



The Historian

Preserving Today for Tomorrow

Volume 4 Number 2

March—April 2010

The History of Leisure World 1963 - 1975

Chapter 4 - Security

By Terry Baker

This article is the fourth in a series adapted from the transcripts of the Historical Society's first archivist, Marjorie F. Jones. Additional information was taken from Marjorie's article, "I Remember the Old Days," and Paul Zimmerman's "Security: Leisure World's Strong Magnet" in the *Historical Society Journal*, Spring 1980 and Fall 1980, respectively.

When Leisure World, Laguna Hills, officially opened on September 10, 1964, Lyndon Johnson had been President of the United States for nearly a year since the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

The country was still reeling from that shock, and yet still other tremblers were rumbling in our society. The Vietnam War was losing popularity as it was beginning to exact a terrible cost in young American lives. Civil rights became the country's other main challenge with confrontations occurring throughout the South as well as other areas of the nation.

In this climate of unrest Leisure World's first pioneers entered into what they had every reason to believe their private Shangri-La.

The first move-in day was Thursday, September 10, 1964, when Leisure World received its first ten residents. At that time, all traffic came through Gate 1 on El Toro Road, which had been totally rebuilt as a two-lane boulevard by Rossmoor Corporation. To the west was open country for six miles to Laguna Beach and the ocean. On the east was the Santa Ana Freeway with only two lanes each way. To the south was endless open space reaching toward Laguna Niguel and San Clemente. Added to this scene were the moving vans parked on the shoulder of El Toro Road as these new residents impatiently awaited the ribbon cutting ceremony to start unloading. The first ten families shared the excitement and uncertainties of inhabiting a new community.

H. McDonald Barber was an early resident who was in charge of the Leisure World, Seal Beach security system. Barber was so successful that in the summer of

1964 Rossmoor Corporation persuaded him to move to Laguna Hills and lay the groundwork for a security system for a much larger Leisure World. "Mac" Barber had spent 38 years on the Toronto police force, all but one of those years in the criminal investigation department. He had also served in the Canadian Army in World War II.

Ross Cortese, President of Rossmoor Corporation, persuaded Mac and his wife, Ivy, to move into this community. Like many new residents they became involved. Ivy served as the greeting hostess, helping newcomers become comfortable in their new homes.

Mac was this community's first police chief. His staff of three—Ray Barrett, Lewis Moffatt and Nate Willner—were kept busy coping with the emergency needs of the pioneers.

"We profited by the mistakes made at Seal Beach," he said. "A basic one was scheduling move-in days for



Mac and Ivy Barber, celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. Mac was Leisure World's first police chief and Ivy was a new resident greeting hostess.

MUSINGS

Your 2010 Society Membership

Enclosed with this newsletter is the envelope to *renew your tax-deductible membership* for the 2010 calendar year.

We need your support so that we can: continue to: modernize the Society's archives, including increasing accessibility; participate in the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project; partner with the County's Public Library and other organizations; recognize outstanding residents through the Honoree of the Month Program; publish bi-monthly issues of *The Historian*; and use oral history projects to capture firsthand accounts of historical events.

Please check the address label on the back page. If it says, "Last Issue," please support the Historical Society by mailing your dues to:

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Honoree of Month

Our congratulations to **Noel Hatch** and **Rose Ting**, our Laguna Woods Honorees for February and March, 2010, respectively. **Las Palmas** and **The Regency**, both part of **Vintage Senior Living**, fund the Honoree of the Month ceremonies.

Inga Futtrup is the photographer at **Images by Dwayne** who so expertly captures the images of our honorees. We are grateful to the Video Club, whose members videotape the ceremony.

Annual Dinner - Save the Date

Scheduled for Sunday, May 2, 2010, the Society's Annual Dinner will be a gala event to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the El Toro Water District. The invitation is on pages 3 and 4. Supervisor Patricia Bates will be the keynote speaker. The Strevey Award will be announced and presented at the dinner.



Bob Ring

Security from Page 1



Ruth Baker and Ivy Barber, left, served refreshments to new residents on moving-in days. The boy, obviously a visitor, had yet to celebrate his 52nd birthday.

purchasers of manors so our streets would not be jammed with vans. It's hard to conceive that was a problem then."

With only one gate to guard, less than two miles of road and relatively few manors in those late months of 1964, Chief Barber and his three officers were able to give the new arrivals plenty of personal attention. Ray Barrett, one of the three, reported that when working Gate 1 he could look north and west and "see only barren land" where today's Gate 5 and Phase II exist. Sheep were still grazing in open fields on what had been the Moulton Ranch. Barrett also drove one of the first patrol cars on the night shift during those early days.

Barber's tenure was short-lived, because the Leisure World Foundation's Board of Directors made a decision that the head of the police force should not be a resident. It took the Barbers little time to reach their decision to remain residents. When their son moved nearby and became a pharmacist at Leisure World, Seal Beach, Ross Cortese quipped, "I'll have to watch out or your family will take over."

Nate Willner was the officer who opened the gates on that memorable September day and allowed the first moving vans to enter Leisure World. He recalled how the vans were lined up on El Toro Road, the confusion and excitement pursuant to the gates swinging wide and the joy of the people who became the first residents. Nate observed, "From the beginning, security has probably been the greatest attraction drawing potential residents to Leisure World."

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Security from Page 2

Nate Willner was one of the Leisure World's first security officers. Before he retired he was a machinist.

Although some officers had previous law enforcement experience, in those early years a good number were retired doctors, dentists, lawyers, educators, servicemen or machinists, as Nate was.

Willner enjoyed regaling latecomers with colorful stories of those early days. While in his eighties, Nate recalled, "Since my first day as Gate Officer on Gate 1, I saw our Security Department grow from Gate 1 to Gate 14 and from one patrol car to seven cars operating around the clock. I've watched the department grow from nine officers to nearly 300—including an increasing number of women."

Willner told tales of the early days when the rolling hills were still home to raccoons, coyotes, skunks and bobcats. These animals frequently explored the habitats of the human intruders into their valley until the mid-1980s. Rabbits still like to call this home but are not too popular with the resident gardeners because of their eating habits. Nate helped the Moulton Ranch cowboys round up a herd of cattle who liked the looks of the new establishment and were headed toward Gate 3 for further investigation.

"A frantic lady called in one evening about this 'white and black striped pussycat' which she couldn't shoo away from her manor," Willner recalled.

When he arrived on the scene and spotted the culprit he immediately knew that capturing this "pussycat" without creating a stink in the neighborhood would require stealth, cunning and caution. With uncommon care he coaxed the skunk into an orange crate

without noxious incident, but the arrival of the county's animal control staff ruined his cautious effort. Before the animal could be returned to its habitat, it had liberally sprayed the premises, not to mention innocent bystanders.

Nate answered another emergency call back in the late '60s and found a diamond-back rattlesnake coiled up in a rose garden. He managed to kill it with a broomstick. "It had eight rattles," he exclaimed.

In those early days swarms of bees were not uncommon. A dark cloud, creating an unusual din, would come down out of the sky and attach itself to the limb of a tree. Of course, residents called Security. Fortunately, someone on the force knew a resident named Paul Colburn, a naturalist. Before retiring Paul had his own apiary so he knew all about bees as well as birds.

Colburn's method of coping went like this: he fired up a smoker, quieted the bees with bellows-forced fumes, then, with gloved hands, scraped the swarm into a large cardboard box, making sure the queen was included. Then he'd deliver his prize to a honey farm in the valley. Not a sting in the lot!

Barber's replacement, Don Wickland, had been the successful operator of a Los Angeles protective association for a large mercantile group. In expanding the security force in 1968, Wickland hired as his chief deputy a comparatively young man who had taken early retirement from the police force at Toledo, Ohio—Leland S. Stipes. Stipes had served with the 102nd Infantry during World War II. Assigned to the military police as a special investigator and later as a provost marshal, Stipes decided to apply his ser-



The security force, pictured in 1967, has always maintained 24-hour surveillance. Mac Barber, second row, second from right, established the Security department and headed it from 1964 until his retirement in 1967.



The 1970 population was 13,166 and the street mileage was far less than today. Patrol cars covered 118,257 miles in that year. By 1979 patrol mileage grew to 377,020 and the population was in excess of 20,000, however the car accident rate did not significantly change.

Security from Page 5

vice training to a civilian job when he got out of the Army and joined the Toledo police force in 1947. This background in law enforcement impressed Chief Wickland.

When Wickland was stricken with a fatal heart attack in 1969, Stipes was appointed his successor. The new chief faced the awesome task of coping with five years of Leisure World's remarkable growth. Stipes created a motorized patrol and established a new communications center that maintained around-the-clock communication by radio with all patrol units and gates. The new communication center also provided instant radio contact with the Orange County Sheriff's patrol, the California Highway Patrol and the Orange County Fire Department.

The problem of security had grown considerably with the expansion of the community in the decade since Stipes was named Chief. In 1970 Stipes was confronted with the inadequacy of the five-foot ornamental wall surrounding Leisure World. Residents were divided between those who favored the artistry of the walls and those who demanded greater security. A rash of petty crimes forced the issue. Barbed wire strands were added atop the walls. After that, the perception of many residents was that the barbed wire on top of the ornamental wall surrounding Leisure World provided a deterrent to both two and four-legged van-

dals or pranksters.

During 1979 another new safeguard was added in the process of clearing guests at the gates. Residents were required to show their identification number card to the gate guards. Numerous fictitious phone calls had been made to admit persons who had no business in Leisure World. The requirement that people entering the community display an identification card stopped this practice.

Stipes reported that the 1,300 calls logged in the police center each week ran the gamut from emergency illness to overflowing toilets. Since repair service was suspended at night, the security force took up the slack. Patrol officers attended to such emergencies as plumbing problems, stalled elevators and power outages. The Golden Rain Foundation provided a large freezer in the administration building where perishables could be kept overnight in case a resident's refrigerator malfunctioned.

One of the unsolved mysteries of the Security Department concerned an equine invasion. When the golf course opened one morning the grounds attendants found several greens had been torn up by horses' hooves. "It must have been something like the charge of the light brigade," said Stipes with a grin.

A check with the nearby riding stable brought the report that none of their horses had been missing. Where the horses came from and where they went, how the equines got into the golf course and out again without being detected, is a puzzle that community staff never was able to solve.

As Marjorie Jones, the Historical Society's Archivist, remembered, "As the move-ins continued at a regular twice-a-week schedule it was not long before 19 buildings were fully occupied. With so many living in the area in October 1964 not only were they instant neighbors they had become good neighbors."

Leisure World rapidly evolved into a community where its success was dependent in part on the cooperative spirit of its residents. The tranquility and security in the housing areas was dependent upon good neighbor-to-neighbor relationships. Volunteers became the prime ingredient to successful recreation and educational programs.



Touching the Past with Street Names By Don & Mary Decker

The romance and stories of Laguna Woods are preserved in some very “concrete” ways. A walk or drive along our streets provides courses in the Spanish language, geography and history. You may find yourself amazed, amused, and enriched, whenever you stop and read the sign posts.

A variety of streets refer to Spain’s towns and provinces: Castilla, Cadiz, Aragon, Sevilla, Majorca, Granada, to name a few.

Other streets provide Spanish descriptions of fair or beautiful locations: Via Buena Vista (good view way), Sosiego (calm), Sosiega (nightcap), Monte Hermosa (beautiful mount), Punta Alta (high point), Via Serena (serene way), Via Dicha (happiness way), Jardin (garden), Via Alhambra (Alhambra way), Rayo del Sol (ray of sun), Calzado (footwear), Campo Verde (green field) and Mariposa (butterfly).

Some streets suggest more amusing or curious references: Duenas (chaperones), Calle los Caballeros (street of the knights), Cantante (singer), Via Carrizo (reed way), and Brazo (branch). Other streets have more descriptive names: Calle Iglesia (church street), Calle Azul (blue street), Via del Faro (lighthouse way), Luz del Sol (sunlight), Paseo del Lago (lake promenade), Bahia Blanca (white bay), Via Puerta (gateway), Cabildo (town council), Punta Algarrobo (carob tree point), and Alta Vista (high view).

Spanish ladies’ first names are: Carmenita, Magdalena and Elvira. Mexican place names are: Via Mendoza (Mendoza way) and Calle Sonora (Sonora street).

Stories of This Place

And then there are those roadways that reflect the stories of this place. One major thoroughfare adopted the name of the principal owner of Rancho Niguel, Lewis Moulton. His ranch covered the area now occupied by Laguna Woods, Laguna Hills, Aliso Viejo and Laguna Niguel. It extended from El Camino Real (now the I-5 freeway) to the Pacific Ocean, covering 21,723 acres of farmland.

Another major street is El Toro, a name applied to this area as early as the 1860s. Some say that the bellows from the herds of cattle that moved around the Serrano home (the owners) caused the ranch hands to refer to the ranch as El Toro (the bull) although its real name was Rancho Cañada de Los Alisos. The Serrano house still stands on a knoll in Heritage Park at 25157 Serrano Road in Lake Forest. It was the



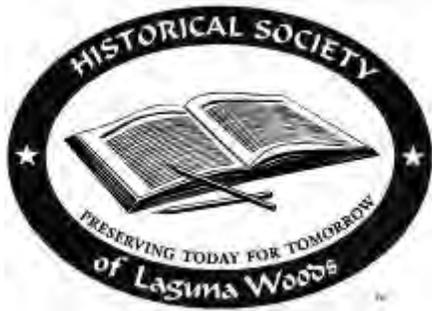
arrival of the railway that prompted adoption of the name El Toro in some official way.

When a railway station and a post office were to be built, it was discovered that the designated name, Aliso City, was similar to several other locations. So, to be distinctive and unusual, the settlers asked that the station and town be called El Toro after the common name given to the ranch area. The name stuck until individual areas began incorporating and the voters had to choose names for their new cities. The results were Lake Forest, Laguna Woods and Rancho Santa Margarita.

The Moulton Family

Lewis Moulton’s two daughters also show up on some street names in their Spanish versions: Charlotte (Avenida de la Carlota) and Louise (Calle de la Luisa). These two Moulton family descendents continue to operate ranches in Northern California. Moulton’s wife, Nellie Gail, also has a nearby street named for her so that these two pioneers may continue to meet each day at that corner.

As we can see, our local street names reflect the historical significance of this area—originally possessed by the King of Spain, then claimed by the Governor of Mexico and finally American pioneers.



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Editor — Bob Ring

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