

# THE SAN JUAN STAR

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## Juan Bautista Mission

### Security: Protecting History

By Zach Johnson

The statue of St. Gabriel, the centerpiece of the Mission church, sits unfettered on the altar, separated by an innocuous and less than intimidating red velvet rope. Don't be tempted to reach out and touch it though; you will be thwarted by a stealthy guard – a pressure sensor underneath the statue will trip and a siren will blare.

That pressure sensor is one of over 100 sensors and 30 cameras that have been donated and installed at Mission San Juan Bautista since January 2007 by Larry Tracy.

Tracy, 62, is the CEO of Aleph America Corporation, a manufacturer of security components. He has been in the security business for over 40 years, has over 20 patents of security related technologies, and has installed security systems in 78 counties, including such exotic places as China's Forbidden City, a 13th century bank vault in Siena, Italy, and an Egyptian prison. "That was before 9/11, and at the time that prison was holding Osama bin Laden's right hand man," says Tracy.

The system that Tracy has donated and installed at Mission San Juan is worth several hundred thousand dollars, according to Ruben Mendoza, the Mission curator. "We actually had two big alarm companies come out and look at in-stalling a system before Larry came along" says Mendoza. "They wouldn't even give us a quote. They said it would be too hard."

Besides the daunting size of the Mission compound, the one prevalent challenge to installing any security system would be the four foot adobe walls that make up most

of the construction. “The adobe walls really block radio signals,” says Tracy. Most security systems now rely on wireless signals and their ability to pass through several different components of the system. That system in your house? Chances are its wireless.

Tracy found a way to defeat this problem by using the Mission attic and a mixture of wires and wireless signals. “We ran hundreds of feet of wire through the attic to the different cameras,” says Tracy. “I have just a fearless wire runner, this little wiry guy; he would go into the smallest, darkest places running wires.” Tracy has also installed the wireless hubs in the expansive attic, which allows the signals to bypass the thick adobe walls by going through the comparably thin roof, bouncing through the attic, and coming down into the main hub through the ceiling.

Another challenge was how to install the system without making it too noticeable and without harming the historic and frail Mission walls. “We didn’t want to be too invasive,” says Tracy. He again had to devise an ingenious system, this time one that would allow him to mount the cameras without causing damage to the walls; and those cameras are often quite understated. Tracy can point out several that are cleverly hidden, yet have unobstructed views of them any rooms and halls. He has also installed several infrared cameras recently. “Now we can see very clearly what goes on at night in the Mission,” says Tracy.

But how, exactly, did a CEO of a company that’s done security systems all over the world come to donate several hundred thousand dollars’ worth of security equipment to Mission San Juan Bautista? “One day there was an issue of AAA magazine sitting on the table, and it just happened to be open to an article about the Missions. It talked about the extensive thefts that were being suffered, and the Missions were all unable to afford to install security systems. So I decided I wanted to give back.”

Tracy has installed security systems at twelve of the CA Missions now, but San Juan was the first. “I used Mission San Juan as sort of a model for how I would approach the other Missions,” Tracy says. “A lot of the challenges were similar between the Missions, so I was able to apply what we learned here to the others.” Since then, Tracy has expanded the system according to the evolving needs of the Mission.

“We had a guy stealing from the collection boxes in the church. He had broomstick type thing with a sticky sub-stance on the end. He would stick it in the collection boxes and pull out the money that way, but he always left the ones and fives, so it took a while for people to catch on. But we were able to record it, and we confronted him about it, and he hasn’t been back. But now we have cameras trained on the collection boxes 24 hours a day.”

Tracy thinks the system serves as deterrence to theft, and there have been no recent incidents at Mission San Juan. As Mendoza expands the Museum, Tracy expands the security to include the new sections. Now, every door, every painting, every glass case, every donation box is watched by a camera, a motion sensor, a pressure sensor, or a vibration sensor. “All the paintings have very sensitive sensors hidden on them,” says Tracy. “If somebody tries to take it off the wall or cut it out of the frame, the sensor can pick up the shift or vibration, and the alarm goes off.”

Thanks to his innovation and hard work, Tracy has managed to build a remarkably successful system at Mission San Juan Bautista, a challenge that others refused to even try. “Honeywell [a major security company] is just astonished by our success here. The wireless access we’ve achieved was thought to be impossible.” As technology progresses, the security promises to become ever more complete. “Now we’ve added internet access to the system,” says Tracy. “So if you have a password, you can look at the security feeds from anywhere in the world. In fact, the priest down at Mission San Diego is pretty tech-savvy, so he can look at the feeds on his Blackberry.”

Tracy has donated hundreds of thousands in equipment and hundreds of hours of his time to protect the historical artifacts that are housed at Mission SJB. In a town that probably would not exist without the Mission’s historical significance, he is protecting the heart of San Juan Bautista.