



Episode 011 – St. Joe’s (transcript)

Introduction

You’re listening to rememBURBANK, a podcast featuring stories from the history of Burbank, California, produced by the Burbank Public Library. Check out our collection of historic Burbank photos at burbankinfo.org.

Announcements

Theodore Roosevelt once said, “The more you know about the past, the better prepared you are for the future.” Burbank Public Library has a COVID-19 memory journal program happening now. Pen your experiences of the pandemic and the local history librarian will preserve them for future generations of Burbankers. The journal form can be found on the Burbank in Focus website or a paper copy can be obtained at curbside pick-up. The library is also offering a new personalized service in which a librarian can help you pick out your next few books based on your reading preferences. Check out the Book Connection on the Burbank Public Library’s website and get some reading suggestions today.

Story

And now for today’s story.

Times of crisis bring to light the unsung heroes of our communities. Medical professionals are reliable and selfless when put to task, which is why I found it an appropriate time to highlight Burbank’s shining star, Providence St. Joseph Medical Center.

In the early 1940s, locals found that the San Fernando Valley was in desperate need of a hospital. Advocates championed the sisters of Providence in Seattle to come aid in the planning, building and operating of the new institution. The sisters’ mission of caring for the sick, along with their history of running hospitals made them ideal candidates for the job. Mother Superior Mary Mildred accepted the challenge with the condition that the land be donated and funding come from federal grants. Lockheed Aircraft Corporation applied for the grant on behalf of the hospital in May 1942. The city of Los Angeles agreed to sell 11 acres across from the Disney Studios for \$17,000 which Lockheed paid for and in turn donated to the cause. After acquiring the land and the grant approval, Mother Mary Mildred announced the hospital would be named after St. Joseph in honor of Mother Joseph, the pioneer leader of the Sisters of Providence holy order.

In January 1943, groundbreaking on the four-wing, cross-shaped medical facility commenced. Because the hospital was being built during the height of the Second World War, the Federal Works Agency ordered materials to be saved for the war effort. So the resourceful sisters bought many items second-hand and Lockheed used its connections to obtain sufficient building supplies to keep the project on schedule. The Lockheed Corporation had more than 90,000 employees, so having medical facilities nearby would be a major benefit. Nearby Warner Brothers and Walt Disney Studios also had influence in raising money for the hospital. On March 25, 1943, the L.A. Times reported Archbishop Cantwell as presiding over the laying of the cornerstone. At which time he declared that “a hospital is a civilizing influence in the community. Whether the patient who comes here be Jewish, Protestant or

Catholic, you will receive the same tender care.” And for over seventy-five years they have done just that, caring for community members of all creeds, backgrounds, and ethnicities.

The baby boom following the war created a surge in need for medical care and St. Joseph’s stepped up to the plate, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars in the early 1950s to expand their facilities and add 130 beds. At this time, the hospital was aided in their fundraising by everyone from the likes of Bob Hope, to the employees of Universal Studios, to the local service station owners. The early 1960s saw another groundbreaking as they added a new six story wing along with new specializations such as pediatric care, intensive care, and advanced cardiac care. The early 1970s saw expansion as the construction of another wing built along with a 55 bed mental health center. A 1969 L.A. Times article reported that their “expansion project is planned to additions and alterations can be made in the future.” They had projected the needs into 1980! And in keeping with tradition, the early 1980s saw the building of a new emergency care complex along with a cardiac rehabilitation department.

Burbankers share with pride the information that they were born at St. Joe’s. Some famous babies birthed there include Tim Burton and John Ritter. Celebrities have also taken their last breath there: Walt Disney, Alan Thicke, and Luke Perry, to name a few.

St. Joseph has been a pioneer in trauma, intensive care, emergency and paramedic services. They were the first hospital in Los Angeles to develop a CPR training program. And also one of the first hospitals to have emergency responders stationed and dispatched from their site. After the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, other local hospitals sustained damage and St. Joseph immediately received patients from them. No one knows when disaster will strike a community. It is comforting to know that Providence St. Joseph Medical Center is our neighborhood’s principal spot to receive health care as they are ready to meet Burbank’s needs no matter the challenge. Today we are living through a time that will be remembered historically as the Covid-19 pandemic. Providence St. Joseph has been heartily up to the task as their staff heroically faces each day’s demands. Their current day message is to not delay medical attention due to fear of the pandemic. Cardiac issues, stroke symptoms, and cancer concerns can’t wait out Covid-19, so get help today if you are worried about your own health or that of a loved one. They take strict measures to sanitize their facilities and teach infection-control through proper hygiene and face masks. The hospital has deep roots here in Burbank and we can chronicle its events as we watch them play out, as it not only is steeped in our city’s history but in its future as well.

News from Burbank

And now for the news from Burbank...

Today’s news comes from the March 2, 1951 Burbank Daily Review.

“Almost 2000 Children Ill, Doctors Say. About 15 percent of Burbank’s 14,000 school children were absent from school today because of an influenza-type virus.

School authorities report one out of every seven school child[ren] this month has been stricken with the infection, which usually starts with a high temperature and sore throat.

An average of 30 teachers and administrators daily also have had the virus. Dr. J.P. Bowers, school physician, said the incident of the disease is growing but had not reached an epidemic state. He advised parents to put their child in bed at the first signs of the disease and call a doctor. Lack of treatment altogether is serious as this influenza-type virus can lead to pneumonia and affect the ears. Children at

school are excused at first signs of the ailment and parents are called to get them. The school system takes the children to their homes in [the] event [that] parents can not arrange to get them.”

And that’s the news from 1951.

End Credits

rememBURBANK was researched, written, and hosted by Carolyn Alves, recorded and edited by Marcos Alves, and reviewed by Cesar Garcia.

Funding for the podcast came from the Friends of the Burbank Public Library, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting books and the library to the Burbank community. The proceeds from their fundraising efforts help fund Library programming and purchase special equipment for the library. The music you hear now, and at the beginning of the podcast, is Burbank's 1924 official song "In Burbank" by Code Morgan.

You can find show notes for this episode, learn more about the show, and view historical photos of Burbank at burbankinfofocus.org

Thank you for joining us today.