

TOP STORY

OPERATIONAL

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Top Story: Organization preserves U.S. Customs Service history



heroin concealment

Created more than 220 years ago, the U.S. Customs Service was established when the United States was in its infancy and in desperate need of revenue. At that time, the agency collected import tariffs and helped secure the nation's borders. That revenue helped the United States purchase new territories like Louisiana, Florida and Alaska; but also build our nation's infrastructure like roads, railroads and federal buildings.

As the country's needs changed, so did the Service. In the 20th Century, the purpose of the U.S. Customs Service shifted, and it emerged as a leading law enforcement agency. Its agents began conducting investigations on drug smuggling, fraud, money laundering, child pornography, and exports of critical technology - among other pertinent issues - all while still enforcing customs laws.

Then 9/11 happened. That's when the U.S. Customs Service morphed into two new agencies under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) - ICE and its sister agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Investigations related to customs and border enforcement, as well as functions of the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), became part of ICE. Customs and border inspections became part of CBP.

Today, a group of more than 850 individuals works tirelessly to preserve the history of the U.S. Customs Service through the Association of Former Customs Special Agents (AFCSA), a nonprofit organization based out of Florida. Membership consists of retired U.S. Customs Service agents and employees, as well as current DHS employees.

"The U.S. Customs Service is a significant part of our nation's heritage," said AFCSA President David Warren, a former special agent in charge of the Philadelphia U.S. Customs Service Office.

That's why the AFCSA has embarked on a campaign to collect images, badges, documents and other U.S. Customs memorabilia. Its members are also recording interviews with some of the oldest living customs agents. The group ultimately wants to have enough items to fill an entire museum, which will highlight the U.S. Customs Service's contributions to American history.

"The AFCSA is working to preserve the U.S. Customs Service's legacy as an agency that helped to build, develop and protect this great nation," said Warren.

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