

ay. Prisbrey built the village from discarded junk and collectibles over a 25-year period. Prisbrey is in a nursing home and did not attend.

Bottle Village's creator turns 93

By Steve Whitmore

The Enterprise Staff

Organizers declared Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey's 93rd birthday party at Simi Valley's infamous Bottle Village Sunday a resounding success.

Prisbrey, who celebrated her birthday Jan. 19, is the artist/creator of the unique village located on a 1/3-acre of land at 4595 Cochran St. The party was Sunday because there is some discrepancy over Prisbrey's actual birthdate. Prisbrey celebrates it on the 19th, but a birth certificate indicates it is Feb. 1. In any event, Prisbrey did not attend the party because she has been in a San Francisco convalescent hospital since 1982.

Joanne Johnson, spokeswoman for the Preserve Bottle Village Committee, said early Sunday that she was disappointed with the turnout, "especially after I sent out 50 fliers." By 11:30 a.m. only about six people had arrived.

However, by midafternoon, more people had showed up and Johnson was pleased.

"I think we made some new and valuable friends today," she said. The hope was that the party would introduce people to the village and get them involved as volunteers in the restoration project. The committee has currently raised just \$4,000 toward the goal of \$100,000. The committee has seven members.

"It's tough," said Johnson. "But I think today we had a good turnout, especially in the afternoon."

In addition, the party kicked off

the committee's latest fund-raising venture, "Pave the Way."

"Pave the Way" is where youth groups can participate in creating a mosaic walkway along the west side of the property. Young people are going to be able to create individual steppingstones for the walkway, sponsored by an organization, business group or individual.

Sponsorships are available for

years of her life to create this," said Dennert, who is currently studying art at California State University, Northridge.

Prisbrey decided to build her first bottle house because she needed a place to house her pencil collection, she said during a 1981 interview. She had about 18,000 pencils at the time.

She went to a nearby dump, an industrial park stands on the site

all types of junk imbedded into the cement. One such piece of discarded junk is an official sign from the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair.

Not all has been wonderful for the village, which Prisbrey left in 1982 after she suffered a stroke and fell down on the premises.

"This is quite a job keeping this up and she was just too old to do it alone anymore," said Johnson.

In addition, the village was closed to the public in 1982 because it did not comply with safety codes. Up to that time Prisbrey had charged adults \$1, seniors 75 cents and children a quarter to enter the premises.

The village has remained closed to the public ever since. The committee has been trying to restore the buildings and grounds for a reopening.

One Simi Valley resident can't wait until that reopening happens.

"It's a magical place. I remember coming here as a kid and now I bring my kids," said Debbie Johnson, 37. "I'm glad to see them doing the restoration. I think it's part of history." Both of Johnson's children were with her Sunday, exploring the village.

"I like it ... all the bottles," said Larrs Johnson, 8.

The site has been deemed an historical landmark, but volunteers keep the heavy metal sign tucked away in one of the trailers.

"We're frightened it will get stolen," said Joanne Johnson.

Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 1412, Simi Valley 93062.

"This (the village) is of historical significance. It preserves a lot from the '50s and '60s. It's also a body of (art) work. It took 25 years of her life to create this."

\$100, while individuals must donate the minimum of \$25. It takes four individual donors or one sponsor per steppingstone to ensure a youth group's participation. The stone will bear the sponsor's identification.

"We think it's an exciting way to involve young people in art," said Helen Dennert, president of the Preserve Bottle Village Committee. It also will raise funds for the preservation and, she said, that's vital.

"This (the village) is of historical significance. It preserves a lot from the '50s and '60s. It's also a body of (art) work. It took 25

now, and decided to use bottles as the main material.

After she built her first house, she said she needed a place to house her dolls and so it went.

When all the construction dust settled, she had built 15 houses, using about 1 million bottles. She did all the work herself, starting in 1956 and finishing in 1972.

"I didn't think this was work. I enjoy it, isn't that crazy," Prisbrey said in the interview.

In addition to the bottles, she constructed a bottle waterfall (that uses fluorescent lights) and numerous mosaic walkways with