

# It's shiny, it's big ... and it's all gold

## Wilson unveils 44-pound nugget

Associated Press

MURPHYS, Calif. — Gov. Pete Wilson called it "world class," and another observer called it "absolutely magnificent" as the largest gold nugget of its class went on permanent display at a Mother Lode winery.

A 44-pound nugget dug up at Sonora Mining Co. on Christmas Day 1992 was unveiled Sunday at Kautz Ironstone Vineyards.

Perched on a pedestal of mariposite rock, the nugget will be the centerpiece of a gold rush-era museum.

The nugget's unveiling previewed a celebration that will begin in 1998 and climax in 2000 of the 150th anniversary of California's Gold Rush in 1848 and founding as a state in 1850.

"It's absolutely magnificent," said Leona Rosenthal of Stockton after a vault door was opened to reveal the chunk of gold.

"Your wildest imagination wouldn't have supplied you with the image you got," she said.

Wilson presided over the ceremony opening the Mother Lode Heritage Museum and Gallery and said the gold nugget "is like most things in

California — world class."

The governor added that "California's Gold Rush began what has been ever since an endless migration to California. But they no longer come in search of gold, but for opportunity, which is invaluable."

This nugget resembles thousands of layers of gold sheets pressed together.

It is considered the world's largest crystalline leaf gold specimen.

It is shiny, compared to the duller sheen of solid gold.

The winery's owners said plenty of high-tech security is in place to protect the nugget, which was valued at \$3.5 million in a 1993 appraisal.

"The governor may have more physical security, but we have more electronic devices to protect the gold," said Ron Kent, the winery's marketing vice president.

Kent would not say how much Kautz Ironstone Vineyards paid Sonora Mining for the nugget.

"It's a wonderful tribute to the museum and the history of gold mining in California," said John McCarty of Sonora, one of 250 people at the unveiling.

"It's so big and shiny," said Marion Malone of Jamestown. "What's not to like about gold?"



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Jon Ellis of Arnold, Calif., looks at the world's largest crystalline leaf gold specimen, a 44-pounder that was unveiled at the Mother Lode Heritage Museum and Gallery at Kautz Ironstone Vineyards in Murphys, Calif., on Sunday. The nugget was dug up at Sonora Mining Co. on Christmas Day 1992.