on 10th near Barrett. His folks moved to a small ranch on the San Pablo Dam Road overlooking El Sobrante where his dad raised turkeys and had one milk cow. Enough with farming, back to the city – they moved to 1009 Barrett where Ronnie lived until he was in the 3rd grade.



Ronnie's dad worked at the Ford plant for 13 years until WWII ended and then worked at the Naval Supply in Oakland until he retired. His mom worked for many years as a waitress in Richmond restaurants like the Buckhorn Café on 23rd St. and then retired from Macy's (formerly Alberts). During the 1960s, the Schells also owned a liquor store next to the Oaks Theatre in Albany called the Stiers.

PLEASE GO TO RONNIE SCHELL ON P. 5

PANCAKES ARE BACK!

(SEE PAGE 3)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

by Lois Boyle

The long-awaited Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park Visitors Center will open on May 27. The Richmond Museum of History staff is creating two exhibits for the Center, one about the *Red Oak Victory Ship*, which is one of the highlights of the National Park tours, and an exhibit about all the places in Richmond which are on the National Register of Historic Places and how many of them were involved during World War II. Simultaneously, the Museum's staff is working on an exhibit for the Seaver Gallery celebrating Chevron's 110th birthday and an acknowledgment of Richmond's 107th birthday in August.

Spring also features the expanded showing of the ever-popular classic films shown on board the *Red Oak*. The National Park Service series will continue showing six movies in June, July and August, preceded by a spring series by the *Red Oak* on Thursdays, April 12th and 26th and May 10th and 24th. Boarding begins at 6:30 p.m. and the movies show at 7:00 p.m. Popcorn is available.

The ballroom dances commence in April on the *Red Oak* and even if you don't dance, you will want to come and enjoy the beautiful music emanating from the #4 Hold and dance on the wooden dance floor, which was created by the ship volunteers, particularly Ed Collins and Dick Dickerson, our carpenters. (See page 6 for more information on the dances.)

The ever-popular Pancake Breakfasts resume on April 8th and continue through October. World War II cartoons will be shown on Pancake days in the #3 Hold theatre to add extra interest to the usual pleasure of the day. (See page 3.)

Again we are hosting a luncheon on National Administrative Professionals Day (formerly National Secretaries Day), Wednesday, April 25th. Because space is limited in the Seaver Gallery, reservations are required. A surprise program always delights the guests, and the Mayor comes to extend her gratitude to this valuable workforce. Call (510) 235-7387 to make reservations.

Not resting on their laurels, the volunteers on the Ship have launched an aggressive campaign to complete internal work readying the Ship for her first sail, hopefully this summer. The sale of the Sailing Certificates is brisk, and this first sail for the Ship since she returned to Richmond on September 20, 1998, is expected to be a sellout. (Information on the Sailing Certificates found on the back page of *The Mirror*.)

CONTINUED NEXT COLUMN

BLUE STAR MARKERS

continued from p. 1

toric sites and civic areas. They bear the words: "A Tribute to the Armed Forces of America."

The Blue Star Memorial Program honors service men and women. This program began with the planting of 8,000 dogwood trees by the New Jersey Council of Garden Clubs in 1944 as a living memorial to veterans of World War II. In 1945, the National Council of State Garden Clubs adopted the program and began a Blue Star Highway system, which covers thousands of miles across the Continental United States, Alaska and Hawaii. A large metal Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker was placed at appropriate locations along the way.

The program was expanded to include all men and women who had served, were serving or would serve in the armed services of the United States. Memorial Markers and By-Way Markers were added to the Highway Markers, to be used at locations such as National cemeteries, parks, veteran's facilities and gardens. The Blue Star became an icon in World War II and was seen on flags and banners in homes for sons and daughters away at war, as well as in churches and businesses.



DAFFODILS ADORN MONUMENT GARDEN

This past winter, volunteer Dee Davison planted daffodil bulbs next to the pathway to the front door of the Museum; just a small bunch. They have bloomed and stand majestically two feet above the ground in all their golden glory, a striking contrast to the stark grey of the ship's anchor next to them.

Thank you, Dee.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

For more information on coming events, please check <http://www.ssredoakvictory.com/calendar.htm> and <http://richmondmuseumofhistory.org/> I look forward to seeing you and hope we will get a chance to chat about all we are doing at both the Museum and on the Ship.

NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS, 2012

The Planning and Building Services Department is now accepting nominations for the Historic Preservation Commission's 5th annual Historic Preservation Awards.

The purpose of the awards program is to increase public awareness of Richmond's heritage by recognizing individuals, organizations, businesses and agencies whose contributions demonstrate outstanding commitment to excellence in historic preservation, local history or promotion of the heritage of the City. In addition to public and private buildings or structures, eligible historic preservation projects include media, publications, presentations and exhibits, parks, burial grounds, public art, oral history, theater productions, events and video presentations.

If you're interested in nominating a preservation project or activity to receive an award, nomination forms are available online at www.ci.richmond.ca.us/preservationawards. You can also pick up a nomination form in person by visiting the Planning and Building Services Department's information counter (City Hall at 450 Civic Center Plaza, 2nd Floor) weekdays between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.. **The deadline to submit nomination forms is 5:00 p.m. on March 30th, 2012.** Awards will be presented during the month of May, National Preservation Month. Last year's award recipients included the City of Richmond and the Save the Plunge Trust for Rehabilitation of the Richmond Municipal Natatorium.

Please contact Hector Rojas, Associate Planner, at (510) 620-6662 or hector_rojas@ci.richmond.ca.us with any questions about the awards program.

Past awards have honored individuals active in preserving a host of sites (e.g., Lucretia Edwards' efforts to save East Brother Light Station – award in 2000), and the 2008 award to Donna Roselius, for her efforts in founding the Point Richmond History Association. Among past recipients were oral historians who recorded the histories of Atchison Village (Dr. Rachael Stryker and her students at Mills College), and Summer Brenner's work on the Iron Triangle. Buildings have been honored, including the Point Richmond Trainmaster's Station.

The National Park Service, through the Rosie the Riveter/ WWII Home Front National Historical Park, presents an annual "Home Front" award. In 2008 Donna Graves was the Park Service's first recipient, honored for her leadership in developing the "Bay Trail Markers," among other related commitments to the city's legacy during World War II. Tom Debley, former Kaiser Permanente Heritage Research Director, was presented with this award for his initiatives in promoting the Rosie the Riveter Park.



Past winners of the Historic Preservation Awards include buildings, books, exhibits and people.

YOU ARE INVITED...

You are invited to the City of Richmond 2012 Historic Preservation Awards on Monday, May 7, at 5:00 p.m. at the City Council Chambers at 450 Civic Center Plaza with Reception following.

PANCAKES ARE BACK!

The Pancake Breakfasts on the *Red Oak Victory Ship* have become a tradition for many in the greater Bay Area and a treat for you if this will be your first time. First the food — fresh coffee, orange juice, sausage, bacon, eggs and fluffy pancakes — all for just \$7 per person.

Children under five are free and reservations are not required.

And let us remind you that the monthly Pancake Breakfasts on the *Red Oak* are a wonderful place to meet friends, take visitors or just get a relaxing start on a Sunday. The first breakfast this year will be April 8, and don't forget Mom on Mother's Day, May 13th, Dad on Father's Day, June 17th, and add to your calendar August 12th, September 9th, and October 14th, Fleet Week.

After a leisurely meal, take a tour of the Ship for only \$5, or hit the #4 Hold for World War II-era cartoons. And visit the small museum and Gift Shop.

The *Red Oak* Pancake Breakfasts are always 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., always \$7, include a million-dollar view, and the weather is always balmy breezes and sunshine on the bay.

The Breakfasts are a benefit for the restoration of the *SS Red Oak Victory*.

RECENT DONATIONS TO THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

Mary A. Arnett, 10.16.11

Scrapbook (pictures & information) about Harbor Gate School in Harbor Gate
Housing project built for shipyard workers during WWII

Priscilla A. Wegars, 12.15.11

4 photos of the 1924 4th of July parade from Harry Edward Spires' album

Unknown (from ROV), 12.19.11

2 scrapbooks of Ladies Auxiliary (veterans of WWI, USA), dated 1964-65, 1968
1 scrapbook about Fern Miles, 135 S. 9th St., Richmond, CA 94804

Pam Hodges, 11.22.12

Large brass marine compass on gimbals
Copper, 4-inch boat compass on gimbals, Lionel Corp. 1942
Small Waltham chronometer with case
Large Hamilton chronometer with case and key

Terry Parkinson, 01.17.12

Shakedown cruise flag for ship built in Kaiser Shipyard #3, 1942

Susan Jordan, 01.16.12

Fore'n'Aft magazines (newsletter of Richmond Kaiser Shipyards), 1943-1944

Laura Silva, 01.22.12

Panoramic photograph of Richmond, 1922

Helene D. Riddle, 02.01.12

Magazines *Among Ourselves*, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1926
Brochure – Club Mendelssohn presents the operetta “*El Toroso*,” 1927
Souvenir Brochure Program – presentation of the Army/Navy “E” Award to the
Richmond Refinery, February 19, 1943

Dick Wayman, 02.08.12

Complete archive of the magazine, *California Coast & Ocean*, Winter 1985-
Autumn 2009

David Vincent, 02.09.12

Richmond Rockets ABA Team autographed shirt
Richmond Rockets Program 2012

Barbara Corff, 02.12.12

3 photos of Carpentry class at Richmond High School
Photo of Teacher Richard Wilson, Richmond High School

Jerry Arbogast, 02.22.12

Photo of Jerry Arbogast with his father at 23rd & Nevin Ave., 1956
Piece of Gym floor signed by Coach Ron Kamp, Harry Ells High School
Certificate of appreciation presented to Herbert Arbogast, Richmond Municipal
Court, 1966

Davis L. Todhunter, 02.24.12

The Bluejackets Manual, 1943
Duffel Bag



Baby Ronnie with his parents Margaret and Dave in front of their apartment on 10th Street near Barrett Avenue in 1932.

RONNIE SCHELL, CONTINUED FROM P. 1



Life on the Schell farm, San Pablo Dam Road, Nov. 1936

The family moved to 2519 Grant Ave. to a house Ronnie's dad built. Ronnie attended kindergarten at Lincoln and elementary school at Lincoln and Grant Schools. He attended Longfellow Jr. High and Harry Ells Jr. High before attending Richmond Union High School, graduating in February of 1950.

After one term at College of Marin, where he led the Varsity Baseball team in hitting as their first baseman, Ronnie joined the Air Force (March '51 – Dec '54). After the Air Force he returned to Richmond and spent one semester at Contra Costa College when the campus was located at the old shipyards. He then transferred to SF State College and graduated in 1958. During college, Ronnie performed with a Richmond Group of Pantomimists called **"The Vagavons"** with longtime friends Ken Larson and Duane Press. At the same time, Ronnie met and became very close friends with local TV and radio star Don Sherwood, wrote comedy material for him and appeared in sketches on his radio and television shows.



In that same era, Ronnie auditioned at San Francisco's famed Purple Onion nightclub as a stand-up comedian and signed a five-month contract! He also performed at the Hungry I, Bimbo's 365 Club and Fack's 11 Jazz Club. Having done well in San Francisco, he easily found his way into the great hotels of Las Vegas where he stills performs today. He also played top dinner clubs in Chicago, New York City and around the country before beginning his TV career playing "Duke" on the hit series **"Gomer Pyle"** for five years.

Despite his busy performance schedule, Ronnie found time for romance and married Janet Rodenberg in 1968. The Schells have two sons, Greg and Chris.

As a motion picture actor, Ronnie has appeared in 24 films including Disney's **"Gus," "The Shaggy D.A.," "The Devil and Max Devlin"** and was the voice of the cat in **"The Cat from Outer Space"** as well as Peter Puck on NHL broadcasts in the '70s. You can hear his voice in many full-length cartoon features such as **"Jetsons, the Movie"** and **"Rover Dangerfield."** He also appears with Tim Conway in the popular video, **"Dorf Goes Fishing."**

Ronnie was the spokesman for Pacific Southwest Airlines for ten years from 1965 - 1975; the BART spokesman for four years; for another four years he was the national Dodge Dealer spokesman and then for seven years the spokesman for the famous Burdines Department Stores in Florida.

America's Slowest Rising Comedian continues to come into his own and get better with each performance – he has produced, along with Ken Larson, a yearly benefit comedy night called **"Veterans of Comedy Wars"** for the Athletic Department of SF State University, which has starred over the years friends like Phyllis Diller, Jonathan Winters, Shecky Greene, Tim Conway and Harvey Korman, Carol Channing, Don Knotts, Rich Little and Tommy Smothers.

As he continues to slowly rise to the top of the comedy ladder, Ronnie has accomplished a lot in his career. He was awarded his first national CLIO award for his Kemp's Ice Cream Commercial, and in 2002 he received the first California Standup Comedy Legend Award and was inducted into the San Francisco State's Alumni Hall of Fame.

From his first visit with Groucho Marx on **"You Bet Your Life"** in 1950 to his current performances in Las Vegas, Palm Springs or on the Disney Channel, Ronnie continues to keep in touch with his Richmond friends by way of setting up a Richmond High School Reunion Luncheon twice a year. The lunches continue to get larger as more Alumni hear that Ronnie is buying as long as they have RUHS stories to tell (*not really, folks; you'll have to spring for your own lunch. --Ed.*)

Thank you, Ronnie, for putting a smile on our faces for so many years and keeping your Richmond roots in place.



THE SPOTLIGHT rests for the moment on the Vagavons, a group of teen entertainers who recently performed at the Recreation Unlimited Halloween party. Pictured above they are Kenneth Larsen, Ron Schell and Duane Press. These fellows have performed for many clubs in the area and are working for a professional career of their own. --Independent Photo

SPRING DANCES

Dance to ballroom, Latin and swing music on the *Red Oak!* Alexis Gable, a well-known dance instructor and *Red Oak* volunteer, has organized the series of six dances with the first one on Sunday, April 1st. The dances continue each month through September and are held on the first Sunday, except September's on the 2nd Sunday because of Labor Day. You surely won't want to miss the dinner/dance in June, featuring the Huey White Dance Band.

Watch for future announcements of the dances, and check our websites for more information on a particular one:

the Museum at <http://www.richmondmuseumofhistory.org/calendar.htm>

or the *Red Oak* at <http://www.ssredoakvictory.com/calendar.htm>

You may also call the Museum at 510-235-7387 or the *Red Oak* at 510-237-2933 for information. Here's the schedule:

Sunday, April 1 – “*A Dancin' Fool*,” 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 6 – “*May I Have This Dance?*” 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, June 3 – “*Junebug*” Dinner / Dance, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 1 – “*Freedom Day Dance*,” 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, Aug 5 – “*Awesome August Evening*,” 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, Sept 9 – “*Steppin' in September*,” 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

The cost is \$10.00 per event and no reservations are needed.

“*Junebug*” is a Dinner/Dance with dancing to the Huey White Dance Band and later with a DJ and requires reservations by May 31. Cost is \$25/person. To pay by credit card, please call (510) 232-6593 or mail checks payable to the Richmond Museum to 608 40th Street, Richmond CA 94805.

Wanna dance?

WANTED! DOCENTS, GREETERS ON THE SHIP

Want adventure on the high seas without actually sailing anywhere? Want a job with great hours, no pay, good company, and lots of fresh air?

Try sharing your talents with the volunteers on the *Red Oak* as a weekend docent or greeting visitors.

No experience necessary, standing in line at a union hall not required, and training provided.

Intrigued? Call the Ship at (510) 237-2933. You'll get a vest, a badge, a flashlight, a whistle, and laser pointer! You'll love it. Call today!

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE RICHMOND MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

Privileges:

- ◆ Reduced admission to events
- ◆ Discounts on services, books, and gift items
- ◆ Quarterly newsletter, “*The MIRROR*”
- ◆ Advance notice of tours and events
- ◆ Free entrance to Museum and Ship

Yes, I want to become a member

Enclosed is my check for

\$ _____ (payable to RMA)

Categories of Membership

\$25	Senior/Student
\$35	Individual
\$50	Family/Organization
\$65	Contributing
\$100	Sustaining
\$500	Patron
\$1000	Benefactor/Corporate

___ **New** ___ **Renew** ___ **Gift**
___ **I Would like to volunteer**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Zip _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

___ **I would like my newsletter sent by e-mail**
(saves money & trees).

Mail to:

Richmond Museum of History
PO Box 1267
Richmond, CA 94802

ITEMS NOT ON DISPLAY

FIRE CHIEF'S HELMET

by Lynn Maack

Sitting on a shelf in the Museum basement, this item waits to be called upon, much as its owner did more than 85 years ago. The item is a fire helmet. But it's not just any fire helmet—it's a fire chief's helmet, denoted by its bright white color and prominent front piece, or shield, that displays the words "CHIEF, RFD." The helmet belonged to William P. Cooper, who became Fire Chief in Richmond in 1924, 10 years after the formation of the official (paid) Richmond Fire Department.



Chief Cooper was born in 1884 and may have been a member of Richmond's Volunteer Fire Department in the early 1900s and then the Richmond Fire Department when it was formed in 1914. He served as Richmond Fire

Chief for 23 years, retiring in 1947 at the age of 63. As Chief, he last operated from the City's Fire Department Headquarters at 235 5th Street. He resided in Richmond on 13th Street around the time he retired. Chief Cooper died in 1978 at the age of 94.



from leather that was specially treated to provide durability and resist wetness without rotting. Gratacap was also a volunteer

firefighter in New York City and recognized the need for better head protection for firefighters. He applied his specially-treated leather construction techniques to produce a very rigid and durable helmet, a helmet that is still produced today.



Around the same time, the Cairns brothers operated a medal, badge, button and insignia business in New York. They developed the idea for an identification badge for the front of Gratacap's helmets, thus creating the first front piece and holder. Gratacap and the Cairns brothers worked together until 1850 when Gratacap retired and Cairns & Brother began its legacy, first as producers of leather headgear and identification shields and later as producers of all firefighting equipment. In 2000, the Mine Safety Appliance Company bought Cairns & Brother and continues to produce Cairns Helmets and other fire safety equipment.

The Museum's helmet is in excellent condition, with a few age wrinkles. It is painted white, which in North America signifies Fire Chief. Chief Cooper himself donated the helmet to the Museum in 1959.

Sources: http://www.msafire.com/cairns_history.html, Museum records, and the Richmond Fire Department, with special thanks to Diane Canepa of the RFD, retired Fire Chief Floyd Cormier and the crew of Fire Station #2.



Must be the whole crew—caption reads, "All Here! Apr 23, 1925" Chief Cooper is third from right.

Richmond Museum Association, Inc.

Museum open Wed-Sun, 1-4 p.m.
400 Nevin Ave., P.O. Box 1267
Richmond CA 94802
(510) 235-7387

Richmondmuseumofhistory.org

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The Richmond Museum of History is a 501 (C) 3 non-profit educational organization. Gifts and donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



Richmond Museum Assoc., Inc.
P.O. Box 1267
Richmond, CA 94802

HELP RAISE THE ANCHOR!

CERTIFICATES OF INVESTMENT

We have launched a *Red Oak Drydock Campaign*. Savings Certificates, redeemable for passage on the Ship's first cruise after dry dock, are now being sold at \$20 each. The first cruise requires six (6) certificates, which will have an appreciated value of \$150 -- the cost of the first cruise. Certificates are available in the Ship's Gift Shop or by calling the Ship's office at (510) 237-2933.



Appointed Chairs

Leona Derheim, *Red Oak Tree*
Lorraine Regier, Membership

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Inna Soiguine,
Administrative Museum Mgr
Matt Walker, Office Clerk

The MIRROR Staff

Lynn Maack, Editor
Lois Boyle
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Admission:

Members: Free
Seniors/Students: \$1.00
General: \$2.00
Children: Free w/adult

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The Museum is open Wednesday thru Sunday, 1-4 p.m.
Call (510) 235-7387 for information and tour appointments.
Visit us online at: **RICHMONDMUSEUMOFHISTORY.ORG**

Return Service Requested