

TRIPPING THROUGH TIME

A Telephone Number? One of the Society's Prized Artifacts!

There have been a handful of famous telephone numbers in history and popular culture: for example, PENNSYLVANIA 6-5000, the main number for the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City, was made famous through a 1940 song of the same name by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra.

In the earlier days of telephony, phone numbers usually started with an *exchange name* rather than numbers, and these names could also be translated into numbers by dialing the corresponding first two letters of the exchange name. In this case, the first two letters (PE) correspond to the digits "73", so we would know **PE**nnsylvania 6-5000 as 736-5000 today.

One amazing fact about this particular number is that it was assigned to the hotel in 1930 and is still an active number for Hotel Pennsylvania 95 years later! Even though the hotel itself has been gone for five years now, you can still call (212) 736-5000 and hear a message from Hotel Pennsylvania's former management company!

In more recent years (1981), closer to home, San Francisco band Tommy Tutone had a world-wide hit with a new song called 867-5309/Jenny. The unfortunate people who had that number, repeating all over the U.S. and Canada through the various area codes, all had to change their phone numbers after being inundated with prank phone calls!

Milpitas has its own legendary phone number - AMherst 2-1776. This number not only helped save our city from being annexed into San Jose, it also gave us our mascot and city seal!

When the Ford Motor Corporation decided to move its Richmond plant to the small unincorporated township of Milpitas, San Jose's City Manager, A.P. "Dutch" Hamann, was ready to pounce and swallow up the little township and make it a part of San Jose. Up to that time, the taxes generated by a small number of farmers, bar and store owners, as well as a handful of other small-town businesses were not of interest to San Jose, but a major automobile manufacturing plant? Yes, please!

As "Dutch" rubbed his hands together in anticipation of an easy takeover, the San Jose City Councilmembers balked at the cost of running sewer and water lines as well as other services over to



Milpitas. This bought some time for the citizens of our township (along with encouragement and help from Western Pacific and the Ford Corporation), to start the process of incorporating a new and independent City of Milpitas, becoming official on January 26, 1954.

With incorporation as well as new prosperity from the Ford Plant and other supporting businesses springing up, Milpitas started growing its own infrastructure - including getting its own telephone switching center from the Pacific Bell Telephone & Telegraph Company. No longer beholden to San Jose using the "borrowed" exchange prefix of "CYpress 5" (295), we now had our very own telephone identity of "AMherst 2" (262)!

Everyone in Milpitas had their home and business numbers change all at once as the new central office flipped the switch at 11 P.M. on November 3, 1956. One of those who received their new number that day was Denny Weisgerber, an insurance salesman and veteran of the recent war in Korea. His Casper Street home was randomly assigned the new number of "AMherst 2-1776", which must have pleased him immensely being the patriotic man he was.

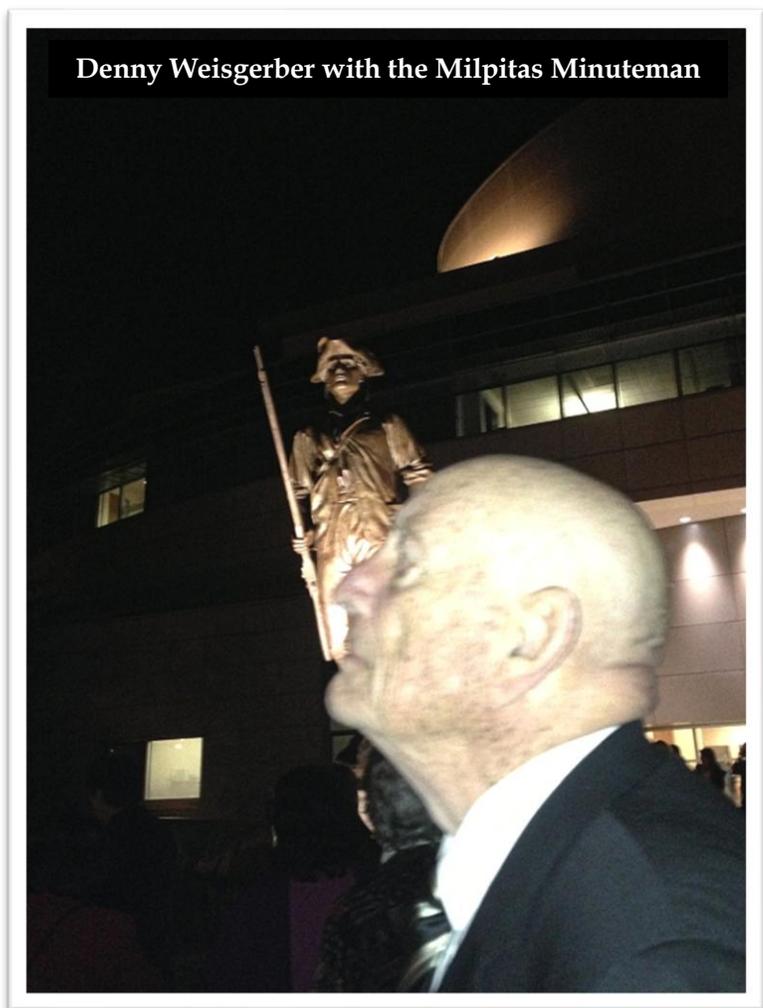
After a few more years of growth and prosperity, Dutch Hamann came up with a new plan in mid-1960 - convince Milpitanans to *want* to join San Jose with promises of lower taxes and more services. He even had an office opened up on Main Street - in the heart of Milpitas - from which his staff could infiltrate the good people of the young city.

A group of prominent citizens co-led by Denny Weisgerber (who would later become a city councilmember as well as serve three terms as mayor) decided to form a counter-campaign called "Citizens for Milpitas", and his 1776 phone number had just the right "ring" to it to be the call center for this fight! Milpitas Post editor Mort Levine then suggested that the group be called "The Minutemen" as the pieces fell together:

CALL AMherst 2-1776 to keep Milpitas Independent!

On January 23, 1961, citizens of Milpitas voted overwhelmingly to keep the city independent, and the rest, they say, is history

Denny Weisgerber passed away in 2019, and his historic phone number was eventually disconnected as well. Later, the Milpitas Historical Society was able to reclaim it as its own historical artifact, and you can call that number today and be greeted with a recorded message - and leave your own if you like! In fact, you are also welcome (and encouraged) to call in response to the poll included in this newsletter!



Written by Bill Hare, Society President and docent. June 2025

