

Fullerton's Wonder Dogs

by Debora Richey

In 1921, Strongheart, a male German Shepherd dog whose real name was Etzel Von Oeringen (1917-1929), made his Hollywood film debut in *The Silent Call*. A year later, another German Shepherd, Rin Tin Tin (1918-1932), would make his first movie appearance in *The Man from Hell's River*. Strongheart would die after an unfortunate movie set accident, but Rin Tin Tin would go on to become an international film sensation. Nicknamed Rinty, he made twenty-eight more silent and talkie films for Warner Bros., saving the studio from financial ruin on more than one occasion.

Warner Bros. rewarded its dark-haired German Shepherd star with his own car and driver, as well as a personal chef who prepared daily lunches of tenderloin steak for him. At the peak of Rin Tin Tin's popularity, Warner Bros. fielded 12,000 weekly requests for pictures of the canine star. Each one was autographed with a



Color Lobby Card for *The Hound of Silver Creek*



Fearless the dog publicity shot for *K-9 Detective* (1926)

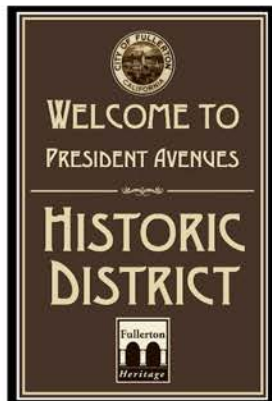
paw print and signed by Rinty's owner/trainer, Lee Duncan: "Most faithfully, Rin Tin Tin."

At a time when one out of two Americans saw a movie a week, Rin Tin Tin was responsible for greatly increasing the popularity of German Shepherds as a family and police dog. United States Air Corps Corporal Lee Duncan had found Rinty in a bombed-out dog kennel in Lorraine, France, during World War I. As part of their war strategy, German armed forces employed German Shepherds on the battlefield. American soldiers were initially amused by the military use of the dogs, but impressed by their obedience, agility, and strength, began to train the intelligent breed for war and police work. The dogs became cemented as faithful canine companions when blind Morris Frank selected a German Shepherd, Buddy, as the nation's first seeing eye dog in 1928.

The fact that Rin Tin Tin was one of the largest box-office draws in the world was not lost on other motion picture studios. Each Hollywood studio soon had its own German Shepherd wonder dog. Metro-Goldwyn Mayer promoted Napoleon Bonaparte; RKO Pictures used Ace the Wonder Dog; William Randolph Hearst's FBO Pictures Corporation had Ranger; and

Fullerton's Newest Preservation Zone President Avenues

by Ernie Kelsey



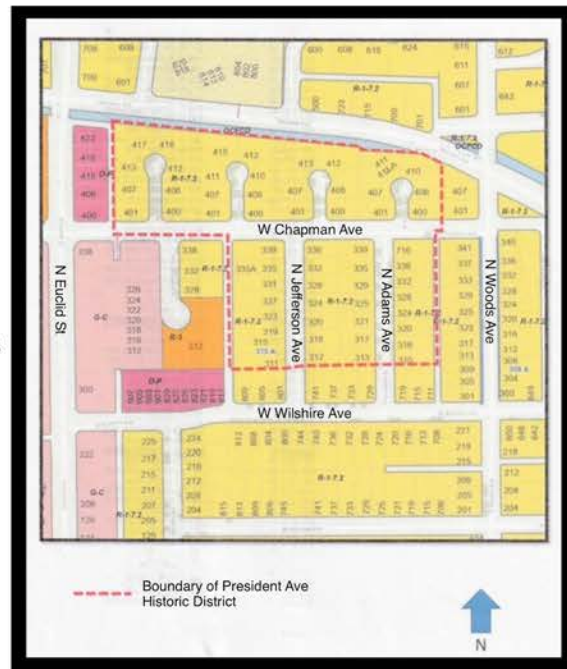
Fullerton Heritage is excited to announce the City of Fullerton has a new Preservation Zone called President Avenues. Situated just six blocks west of downtown Fullerton and located between Wilshire, "Little Chapman" and Woods, the President Avenues Preservation Zone is Fullerton's 11th Preservation Zone and features beautiful examples of Minimal Traditional Architecture.

Minimal Traditional architecture was popular in the 1930s and this neighborhood is an excellent representation of this style. The homes are incredibly maintained, and the landscaping enhances the charm of this great "pocket"

neighborhood of 61 single-family homes. There is also defense worker housing located in and around this beautiful neighborhood built for WWII defense workers.

It took approximately two years from when local neighbor Debbie DeSpain contacted Fullerton Heritage to the City Council approving the new Preservation Zone on October 3, 2023. Ms. DeSpain worked tirelessly going door-to-door to gauge the neighborhood's interest in becoming a Preservation Zone. She attended many meetings and answered a lot of questions. Without her efforts, this would not have happened as quickly as it did. Thank you Debbie!

If you live in a historic neighborhood in Fullerton and would like to see if it can become a preservation zone, please email Fullerton Heritage at info@fullertonheritage.org requesting that your neighborhood be researched. It's that simple!



Ann Gread Retiring Thank You for Your Service

by Ernie Kelsey

The New Year always brings about hope and excitement and sometimes change, too. We're going through a big change. Effective midnight December 31, 2023, Ann Gread has officially retired from the Fullerton Heritage Board of Directors.

Ann has been on the Board for 31 years and Vice President for the last 4 years. Ann has worked on so many projects! She was a big part of the Save the Fox effort led by Fullerton Heritage before the Historic Theater Foundation was created. Ann's late husband Joel was also a board member for many years.

Ann was our lead person on our



communication efforts including the Fullerton Heritage website and Facebook. She was always willing to lend a hand and help on any task. She attended countless City Council meetings, represented the City and

Fullerton Heritage at numerous functions and was fun to be around.

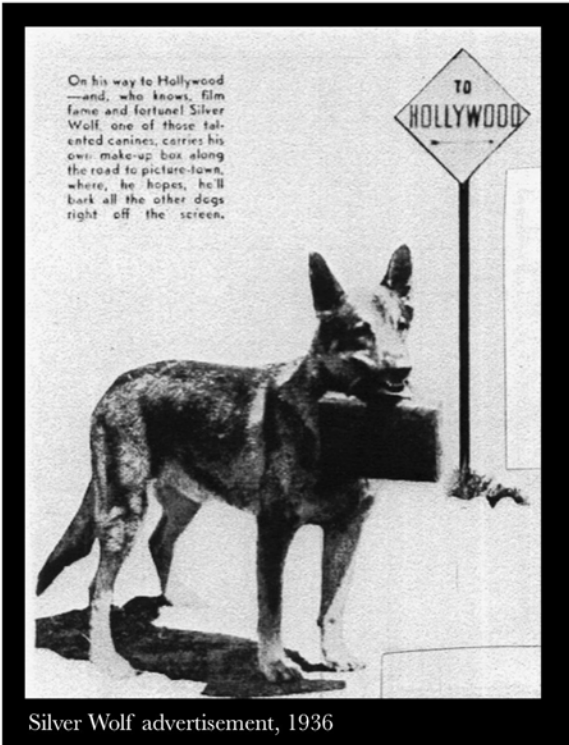
We will miss Ann's commitment, enthusiasm, and organization! Most of all, we'll miss her smile and humor. Ann is going to be in town for another couple of months. During this time, she'll transition her duties to other Board members. Ann is looking forward to the next chapter in her life in the Northwest where she'll be closer to her family, especially her two wonderful children.

Here's wishing you only the best Ann. Thanks for your 31 years of service to Fullerton Heritage and the City of Fullerton.

(Continued from page 1)

Paramount and the Fox Film Corporation championed Thunder the Dog. Dozens of different trained German Shepherds began appearing in films, bearing such dynamic and commanding names as Lightning, Flash, Flame, Wolfheart, and Cyclone. The silver screen made the German Shepherd one of the most recognizable breeds in the United States, and dog trainers were soon working at all the studios. Blair, a Collie, had starred in the first canine feature, *Rescued by Rover* (1905), but the 1920s marked the first time that cinematic canines were given top billing over human actors.

In the early 1920s, the Hollywood film industry was just forming, and it was easy for enterprising men and women to break into the fast-growing business. Poor, but ambitious Fullerton resident Louis (or Lewis) Vokali (1900-1968), who had been



raising and training German Shepherds, quickly took advantage of the dog film craze. He signed a contract with Van Pelt Productions, a family-owned Culver City independent motion picture production company, to make a series of two-reelers featuring his German Shepherd, named Fearless. Advertised as the “Greatest Police Dog Detective” and “The Greatest of All Dog Actors”, Fearless received top billing as a canine detective in twelve silent films from 1926 to 1927. The first films in the series – *Detective K-9*, *Dog Scents*, *The Love Fighter* – were silly tongue-in-cheek productions, but the later barkies were more stolid melodramas. All of the films were distributed by the Poverty Row Chesterfield Motion Picture Corporation of New York, that rented space at other Hollywood studios, primarily Universal Pictures and RKO.

With his contract with Van Pelt Productions over, Vokali signed a five-picture deal with Universal Pictures featuring another of his German Shepherds named Dynamite. Vokali had selected Dynamite from a litter of nine pedigreed police pups sired by a champion show dog. Born, raised, and trained in Fullerton for eighteen months, Dynamite would play the stellar role in five “western photodramas”: *Fangs of Destiny* (1927), *Wolf's Trail* (1927), *The Call of the Heart* (1928), *The Four-Footed Ranger* (1928), and *The Hound of Silver Creek* (1928). Before retiring, he would make his last film appearance in *The Indians Are Coming* (1930), a Universal serial based on *The Great West That Was* by William “Buffalo Bill” Cody.

Dynamite did not have Rin Tin Tin's magnetism or expressive face, but he was remarkably aerobic. He could easily jump on the back of a fast-moving horse; climb a tree; lower a rope down the side of a steep canyon; knock down a horse rider from a tree; and execute a series of flying tackles. He also “talked” with his barking translated as superimpositions at the bottom of the screen. Part of Universal Pictures Thriller Features, the studio initially promoted Dynamite as “The Wonder Dog”; then later as “The Miracle Police Dog”; and finally, as “The Devil Dog” ready to attack evil poachers, rustlers, and smugglers. Firmly on the side of the law, he came to the aid of the helpless and innocent, including homesteaders, children, and schoolmistresses. Critics reviewing Dynamite's films regularly singled him out for his intelligence and acting skills.

Despite the “Devil Dog” moniker, Dynamite and Vokali were required by contract to make scores of personal appearances at silent movie theaters around the nation. The two made a triumphant visit to Fullerton's Rialto Theatre (219 North Harbor Boulevard) on January 6, 1928 for the premier of *Wolf's Trail*. The silent movie house was just a short drive from Vokali's home and kennel, located just north of Harbor Boulevard on El Dorado Ranch.



(Continued from page 3)

Universal Pictures press agents fabricated a heart-warming story that Vokali was a former member of the California constabulary, and with Dynamite as his inseparable companion during his foot patrols, would participate in a dozen or more arrests of criminals. In reality, Vokali had emigrated from Hungary at the age of four with his family in 1904. Raised in Poughkeepsie, New York, he worked as an ironworker alongside his father and brother before moving to Fullerton. By 1917, he was living and working as a ranch hand on the 125-acre El Dorado Ranch owned by Harry Gantz, who would later develop Malvern Avenue, Jacaranda Place, and Brookdale Place subdivisions in Fullerton.

In May 1922, Vokali was hired as a part-time motorcycle officer by the city of Anaheim, which most likely gave him the idea of raising and training German Shepherds as police dogs. Anaheim's downtown speed limit was 15 miles an hour, and Vokali was hired to work 50 hours a month as part of the Anaheim Merchants Association's anti-speeding campaign. Well-liked by the business community and his fellow officers, who nicknamed him "Shortie", Vokali ticketed hundreds of speeding motorists. When he refused to overlook a speeding violation by a former Anaheim official, he found himself out of a job in July 1923. He worked as a mechanic, then as a dog trainer, before hitting upon the idea of using his German Shepherds as canine film stars.

For his Hollywood film shoots, Vokali drove from Fullerton with his dogs in the back of his truck. He relied on two local lawyers to draw up his film contracts: Albert Launer and Sam L. Collins, who would later serve as a Congressman and Orange County District Attorney. It was well-known throughout Fullerton that Vokali was raising German Shepherds for film work, with the *Fullerton News Tribune* announcing upcoming films where his dogs had the starring role ("Fullerton Dog To Be Actor in Film"). When Fritz, Dynamite's stand-in, escaped from his kennel in March 1926, Vokali made a personal appeal to local residents to assist in finding the wayward pup, and offered a substantial reward for the return of the valuable dog. Fritz was spotted around downtown Fullerton before deciding to return home on his own. Vokali also received much favorable publicity when he rescued Ruth Palmer, 18, from drowning in the El Dorado Ranch reservoir in July 1923.



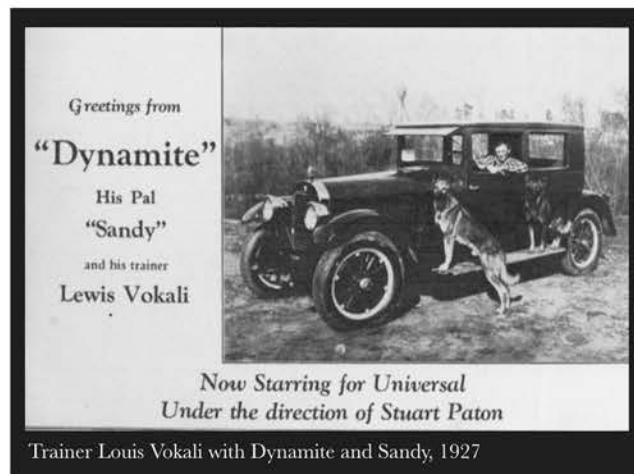
Fearless Advertisement, 1926

In the 1930s, Vokali turned to two of Dynamite's offspring – King I and Silver Wolf – for additional film work. King I would appear in a few films, serve as stand-in for Rin Tin Tin, and make multiple appearances at movie theaters and dog shows. With the advent of talkies, dog trainers who had once been able to talk to their dogs while cameras rolled now often had to remain silent. With King I, Vokali developed an intricate series of signals, needing no spoken commands, and their silent appearances wowed audiences.

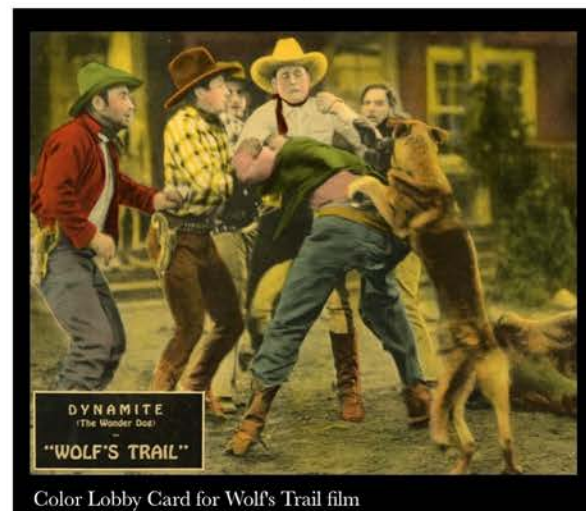
Featured on posters, Silver Wolf, a medium-sized black sable dog, starred in *The Rogues' Tavern* (1936), *Topa Topa* (1937), *Call of the Yukon* (1938), and *Radio Patrol* (1937), a 12-part Saturday serial. In *Radio Patrol*, Silver Wolf (called Irish) helps a young radio cop stop an international criminal gang from getting their hands on a formula for flexible steel. In some of the fight scenes, Vokali can be seen doubling for various henchmen that engage in one-on-one combat with Silver Wolf. When Harry Gantz sold El Dorado Ranch in 1931, Vokali purchased a small ranch in North Hollywood (12708 Burbank Boulevard) to be closer to film studios. He continued to raise and train German Shepherds into the 1950s,

but during World War II, when the production of dog pictures stopped, he worked at the Lockheed Aircraft Company in Burbank. Vokali, who never married, eventually retired and moved into a small apartment building in Los Angeles (1016 Albany Street), where he passed away in 1968, at the age of 68.

Vokali's first trained dog, Fearless, made his film debut on March 1, 1926 in *A String of Diamonds*, and his German Shepherds eventually appeared in 40 films. Some of the films have been lost, but a number, including all of the twelve Fearless shorts, will be found on DVDs in the Fullerton Local History Room of the Fullerton Public Library, along with lobby posters, advertisements, and newspaper articles. Other films, such as *The Rogue's Tavern*, are available on *Youtube*. The Local History Room also has books on film dogs: *Wonder Dogs: 101 German Shepherd Dog Films* and *Hollywood's Top Dogs: The Dog Hero in Film*.



Trainer Louis Vokali with Dynamite and Sandy, 1927



Fullerton College

300 Building Project Moves Ahead in 2024

by Terry Galvin

While nothing visible happened in 2023, the State-approved plans for the project were revised to include additional seismic work. Funding for the original project was cancelled and replaced by other District funds. The broader focus of the project for additional seismic work required the revised plans to be approved by the State. Fullerton Heritage was given assurance that the additional work did not change any of the restoration components of the original plans. The State approval was given in late 2023.



The project was advertised to a list of pre-qualified contractors. One of the required qualifications was documented construction experience with historic properties. The 300 Building is on the National Register of Historic Places, making appropriate experience essential. In December 2023, a job walk was conducted for the pre-qualified firms and all seven were represented.

Currently, any questions about the plans or the project from the attendees are being reviewed and will be answered by the project architect. The goal is for bids to be submitted in January 2024, when they will be reviewed by the project architect and the construction management company selected by the Chancellor's Office to oversee the construction. The recommendation will be submitted for Chancellor and Trustee approval in February 2024. Construction may begin by April/May 2024.

Fullerton Heritage Presents Halloween Contest

by Noelle Rossi

We would like to congratulate and recognize the winners of our 2023 Halloween decorating contest. Thank you to all who submitted photos and we wish everyone could have won.



Postcards announcing the contest were mailed to residents in Fullerton's Preservation Zones. The winners received a cash prize and a Fullerton Heritage membership for one year.

Here are the categories and winners:

1) Most Scary: Kristen Grime at 334 W. Whiting Ave



2) Most Classic: Joanna and Joe Lisardi at 214 Malvern Ave



3) Most Creative: Star Delucca at 235 Malvern Ave



Coming this year... 2024 Christmas decorating contest!

Hello and Happy New Year everyone! I can tell 2024 is going to be a great year!

Fullerton Heritage sure has stayed busy over the last six months. There's always a lot going on in our town and it's a pleasure to represent Fullerton Heritage and its members anywhere we can.

Check out the October 23, 2023, Video Observer (www.fullertonobserver.com) article about the new Historic District at Fullerton College. Emerson Little did a great piece and there's a supporting video with me talking about the history of the school and the beautiful architecture. Fullerton is so lucky to have such great educational institutions, especially one as beautiful as Fullerton College.

The new Local Landmark and National Register plaques have been placed at the Fullerton Auditorium. There's even a new plaque commemorating the Charles Kassler mural on the West side of the building. A **big THANK YOU** to the **FULLERTON ROTARY** for their continual support of Fullerton Heritage's plaquing efforts. Placing plaques is very important because it helps educate citizens about our historic elements in the City. Fullerton Heritage is a 10+ year winner of the Fullerton Rotary's Community Investment Award. We can't thank them enough for their continued support!

I hope you saw our Special Edition newsletter celebrating the 100-year anniversary of the opening of the Chapman Building. The Chapman Building is of course important to Fullerton, but it's also an iconic building in the County. Once the tallest structure in Orange County, the Chapman Building symbolized Fullerton's prominence in the region. If you didn't see this Special Edition, you can read it on our website at www.fullertonheritage.org. Stay tuned for more 100-year celebrations next year!

We're looking forward to the grand re-opening of the Hunt Library in April 2024. Fullerton Heritage has been very involved with the recognition and restoration of the Hunt Library and has been working with City staff on many aspects of the project. We can't wait to get back inside.

With Ann Gread's retirement, Fullerton Heritage is looking for new board members. Being a board member entails living in Fullerton, attending monthly meetings, having a passion for preservation and a willingness to take on different assignments as necessary. If you're interested, go to our website and fill out the prospective board member form (under Contact Us), submit it and we'll be in touch.

We're excited about 2024. We have a new Preservation Zone "brewing" around the Wilshire/Woods/Marwood area and several homeowners requesting Local Landmark status. It's going to be a great year!

Please renew your membership today! Thank you for all you do.

Ernie

Renew Your Membership Today

January means it's time to renew your Fullerton Heritage membership for 2024. Your membership helps place plaques (with help from the Fullerton Rotary) on historic buildings and homes throughout Fullerton. You also help with the purchasing of historic materials for the Local History Room at the Fullerton Public Library.

Membership makes a great gift too. Give a gift and know you're helping preserve Fullerton's past so the generations to come can enjoy what we do today.

Welcome New Members:

Mary Collier / Mehul Desai / Lee Fuller Michael & Sherrie Mori / Robert Pletka

Thank you!

Board of Directors 2024-2025

John Estrada / Terry Galvin / Jennifer Harris
Ernie Kelsey / Bob Linnell / Debora Richey
Noelle Rossi / Raymond Sly / Joan Wolff



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