



The Historian

Preserving Today for Tomorrow

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The History of Leisure World - 1965

This article is the fifth in a series adapted from the transcripts of the Historical Society's first archivist, Marjorie F. Jones. Additional information was taken from the five *Historical Society Journals*, published between 1980 and 1982, *Fulfilling Retirement Dreams*, published by the Historical Society in 1989 and numerous 1965 issues of the 1965 *Leisure World News*.

On News Year's Day 1965 Leisure World had 117 buildings and 1,469 residents. Eight new buildings with 79 manors opened during the first eight days of January. Mutual 2 of the 21 mutuals that would ultimately become United Laguna Hills Mutual was now complete.

Prior to 1969, new owners purchased a cooperative unit from the developer, Rossmoor Corporation. The first 6,323 manors were all cooperatives and all real estate was owned by the respective mutual corporations, not by individuals. Today this ownership is totally vested in United Laguna Hills Mutual.

Building Maintenance

Each of the 21 cooperative housing corporations was responsible for maintaining the exterior of properties in their respective areas, as well as certain clearly defined interior fixtures and appliances. The mutual's maintenance staff was small and was part of the Physical Properties Department. Much of the early warranty maintenance was provided by Rossmoor's subcontractors.

The community was fortunate in the early years to be one of the first gold medallion, all-electric communities serviced by Southern California Edison. Rossmoor entered into an agreement with General Electric to provide all appliances—refrigerators, ovens, and ranges.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which made the original loans, had an inspection team on site that made sure specifications, standards and procedures were met as each unit was built.

From a building maintenance perspective, much was promised to buyers by the housing mutuals. Owners were entitled to receive many diverse maintenance



July 4, 1965, more than 1,000 resident packed the outdoor concert area at Clubhouse I for the community's first Independence Day celebration. Courtesy Leisure World News

services—all of which were included in the monthly carrying charge. For example, maintenance included all appliance repairs and the replacement of water heaters and garbage disposals. In addition, window screens, sliding door screens, kitchen tile, bathroom fixtures, exterior building maintenance and many other interior structural components were the responsibility of the housing corporations. The cost of maintenance for each mutual was shared by owners of that mutual. At that time there was no great diversity in building sizes or styles. Buildings contained either four, six or eight attached units.

The Golden Rain Foundation (GRF) was responsible for the maintenance of the community facilities, which were then all owned in trust for the mutuals. GRF provided such services as recreation, clubhouse scheduling and security.

MUSINGS

Honoree of Month

Congratulations to **Bob Sellards**, our Laguna Woods honoree for June 2010. **Las Palmas** and **The Regency**, both part of **Vintage Senior Living**, fund the Honoree of the Month program.

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



Bob Ring

Annual Meeting

On May 28th the Society elected the following as members of its board: Terry Baker, Trish Cassidy, Marty Hecht, Ira Joss, Fran Lindberg, Leslie Keane, Elaine Morgado, Bob Ring, Mark Schneider, Evelyn Shopp and Dick Tyhurst.

John Fuller and Linda Wilson temporarily declined to serve because of health issues. John is the Society's immediate past president. For the past four years Linda served as corporate secretary. We are grateful for their contributions and hope that they will be able to serve us again in the near future.

90+ Luncheon

On June 2nd, another 90+ Luncheon sponsored by GRF was held in Clubhouse I's main lounge. More than 100 attended the gala event which featured three centenarians—**Dorothy Lawson, Katherine Nida and Audrey Palmquist**.

If you or one of your friends would like to be invited to this delightful event and you will be at least 90 on June 1, 2011, please send a note to Joan Long at the Historical Society. Include your name and/or your friend's name, the appropriate manor number, telephone number and birth date.

Veterans' History Project

The Society is seeking a veteran who would like to serve as the Promotional Coordinator for our Veterans' History Project. We are looking for a personable, active resident, who participates in numerous community events, to encourage veterans to take part in this Library of Congress Program—a way to ensure that our veterans' achievements are forever etched in our country's history.

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Unionization

By 1965 Rossmoor and the housing corporations recognized that agreements were needed which defined the tradesmen who would perform the various services and maintenance functions—plumbers, appliance technicians, electricians, carpenters, roofers, painters and janitors.

When construction started in 1964 the numerous construction trade unions were represented by the California Building Trades Council. During the 1960s unions enjoyed high visibility, and each construction union demanded complete jurisdiction over its trade. Plumbers could only do plumbing; electricians could only do electrical work and carpenters could only do carpentry. The Building Trades Council intended to certify these various unions to perform the maintenance work in this community. This would force the managing agent, Leisure World Foundation, to negotiate with more than eight different unions—a task bitterly opposed by the Foundation. It was the contention of the Foundation that maintenance employees were not required to adhere to policies of construction employees' unions.

Despite considerable opposition from the Building Trades Council, negotiations were completed with the International Laborers Union's Santa Ana Local No. 652 to cover all of the community's maintenance employees under one collective bargaining agreement. This agreement was signed during the later part of 1965. Without question, the strategy of one bargaining unit has minimized labor disputes and reduced management costs over the years.

Management

The Leisure World Foundation was formed for the distinct purpose of serving the people of the community by sponsoring and managing its several corporations, both individually and jointly. The Foundation was totally independent. It owned no property in Leisure World and was not a part of Rossmoor.

Robert L. Price became the Administrator of Leisure World, Laguna Hills in November 1964. Clubhouse I housed the Foundation's offices—Physical Properties, Medical Services, Education and Recreation and the Business Manager.

Rossmoor Corporation had no authority or responsibilities in the governing or managing of the community. This separation had been mandated by FHA as a condition of its mortgage endorsement of the coop-

erative mutuals. These were 40-year mortgages at 5¾%. As a builder under contract with each of the respective mutuals, Rossmoor fulfilled its obligations to the corporations under the normal warranty requirements for new construction.

Rossmoor's original master plan called for seven clubhouses, the globe area, administration building and the maintenance building, all of which would be conveyed to GRF at an appropriate time. The globe's original location (the current location of the empty Circuit City building) was owned by GRF for two months in 1965. Its conveyance was reversed by a mandate from FHA and in its place came title to Clubhouse II.

The Mutuals

While these early mutuals were very large, new boards came on swiftly, so that by the end of 1965 there were four resident boards. From the leadership of these boards came the first resident directors of the GRF Board. GRF's bylaws stipulated that each mutual corporation was a "corporation member" of GRF and stipulated that there should be one director chosen for the board by each housing mutual board. The initial GRF Board had resident representatives from Mutuals 1 through 4, four persons from management representing other mutuals and a fifth resident member chosen by the board at large, making a governing board of nine. Price was chosen as president, a post he held by annual election until May 1971.

As far as its own internal costs were concerned, each mutual was financially self-supporting. However, GRF's costs (clubhouses, security maintenance, etc.) were heavily subsidized by sales-related income. This was planned and necessary to offset the initial operational deficit of those early years. These subsidies made it possible to provide satisfactory service levels to those earliest residents. In 1965 the monthly



Early morning clipping, 1965 style, is performed by GRF's landscape crew. Courtesy Leisure World News



The Medical Clinic on Paseo de Valencia was torn down in 19xx and replaced by Saddleback Hospital.

GRF subsidy from Rossmoor for each manor was reduced from \$300 to about \$50.

The Community

The sales building was next to Clubhouse I and it became the administration building, which was ultimately sold and became an apartment building complex. This structure housed Rossmoor Furniture, Crestmark (carpets and drapes) and the United California Bank. Interestingly, there was no provision in the long range plans for administrative offices. Next to the sales building was a temporary metal building housing a refreshment lounge which supported the marketing program. Later, for a short time, this building became a coffee shop and then the Leisure World Library. Today, in its place stands the permanent homes of the Laguna Woods Village Library and the Historical Society.

At first, commercial development surrounding Leisure World started slowly. Leisure World residents saw only a Union Oil gas station at the southeast corner of Paseo de Valencia and El Toro Road and the beginning of the Rossmoor World Office Building (Taj Mahal). A temporary fire station was in a manor in the model area on El Toro Road. In early 1965 Chevron opened a gas station directly across from the Union station, the current location of Walgreens Pharmacy.

Medical Care

When Leisure World opened, Medicare did not exist. Ross Cortese believed strongly in medical care for seniors; consequently, his plans included a medical clinic building for Leisure World residents. The regular monthly fee included a charge for medical service. On opening day the medical unit and pharmacy occupied



Alpha Beta Shopping Center was the community's first shopping center. During the last decade, this complex was torn down and replaced by Towers Records and then Nordstrom Rack. Courtesy Leisure World Stars, Inc.

two of the dining rooms and the second floor conference room in Clubhouse I. Outpatient and home nursing service were provided with by a complement of three doctors and three nurses.

In January 1965 the medical clinic located on Paseo de Valencia on the site now occupied by the Saddleback Hospital parking structure, was partially finished and staff moved in. Six doctors and six nurses plus three secretaries moved out of Clubhouse I to the new facility. Within a year the services were expanded to include X-ray, physical therapy, a home-maker service and a volunteer program.

February and March 1965

That month the Foundation introduced a new marketing program. Every Monday evening 100 new residents were invited to a complimentary dinner. A entertainment program was provided by entertainer Harry Babbitt, an employee of the sales department. Administrator Bob Price provided a two-minute speech on the joys of Leisure World living. Like all good things, 30 weeks later these dinners ended because of the large number of move-ins.

In spite of seven inches of rain during March and April the 3,000th unit was sold.

Alpha Beta Shopping Center

The nearest store—located at the railroad tracks on El Toro Road—was a very small country store ill equipped to handle the additional business created by Leisure World. This had been anticipated and contracts had been let to build the first commercial center, which was known as Alpha Beta Center, on Calle de Louisa, where Nordstrom Rack is now located. Alpha Beta opened March 17, 1965 just over 6 months after Leisure World opened.

First to leave temporary quarters in Clubhouse I was the branch post office of Laguna Beach. It moved in

next door to the market. The vacated room at the Clubhouse was immediately filled by a Travel Desk under the supervision of the Education and Recreation office.

Belmont Savings and Loan Association, which watched Leisure World, Seal Beach develop, was one of the center's first tenants. The story was told that on that opening day a man walked into the office to apply for a job. "We didn't have time to talk to him, but we needed someone to pour coffee for the customers. He poured coffee for four hours. It wasn't until 2:00 p.m., at lunch break, that we finally got around to hiring him!"

It was another 18 months before another financial institution opened. The center also included a barber and beauty shop, cleaner, liquor store and donut shop.

Rossmoor World Headquarters

The Rossmoor's World Headquarters, later to be known as the Taj Mahal, opened with Rossmoor moving into the top floors. The most salient early architectural achievement in the Valley, the three-story, columned Taj Mahal was sited prominently immediately outside the walls of Leisure World. It housed the Cortese organizations until it was sold in September, 1968, when an economic slowdown forced liquidation of some of Rossmoor's holdings.

Need for Transportation

In 1965, a fleet of small candy-striped blue and white mini-buses circled the fountain at Clubhouse I every 40 minutes, then rested as they waited to depart. The mini-buses operated from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The mini-bus route was stretched to include the Alpha Beta Center. This new bus route replaced the twice-weekly trips to Tustin's Larwin Square market which cost riders a \$2 round-trip fee. As the population increased more buses and drivers were added and routes and schedules were repeatedly rearranged



The Rossmoor World Office Building (Taj Mahal). Union Oil gas station would follow. Courtesy Pacific Air Industries

to meet residents' needs. In April 1965 the Southern California Transit District began three-times daily public bus service to Santa Ana with continuing service to Los Angeles.

Leisure World News

On March 17th the first edition of *Leisure World News* was delivered to each manor. Financed entirely by the Foundation, the weekly edition was definitely a "house organ"—news of its people for its people. In accordance with established policy it was the only free, non-subscription, publication allowed to be delivered door-to-door in the community.

Reporting of official news had high priority, followed by news related to clubs and organizations. Special columns were published together with schedules of meetings and information on both formal and informal events. The first edition included Robert Price's column titled, "Memo From Your Administrator." It ran until 1977. Periodically, Ross Cortese's column, "It's a Great World," would appear.

The *Leisure World News* did an excellent job of informing people of the complex workings of the community and of communicating the various policies and procedures each resident needed to understand.

April and May 1965

By the end of April the population had grown to more than 2,000 residents.

The partially completed Medical Clinic opened in May. Built by Rossmoor, it was operated under lease by GRF. All medical personnel and the pharmacy quickly moved from Clubhouse I into the clinic. GRF increased ambulance service to 10 hours a day, 7 days a week. One ambulance was stationed at the clinic since patients had to be transported to hospitals in South Laguna, Newport or Santa Ana.

The Medical Clinic attracted 25 volunteers, the Pink Ladies. Starting on May 20, 1965, the Pink Ladies provided more than 750 hours of assistance to doctors, nurses and other medical departments during their first year. At year end the Pink Ladies changed their name to the Laguna Hills Medical Auxiliary.

Clubs Multiply

As the community grew, organized activities flourished. More than 17 clubs were formed under the auspices of the Department of Education and Recreation. They ranged from service clubs to golf and tennis club and to home town and state clubs. As a private community, with a special emphasis on security, all clubs were re-



Starting in April, 1965, the Leisure World minibus met, three-times daily, with the transit district's bus service to Los Angeles.
Courtesy Leisure World News

quired to limit their membership to Leisure World residents. Club bylaws had to be approved by GRF.

Church congregations formed quickly and started holding services in Clubhouse I. First, was the Methodist Church in October 1964 followed by the Lutherans, November 1964; United Church of Christ, April 1965; Presbyterian Church and the Church of Religious Science, May 1965; Christian Science and those of Jewish faith, June 1965 and the Baptists, November 1965. The Catholic congregation had outgrown the tiny St. Anthony's Chapel and started holding Sunday mass in Clubhouse II when it was completed in September, 1965.

Many ministers rented or shared office space in the Medical Clinic. As a result there was a spirit of camaraderie among the congregations, the secretaries often answering telephone calls for each other, the ministers sharing thoughts and problems. From this sharing came the establishment of the Religious Council.

June, July and August 1965

Leisure World's first summer arrived and residents focused on outdoor recreation. Four horses were purchased for the El Rancho Cortese Stables, scheduled to open in September. Greens were ready for lawn bowling. Others turned to shuffleboard, swimming, tennis and golf. More than 1,000 residents attended the July 4th celebration at the bandstand behind Clubhouse I.

In August the first Water Carnival Show, later known as the Aquadette Show, was presented by a small

group of women swimming together, starting a tradition of shows that has grown more elaborate each year. The Foundation also sponsored block parties throughout the community.

Rules and Regulations

Leisure World's rapid growth caused the community's leadership to address resident rules and regulations. Most residents believed that a private community of "good neighbors" could be expected to police themselves. With the exception of the rules in the covenants signed by the buyer, a policy of no iron-clad rules, unless absolutely necessary, was adopted.

Leisure World was a part of the unincorporated area of Orange County and was subject to the rules and regulations of county government. Building permits and county licenses were issued in Santa Ana.

The Orange County Master Plan of Arterial Highways was initially established in 1956 and has been continuously updated to reflect changing development and traffic patterns. El Toro Road, Santa Maria Avenue (which would be built at a later date), pass through the Leisure World property. They, and Paseo de Valencia, Avenida de la Carlota and later Ridge Route Road were built to county specifications by Rossmoor and then deeded to the county.

GRF set the speed limits inside the gates which, in most instances, were lower than the county's limits in an effort to protect pedestrians. Bicycles were allowed on sidewalks, however pedestrians had the right-of-way. Golf carts were allowed to cross sidewalks in order to enter or exit a building. The sheriff did not patrol within the gates. However, Leisure World security maintained a close working relationship with both the sheriff and the Orange County Fire Department.



At a cost of \$187,000, Orange County purchased a 1.1 acre site for a fire station on Paseo de Valencia just north of El Toro Road. The design included a dormitory housing 32 men and bays for six vehicles.



Two months before the stables opened, four horses were purchased for resident use. Courtesy Leisure World News

A regulation, not spelled out, but expected to be observed, was that a resident with two cars was expected to rent a carport area from another resident. Long-term resident parking on the streets or in guest parking spaces was not condoned.

Architectural control, landscape and clutter regulations were adopted to maintain a safe environment and appearance that would enhance property values.

Clubhouse II and Stables Open

In 1964, Clubhouse II was first planned as a golf shop, but demands for a place to hold social activities were so numerous that it was decided the plans should be modified to provide for dancing, dining and club activities.

On September 8th, Clubhouse II officially opened with all the proper ribbon cutting and speech making. Since there were no restaurants in the surrounding community, new residents were anxious for a place to dine out in fairly close proximity to their homes. Rossmoor bent the rule—no business permitted within the confines of Leisure World—and approached Manning's Restaurant and asked them to serve light meals in the evening in the main lounge. Manning's provided this service from October 1965 until the following spring, when they opened their own restaurant on El Toro Road.

Clubhouse Reservations

Clubhouse II opened, which made more rooms available, which allowed new clubs and resulted in more requests for rooms for meetings and special events. The Education and Recreation Department established a new room reservation system. Clubs were asked to plan their activities and needs so that they could make their room reservations on July 1st. This practice solved the problem and is still in operation.

Clubhouse II's main lounge area is flanked by two wings, each with smaller dining rooms and kitchen facilities. The original configuration was as it is today. Dining Room 3 occupies the front patio wing and the other wing has two dining rooms, each seat-

ing about 25 people.

The Library

On the north side of the clubhouse a terrace and steps led down to a small court lined with card and game rooms. One of these rooms was used as a library containing about 1,000 books donated by residents. The Panhellenic Club founded the Leisure World Library in 1965 under the leadership of Catherine Wright. The library was staffed by Panhellenic members and other volunteers.

September 1965— Educational Classes

September has always been associated with school days, and it was only natural that residents would ask the Education and Recreation Department to provide adult education classes. Most requests were for classes in different hobbies. An instructor in painting came from Laguna Beach and had 30 students in beginning and intermediate classes. Other hobby classes were taught by residents.

The Education and Recreation Department contacted the Tustin Unified School District and arrangements were made to have adult education classes in Leisure World. Each class had to have 15 registered members. On September 20, 400 residents registered for a wide selection of classes sponsored by Tustin Union High School. The temporary offices in Clubhouse I that were used by the Medical Clinic were remodeled into classrooms and hobby shops.

Students were charged a fee of \$5.00 to enroll in a class. Some of the first classes offered were in color and design, dressmaking, lapidary, mosaic, oil painting and organ lessons. In all there were 42 different classes with an enrollment of 500 students. The one unique provision was the requirement by the State Board of Education that the classes would be available to students who did not live in Leisure World. Special limited passes were issued to the comparatively few who did register

Channel 6

Rossmoor plans specified that each unit be connected to a master television antenna system. This eliminated roof-top antennas and provided a better reception.

Since Channel 6 was available on the TV dial, Thom Keith approached community officials in the mid-1960s with the idea of a closed circuit station which would provide programming of interest to residents. When staff learned that some used black and white industrial television equipment was available, Leisure World's own TV station—Channel 6—was born.

The original master antenna was located in Clubhouse I in the space now used by the Amateur Radio

Club. The studio, also located in the clubhouse, started broadcasting October 14, 1965. The station was operated by the Foundation under the direction of the Education and Recreation Department. All of the employees worked for the Foundation and all of the equipment belonged to GRF.

October, November and December 1965

By October 1965 the population had grown to 4,500 residents.

The second Water Carnival was presented at the Clubhouse II pool. At the end of November the 54 bell carillon in Clubhouse I made its debut.

On December 1st, Manning's started serving lunch and dinner at Clubhouse II. The groundbreaking ceremony for St. Nicholas Catholic Church was held on Sunday, December 5th. It was the first church built adjacent to the community.

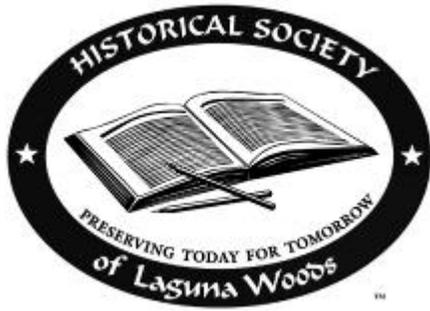
During 1965 more than 2,000 families moved into 379 buildings resulting in a total population of 5,145 living in seven housing mutuals.

The closing days of 1965 found Administrator Bob Price busily preparing the 1966 budget—Leisure World's first budget.



Ball room dance instructors demonstrate a new dance step during one of the many classes offered residents during 1965.

Courtesy Leisure World Stars, Inc.



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Clubhouse II and El Rancho Cortese stables opened on September 30, 1965. This picture of Clubhouse II was taken a few days earlier.

Courtesy Leisure World News

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Editor — Bob Ring

Opinions expressed by authors in *The Historian* do not necessarily reflect those of the Historical Society of Laguna Woods.