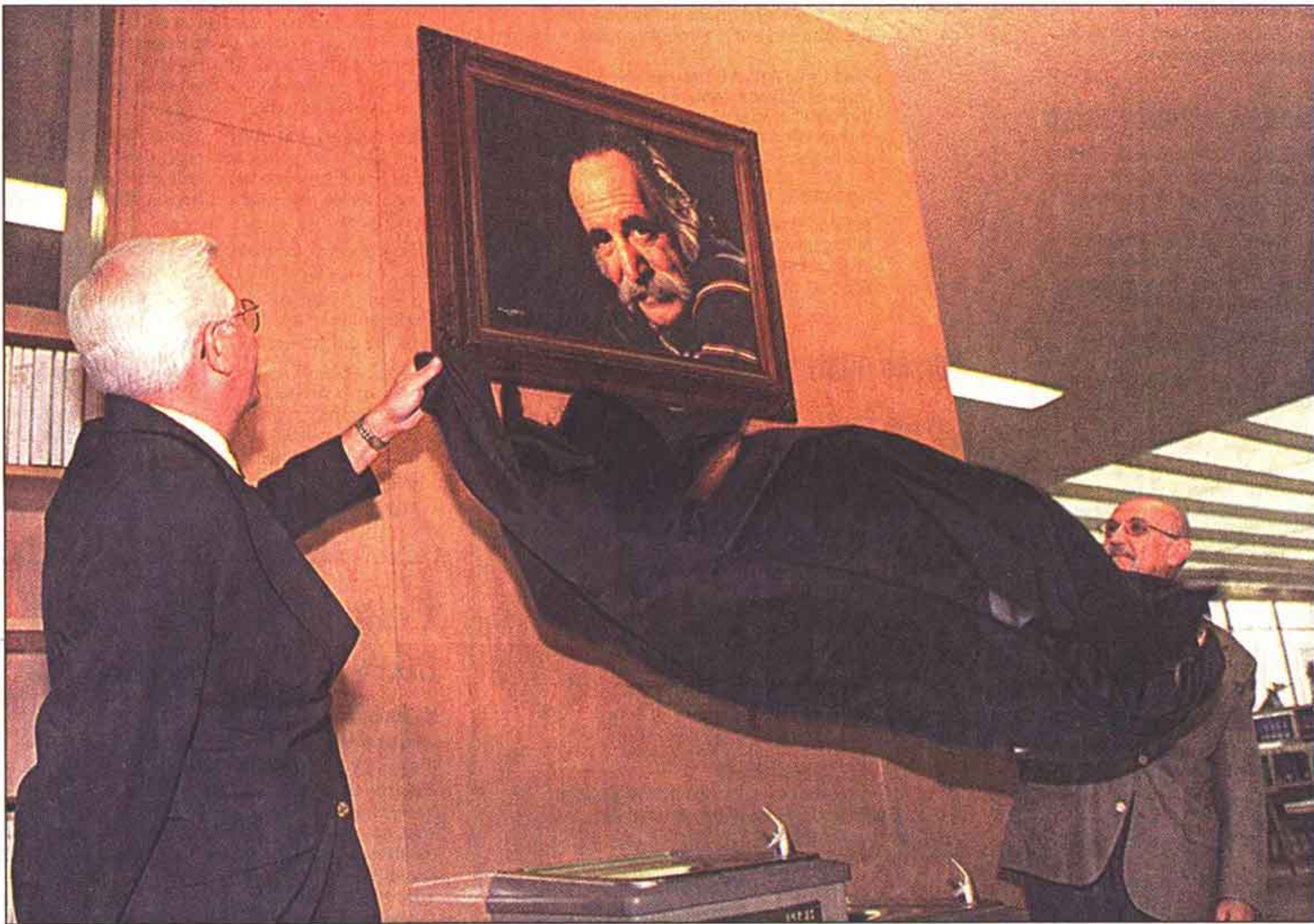


# Local News

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## IMAGE OF A LEGEND



ERIC PAUL ZAMORA - THE FRESNO BEE

Fresno County Librarian John Kallenberg, left, and photographer Paul Kalinian unveil portrait of William Saroyan in the downtown library.

### Portrait of William Saroyan is donated to the main library.

BY FELICIA COUSART MATLOSZ  
THE FRESNO BEE

For a famous writer who despised having his photo taken, Fresnoan William Saroyan has the hint of a smile in this one.

It's probably because he felt at ease with the photographer, Paul Kalinian. The March 26, 1976, sitting was arranged through a close Saroyan friend, Varaz Samuelian, but soon Saroyan and the photographer became close friends as well.

On Monday — the 90th anniversary of Saroyan's birthday on Aug. 31, 1908 — Kalinian donated a portrait from that sitting to the main library of the Fresno County Free Library System in downtown Fresno.

Measuring 36 inches by 42 inches including the frame, the portrait is on the first floor near the Readers Services desk.

It's an appropriate place, given Saroyan's lifelong love for libraries.

John Kallenberg, the system's head librarian, said Saroyan as a boy was a regular visitor to the city's old Fresno Carnegie Library. As an adult, Saroyan used libraries wherever he lived. When he returned to Fresno in his later years, the main library was a regular stop.

The library features a permanent collection of Saroyan's work that contains more than 1,500 books, manuscripts and other items.

Saroyan, who died in 1981 in Fresno at age 72, was a prolific and acclaimed writer. His books include "My Name is Aram" and "The Human Comedy." He won a Pulitzer Prize and an Academy Award for the drama "The Time of Your Life."

It was Saroyan's art that attracted Kalinian, now 65. Kalinian was born in Beirut, Lebanon, where he first read Saroyan words and was hooked. After living in New York City and Los Angeles, he came to Fresno in 1964 with the specific hope of meeting the writer.

"From that day on, I was chasing him. For 12 years," Kalinian said.

In 1976, his dream of photographing Sa-

royan became a reality. Kalinian remembers fondly the sitting, held at the studio of Samuelian, a Fresno artist.

At first, Saroyan resisted, partly because he probably thought Kalinian was another photographer attempting to make money off his image. "Get lost. I don't want my picture taken," he told Kalinian.

But Kalinian assured Saroyan that commerce was not his intention, that he admired and respected the writer. To this day, Kalinian has honored Saroyan's desire not to commercialize his image.

Saroyan eventually asked Kalinian to sing an Armenian song and he obliged.

"I saw tears in his eyes. He was very emotional," Kalinian recalled. "He liked the song. He said, 'Paul, I like you very much. Take all the pictures you want.'"

Photos from that series have been seen in dozens of magazines and publications. In 1991, the United States postal service and the Soviet Union issued commemorative stamps bearing one of the portraits.

Kalinian also made a documentary about Saroyan that has been shown in 42 cities in 14 countries.