

Laguna Woods History Center  
Community Oral History Project  
Transcript

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ABSTRACT: Myra Neben started her journalist career in Massachusetts working for *The Peabody Times*. She became a reporter for the *Leisure World News* in 1977 and quickly became the editor. Myra had a twenty-seven year career with this publication and shared about the shifts in content and technology. She personally knew the Leisure World founder, Ross Cortese, and shared anecdotes. Myra worked with Rob Merritt, host of Channel 6 news. Neben collaborated on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary book with Bob Ring.

00:00:00 JK: It's January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017. We're here at the Laguna Woods History Center with Myra Neben, and my first question for you is, "Can you share about your education, professional training in journalism?"

MN: I can. I graduated from Ohio University with a degree in Journalism, Master [Bachelor] of Science in Journalism. [I] did graduate work in Maryland [Boston] at Northeastern University anticipating a teaching degree in secondary education, but I never finished that because I went to work instead in my first...that was my second, actually, real journalism degree with *The Peabody Times* in Peabody, Massachusetts where I covered school board zoning issues and crime. [I] moved from there to Maryland where I eventually became the city editor of the *Bowie News* which became *The Prince George's County News*. And also did City Council education court reporting and crime reporting. Eventually moved out here where I temporarily got a job with the Irvine World News because I had met Jeanne Keevil who was the editor at the time. She was going on vacation, so I substituted for her for a while and the editor of the then *Leisure World News* had an opening and invited me to come interview for it, which I did. Figuring I would be here temporarily, you know, just for a year or so until I got my feet wet and figured out where everything was and got a job with a real newspaper and discovered that I really liked it. I liked interacting with the people, liked the one-on-one connect with your readership and so I stayed for twenty-seven years.

JK: Excellent. What was it like becoming a reporter for the *Leisure World News* in 1977?

MN: It was a much smaller community and a much more cohesive community. It was...everybody knew everybody. Everybody was friendly...it was a much more closed

society in that the board meetings were closed. There was little interaction between board members and the newspaper. Everything went through a third party, lot of interaction between the residents and the newspaper because of the clubs. But, in terms of the boards, it was a different kind of reporting. After each board meeting for the first few years that I was here, after each board meeting we would meet in the...either then when I was an administrator or the general manager's office with the general manager and whoever was doing publicity for the board and the board present and they would tell us what they wanted us to know and what they wanted reported. But, the meetings were closed even to the members of the corporations, to the residents...meetings were closed unless they specifically asked to be there.

JK: And you mentioned that Dixon [Trueblood] shifted this policy. Would you share about the role of how this happened?

MN: Well, there were two people...

JK: Two people. Okay.

MN: ...that were instrumental in shifting the policy. One was Dixon Trueblood who was a member of the Third Laguna Hills Mutual and the other was "Dinty" Moore, like in the beef stew. And both of them were ex-newspaper people and it was through them that the boards were actually almost forced to open their meetings where they insisted that the meetings be more open. And at that time, they also, at the time we were able to go in which was probably a year after I started working, must have been about 1978 or thereabouts. The television station, Channel 6, was also able to broadcast the meetings live. And so it took a different turn even though there were board members mostly on United, but also a few on Third that absolutely refused to speak in public.

00:04:49

### **Channel 6**

JK: Would you share about your collaboration with Channel 6?

MN: Oh, it was a fun time. We had a...it was interesting. Every week on Thursday morning when the newspaper came, right after the newspaper came out - one of us, usually me, but, you know, whoever the reporter was, we would take turns sometimes...we would go over to Channel 6 and do a short headline news broadcast. We also did some fun things on Halloween. This community used to have wonderful Halloween celebrations in the old Administration Building. Every department would dress up in a theme and come marching through the studio. We would narrate with Channel 6 and we would narrate what they wore, what the themes were. Some of them were extremely creative. We would do parades. There were Channel 6 and *Leisure World News* would do...we had a 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade, a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade, Channel 6 would broadcast that. We covered live coverage of when...the cityhood votes. We would stay late and do those. Those were the few times that Channel 6 was on late. Yeah, we did a lot of collaboration. It was kind of fun. We also ran of course, you know, the newspaper ran their schedule, the Channel 6 schedule. Yeah, it was a lot of...it was good collaboration. They were a good group. We were all, at that time, we were all young and eager. Now, we're old.

JK: And you had a feature, correct, with collaborating with Rob Merritt? So, there was...you knew him personally, of course. But, there was...you read the news in this forum. Would you share a little bit about that...about the show?

MN: The news show?

JK: Uh-huh.

MN: That we did?

JK: Yes. Is there...maybe some connection to Rob Merritt and how you may have worked directly with him? Would you share...?

MN: Well, Rob was the prime reporter. He started as a child, actually...in Channel 6. He was another one that stayed, you know, for a long time. Rob would...very, very personable young man. He's now a very personable old man. But, he was a very personable young man. And we would...we would share interesting facts about the community and interesting facts about the news stories. And Rob was just an excellent interviewer, really enjoyed working with him.

JK: Great! And not too long after you arrived [at] the paper you became the editor.

MN: Yes.

JK: So, would you share about your shift into this position?

MN: Well, I started out as a reporter 'cause there was an editor. Very shortly after I got there, she left. It was a female, a woman. She left, she was sick...whatever, she just didn't come back. They brought in another young woman as the editor. She lasted maybe six months. Leisure World was a difficult community to get used to. You had to...you had to realize that you were dealing with older people. And you had to have a knack for it and they're...the gal that they brought in really didn't...and so she left and I sort of was elevated to the position within a year or so...became the editor.

JK: And how did you structure things...any differently?

MN: We structured things differently because the community was changing. When I started here, this community had a[n] administrator, Bob Price, was the administrator. He...everything of a news value was filtered through him. Very shortly thereafter Bob was, for a lack of a better word, demoted. And the community hired a general manager. We sort of, at that point, started to do more news, things opened up a little bit with the boards opening their meetings. We were able to be more of a newspaper rather than just a house organ. We also ran a column at that time because it basically had started as a Rossmoor house organ from Ross Cortese every week, telling the community because there were still houses for sale. There were some places for sale. There were new communities, new areas being built. So, Rossmoor Corporation had to have its little say and Ross did a column every week for the newspaper. So, we became...actually, we started to become more of a newspaper. We covered...I mean there were things that happened in the community and we covered...I remember one meeting, and I told you girls earlier, with...they brought in the editor of the Seal Beach newspaper at a community meeting. And somebody asked about why the Seal Beach newspaper, which was also the *Leisure World News* or whatever it was called, didn't run obituary notices. And she said very indignantly, "Well, we don't run anything in the newspaper that's negative." And then they looked at me and I said, "Well, yeah, you know, we run obituary notices because our friends and neighbors want to know what happened to their people. And we don't view it as a negative. Everyone is positively going to die. And although it's not happy news, it's something that your friends and neighbors wanted to know." And we did things that sometimes were not popular.

JK: Would you share more about the other columns and other features of the paper? So, more about the club participation?

00:11:58

### **Club Columns**

MN: Every...it seems like at that time, every club had a column whether it was Hooks and Slices from the Men's Golf Club or the Fishing Club or the Shuffleboard News and the Lawn Bowling News. And for a while, until the company management changed, basically, for a while they all had their own special titles such as Putter Patter. There was Putter Patter for the nine hole women and Putter Patter for the eighteen hole women. And the Scrabble Club had a logo. We ran a half page of winners of the Bridge Club News. Virtually every group had its own special column. They all wanted their own special...sports being a big highlight of Leisure World. There was, you know, other than baseball, basketball, and soccer, there was almost every activity you could think of...from table tennis to shuffleboard to lawn bowling. And at the beginning, bowling because we had a bowling alley over on Moulton Parkway. And there were a number of bowling leagues that we covered for a long time until the bowling alley closed. They were...every club because this is...this was a closed community and a very club-oriented community, virtually every group had something in the paper every week - an announcement of a meeting, program announcements. After a while, when space became a problem, we sort of had to limit it and they could have, you know, two announcements two weeks before the meeting and the week before the meeting. But, for a long time, it was like every single week they would be announcing the meeting.

JK: Wow.

MN: And then things changed with the internet. We didn't have an internet. We didn't have things coming in via e-mail. We didn't have cell phones. So, you had to get your information out via the newspaper. That was the only basic, the only outlet that they had. And after a while things changed a little bit and when people became computer literate and we quieted down with club information, with club news.

JK: Would you share more about the technology changes that you saw in the office from either...?

MN: When I started to work here...

JK: Sure.

00:15:05

MN: When I started to work here we used, for those of you who remember, an IBM Selectric typewriter. It was one...it was an electric typewriter, had special codes on it. We had big sheets like 16 by 20 sheets of white paper that you typed on. It was a special paper and if you made a mistake on a letter, if you were typing and you made a mistake, you hit a special code that eliminated that letter. And you could continue typing if you made a mistake on a word, you hit two boxes that eliminated that word. And you could continue typing and you could hit three boxes at the end of a sentence which would eliminate a whole sentence. It was an interesting technology. That paper, then on our production plant, was fit into this machine and came out in a long strip of paper that was fed into another machine and became typeset. Then, we went to a computer system, a regular real computer system...not as advanced as what we [have] today. And I thought I would kill myself for the...learning it...for a while. And we were able after a while to do pagination. Again, differently than what we had. Everything had a number and you had a...it was a much more awkward situation than today. And then the technology changed again and we went to a more advanced computer system where...can able... paginate and

see what was on the page and type and e-mail. And I remember we got our first fax machine in the office and that was just wonderful. I mean 'cause we could get notices from our other offices. I couldn't get them from people because nobody had fax machines, but we could get instead of running back and forth with information we could actually fax information from office to office. And that was really a...just a great thing, a time saver. And, of course, then we got pagers. Eventually after a few years, we got pagers so we would know when someone from our other office was calling us which eventually morphed into these great, big cell phones or car phones, or whatever. You know, they were huge and you carried them on your belt and, you know, technology changed. Things got a little easier and different and of course as everybody within the community became computer literate. We have a Computer Club of the Apple and the Macs Computer Clubs. Rather than having so many people come into the office, we got a lot of things by e-mail. There's a very...it was...and it became easier because rather than having to have someone type, re-type everything that was brought into the office on paper, you could just transfer an e-mail to a Word program. So, it became a little different, but it also changed the dynamic. Rather than having people come into the office as frequently, which was something I really enjoyed, and that became a little more impersonal. It's hard to relate to people via e-mail. It's much more fun face-to-face.

JK: What about the community's reaction to the content? So, I'm imagining, in the early years, they would physically come in, maybe react to articles as well converse about...

MN: Oh, yeah.

JK: ...the paper and maybe less removed.

MN: Well, in the early days, everybody was really quite content with things that went into the newspaper. It was a training process at times because in the effort to be a newspaper, we had to train people to get away from the using...personal pronouns and to try to write in an impersonal way. And it took some time and we would...and we, you know, we were a newspaper and I was the editor and that was the way it was going to be. And when...if we changed something, you know, so be it. We tried not to change content, but we did change wording to actually reflect newspaper style and become a real newspaper. Not everybody was happy with it and we had some interesting conversations with people, and I do remember and I have to, just as an aside, some of the funny things that happened. We had a gentleman who was a member of the Billiards Club. Billiards Club... Billiards was...maybe still very popular in this community. There were two billiards centers, one at Clubhouse 1 and one at Clubhouse 3. And he came into the office one day and very quietly handed me two dollars and suggested that maybe we could give his club a little more publicity.

JK: Cute.

MN: And I handed it back to him and said, "Thank you." I said, "We'll do our best for you, but really you don't have to bribe us.

JK: That's great!

MN: And of course, you know, in the sense of bribery, but, you know, the sense of getting things. Christmas was always our wonderful time. People here at...are extremely generous and fun. And we would end up with cookies during Christmas and boxes of See's candy. And I had one wonderful little lady rather than bringing Christmas gifts, rather than bringing candy or cookies, would always bring us a book of stamps, which I thought was a lot...was really useful.

JK: Sure.

MN: Really, really loved it. You know, she just liked us and she would bring us a book stamps. We had, at one time, I can't remember whether it was a special occasion or not, may have been somebody's birthday. The Melody Men which was a choral group, you know, prance into the office one day in their garbs and serenaded us just because. It was fun. We'd have some really, really fun times. And people would come in and sit and chat and tell us about their histories and their backgrounds. And some wonderfully interesting people. And it was nice. It was nice...it was a very close knit, very good feeling.

JK: It's neat. I want to take your conversation back to some early experiences. I want to find out from you the first time you even learned about Laguna Woods and what you had heard about it and your initial reaction coming here.

MN: I knew nothing about...and it wasn't Laguna Woods. It was Leisure World.

JK: That's right. That's right.

00:23:18

### **Learning about Leisure World**

MN: I mean it was Leisure World. I had heard about Leisure World because where we lived in Maryland was not far from the Leisure World in Columbia, Maryland. So, I knew of the concept. I knew of the community. But, I had no idea of this one. And I learned about it while I was actually working for the *Irvine World News* because the editor of the *Irvine World News*, Jeanne, was friends with the then managing editor of our three newspaper[s] – The Golden West Publishing. The first time I came here after I was hired, I drove 'cause I was interviewed and hired at the Saddleback news office, not at this office, which was the Administration Building, which was...address was on Valencia. First time I came here I drove up and down Paseo de Valencia looking for the building. The building was not visible from the street.

JK: Wow!

MN: You went from the real estate office on Valencia to Wells Fargo Bank. But even though the building address was on Valencia, you couldn't see it. It was...you had to come up that little street. I drove up and down and up and down. I was gonna be late for my first day at work. And I finally stopped somewhere and used a payphone to call and say, "Where are you? Where are you?" to locate this office. But when people came to the [office] you had to give them...if they hadn't been here before, you had to give them very specific instructions. "You have to turn on La Plata on the little street," because otherwise you couldn't find...you couldn't find the building. The old Administration Building was a...it was originally a Rossmoor sales office. It was a great building – one-story building with big black windows, big entryway with wonderful, wonderful trees out front. It's all gone, of course, now. Leaked like a sieve – had been...rooms were moved every which way until eventually, of course, they sold it and moved. But, it was a different, you know, different atmosphere – much more closed, much more open in concept, but a closed society.

JK: Would you share a little bit more about the infrastructure - Gate 14 was just opening, you mentioned?

MN: Gate 14 was just opening when I moved here. There was no traffic light between Gates 1 and 5. I think that came later. There was nothing at...the nine hole golf course had not been built. There was, of course, you know, the Home Depot Center was not

there. And the Administration Building Center was not there. The Clubhouse 5 was not built yet. There was Clubhouse 6, but not a Clubhouse 5. The... where they... where the nine hole golf course is, was supposed to be a lake for fishing. And then somebody decided that, well maybe that wasn't such a... I think probably a Rossmoor lawyer said, "Hey, you know, that may not be such a good idea. You run the risk of somebody falling out of a boat." So, that became the nine hole golf course. The Towers was new. The Towers had just opened... gate... the houses inside Gate 9 - what was called the Leisure Estates, Leisure World Estates, hadn't even been started yet. Those were the premium houses. Let's see, Gate 14 was just opening. And, of course, it was difficult because it was in the flight path of El Toro Marine Base. So, airplanes, the jets came in directly over... well, they came in actually over where the Maintenance Center is, but they sort of veered a little bit towards Gate 14. So, they came very close to Gate 14 and over the golf course. If you were on the golf course at that time, and the jet was coming over, you felt like you could almost reach up and grab the landing gear. I mean, they came over low and loud. Clubhouse 2 had a fair number of meetings and often whoever was speaking had to stop because of the noise of the jets. And, of course, there was a legal limit at the time via of Marine Corps ordinance that you couldn't have more than whatever number at a meeting just in case, God forbid, something happened. But... they... those planes came over Clubhouse 2 and Clubhouse 4 and they were noisy... constant complaints from people. Some of them interesting, who complained about the airplane noise, the noises of the jets. And then people who were very grateful that they were our jets that were making noise and not from somewhere else. And then we had some people who insisted that the jets were flying over at night and, you know, one, two o'clock in the morning. And they had it all... unless it was an emergency, the Marine Corps stopped flying early in the evening. Leisure World was very supportive, at the time, of the Marine Corps. I mean the, you know, a lot of ex-military lived here and, of course, a lot of ex-military lived in the area. And they were very supportive of our troops.

JK: Would you share a little bit more about that relationship? I know that would affect a community - living so close to the base. So, would you...

00:30:44

### **El Toro Base and Military History**

MN: In the very early days, and this was actually before I started to work. This was during the Vietnam War era. We had a group from... there was a group from Leisure World that would go to the base and actually meet the military men, the servicemen that were coming back from Vietnam. They were, you know, we had a very... there were... had a lot of support, a lot of... very... this was a very patriotic, very patriotic community. Even with the noise of the military jets, had a lot of ex-military here who, you know, were very upset when the base closed because they used the PX. Yeah, very, very, patriotic community... big, big parades on Memorial Day. The American Legion would invite the military in. We had a lot speakers from the military and, you know, it would... very, ultra-patriotic community... wonderful, wonderfully patriotic.

JK: Do you credit some of the support, especially in the Vietnam War where the country is divided about this that maybe it's the war service that they themselves participated? I know there's some connection of military servicemen, WWI and II, who moved here.

MN: Oh, no. We had a lot... yeah.

JK: So, you think... was there... what do you think the correlation with... is there a correlation?

MN: Well, like I said, they were very supportive of the military. You know, these were people...the people who lived here had lived through, many of them through WWI and, of course, WWII and Korea. And they were extremely...it was a very homogeneous community at the time. How does one say that without being...but it was a very homogeneous community of people. We had very few, okay, at the time, okay, the early community was probably 90%, if not more, white American men and women. They were very few foreigners in the community, very few African-Americans in the community. And when, in the early days, when we finally had some African-Americans move into the community, they were not readily accepted. I was a member...I was one...I was the first female member of the Kiwanis Club here. And I was a member of the membership committee. This goes back a long time and things obviously, you know, changed.

JK: Absolutely.

MN: And we had a...an African-American gentleman who was up for membership and the committee was almost about to vote not to allow him in. And I got upset. I mean, I really said some things that I probably shouldn't have said and really lambasted them. And the gentleman eventually became a member, but it was very obvious that there was some discrimination in the community. Now that's, you know, obviously changed, but it was a very homogeneous community.

JK: And you also mention, while we're on this topic of patriarchy, would you explore a little bit of that as well if you're...a little bit.

MN: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, if you go back...

JK: Sure.

MN: ...to, you know, to the early days. We're talking about the days when most of the wives stayed home. You know, very few of them went to work and if they went to work they were secretaries or teachers or, you know, nurses or whatever. But for the most part, you know, they were housewives which was fine, which was good. But it became a problem when you had people who, women particularly, who had never written a check. We didn't have credit cards, you know, credit cards were not common, but they had never written a check, they didn't know how to pay bills. And they would come into the office, particularly, and really bemoan the fact that they never learned these things because their husbands always took care of it...with later things, things changed as, you know, women...more modern, more educated women moved into the community. But the boards were...there were very few women that served on the boards. I think we had, we had a woman here...I mean she was a wonderful lady. She had been one of the early female doctors in the country, you know, she was wonderful. She was...but...she was unusual. I don't think we had very many female lawyers, if any. God knows there were no female accountants. They were just very, you know, they stayed home and baked cookies and raised the children. And there's nothing wrong with being a housewife, but they...today's modern housewives, okay, know how to keep the books, know how to write checks, know what a credit card is. Those ladies didn't, and many of them were absolutely lost when their husbands passed away. And they were, you know, on their own.

JK: Would you share about your role knowing Ross Cortese personally and that interview that you conducted?

00:38:02

**Ross Cortese Interview**



MN: Ross was a very dynamic person. You had the feeling that you were talking to Don Corleone, you know, that was his persona, you know. Ross was Italian. Ross was the Leisure World personification of the godfather...strong personality. What Ross wanted, Ross got. He...when I interviewed him, I was sort of intimidated. He [had] a very intimidating personality. Now, at that time, as I recall, the interview had to do with the project he wanted to develop where the Home Depot Center is, where the stables [are] located for The Koll Company, K-O-L-L. This Koll business...it was the Koll Business Center. And he was looking for Leisure World support for that. And, of course, people here were all upset because traffic and whatever and they did not want it. But he was determined. I mean, and he made it known that he was going to develop this and Leisure World people be darned or damned. Of course, it never did get built, the economy went downhill and, you know, he was just at that point of the...our big recession and it never did get built. But he was very, very determined...what he wanted, he was going to get. Ross managed to intimidate, I suppose the board of supervisors, and got, you know, permits for all kinds of things, for all kinds of buildings. He had, yeah, he was a big supporter and, of course, he was friendly with supervisor, Tom Riley, Colonel Tom Riley, at the time who was the county supervisor for the fabulous 5<sup>th</sup> District down here. Yeah, very...Ross was a very...he wasn't a big man, but a very intimidating...very intimidating personality.

JK: And you mentioned his favorite restaurant. So, would you...

MN: It was called 20/20...was a little hole in the wall restaurant on Alicia Parkway, little Italian restaurant. And he took me there for lunch one day with a bunch of other people and introduced me to Spaghetti À La Vodka, spaghetti with vodka sauce. But that was his favorite...it was called 20/20. I don't think it's...it hasn't been there probably for years, but it was called 20/20.

JK: Great.

MN: And he and...yeah, a couple of other people, Al Ceresa, who was the board chair for Rossmoor Corp. and Elm Weingarten a couple of others...of his buddies.

JK: Would you share about your readership survey you conducted?

MN: I don't even remember what year it was.

JK: Okay.

MN: And it had to have been before Golden West Publishing was sold to Media General 'cause it had to have been part of the sale. And a private company and, you know, independent company was hired to do a readership survey. This was just after, okay, go back a little bit. When I first started to work here, the *Leisure World News* was delivered to every household, every Thursday to every household via a contract, sort of, with the Golden Rain Foundation in which residents payed like three cents a week or whatever in their carrying charges for the newspaper. The *Leisure World News*...the community, not the *Leisure World News*, the community was sued by the then *Laguna News-Post* which had to have subscribers by name in order to deliver its newspaper into Leisure World. Leisure World lost that lawsuit or Restraint of Trade lawsuit, Leisure World lost that lawsuit. And after that, the *Leisure World News* went to a subscriber only publication. And you had to literally fill out a card, become a subscriber, pay whatever it was. It was a nominal fee, but you had to be a registered subscriber. During one of the transitions when the newspaper was being sold, a[n] independent company did a readership survey and came up with a 99% readership which they thought was, you know, ludicrous. It was just

impossible, but virtually every household in this community was a subscriber for whatever the nominal charge was at the time. But they had to be individual subscribers. They came up with 99% readership. Later on, when readership started to dwindle, we had a lot of people, a lot of subscribers, but we also had people who just liked to walk into the office and pay their quarter and buy a newspaper every Thursday. They'd be out for a walk and they'd come in and they'd buy their newspaper rather than being subscribers. So, we still had a very, very large survey...readership. Of course, everybody wanted their club news, wanted to know...want to see their names in the paper, wanted to see...we had a people column, wanted to see the names of their grandchildren and their children and, you know, proud grandma[s] and grandpas, you know, the little bragging column we had...the people column we had so you could brag about your grandkids, primarily. Nobody bragged about their kids, it was always the grandkids.

JK: And would you share more about this change of ownership and the expansion with Golden West Publishing?

00:45:03

### **Publishers**

MN: When we started, Golden West Publishing had three newspapers, *Leisure World News*, *Saddleback Valley News*, and *Capistrano Valley News*. And eventually added a few more, but then the newspaper was sold to Media General which was a company out of Virginia. That's when they had to settle the lawsuit and the company itself expanded because we actually bought the Laguna, the company bought the *Laguna News-Post* and then expanded to, you know, various other communities with weekly newspapers. That was a...had to be about five, six years maybe more that Media General owned us. They didn't even know where we were. They had us and they had a newspaper in Diamond Bar, headquarters in Diamond Bar. Basically they didn't even know where we were. When they decided to sell, it was bought by the *Orange County Register*. That was somewhere around 1994 and it changed, you know, changed hands. I can't...I don't know, that was the only other ownership from Saddle...from Golden West Publishing to Media General to the *Orange County Register*. Of course, the *Orange County Register* since changed hands a few times, but when the *Orange County Register* bought the newspaper, they basically left us alone for the most part. In fact, they didn't even know where we were and we were quite content with that. I don't think the editors of the *Register* are even...came down here. They let us run our newspaper and we did, you know, just fine and we were a very profitable publication. Again, a lot of this had to do with pre-internet and as the internet became more popular, it stole advertising. We used to have a very large...newspapers used to have very large classified advertising sections. That all but disappeared with the advent of the internet. And although the newspaper was still very profitable, space shrunk, news space as advertising space shrunk, news hole space shrunk. And we sort of had [to] put limits then on how many, you know, columns had...couldn't exceed more than 250 words and things became a little tighter, a little more difficult to run, to do. But that was the way of newspapers throughout the country.

JK: Right. It's a general trend.

MN: It was the general trend. News holes shrank as advertising became less.

JK: And you saw the conversion, in part, you shared to e-readership and such, so, up until your retirement. So, would you share about how your readership changed and just content?

MN: Well, the readership changed because, in part, because the makeup of the community changed from being a very homogeneous community. We had a lot more...other ethnic groups moving in. A large, a very large Asian population started to move in. In part, they weren't newspaper readers. You know, so they really weren't as interested in buying newspapers as the older population were. And readership did begin to go down and also went down with the internet. You know, where you could get your club news and your club information and exchange information with other people via the internet. You didn't need the newspaper quite as much. Eventually, the boards I'm sure, posted minutes of meetings and things on the internet. And the community has its own URL. And so you can get information that way. So, readership began to change considerably.

JK: When you [were] working with this community, were you ever a part of these clubs or organizations?

MN: The only club I ever joined was the Kiwanis Club.

JK: Okay.

MN: And they needed a female.

JK: Okay.

MN: They needed a woman at the time. I was their woman member. That didn't really...I didn't last actually terribly long - a couple of years, you know, didn't last very long, but yeah. Eventually, all the women joined and I was able to sort of...but, yeah, no I don't think I ever joined any clubs in part because it would have been really unfair. It just wasn't right to single out, you know, to single out any club. You know, I'd speak to clubs.

JK: Right.

MN: I'd go to club meetings...

JK: Right.

MN: ...but I never...yeah...

JK: Joined formally.

MN: Yeah.

00:51:18 JK: What was it like being a resident outside of the community while supporting the community inside?

MN: Was fun, was wonderful...oh my gosh, I had my first formal gown to wear because I was going to parties. You know, they'd have wonderful dinners and parties and...we were invited to all kinds of things. My husband was frequently introduced as Mr. Myra Neben.

JK: Cute.

MN: Yeah, which was...bless his heart, he, you know, he sort of got a kick out of. It was...we had some...there was some great parties. The clubs invited, you know, politicians. This was at the time, waive a few years ago, a very Republican community. And the Republican Club had just, you know, great, wonderful events. There was also

other clubs where just because we were, you know, I was the editor, we got invited to all kinds of great parties, great food. You know, glass of wine here and there. Ah, yeah, it was very social, extremely social. People loved to party.

JK: Would you share about the incorporation of Leisure World into the cityhood and officially being...coming, renamed Laguna Woods Village in '05? So, about that shift that you perceived?

00:52:54

### **Cityhood**

MN: Leisure World was part at the time, way back when, of the Saddleback Coordinating Council, I think it was called. It's a group of residents of people from various Saddleback Valley cities - Mission Viejo, Lake Forest, El Toro, etc. who met Saddleback Area Coordinating Council, SACC. And they'd discussed early on, must have been the late 80s or thereabouts, they discussed an effort to become a Saddleback Valley city. And that never quite got off the ground. Mission Viejo decided, wanted to go its own way and then Lake Forest wanted to go its own way. And Laguna Hills...and Leisure World at that time had a Laguna Hills post office. The post office was Laguna Hills, not Leisure World, not Laguna Woods. Laguna Hills offered to join with Leisure World in becoming a Laguna Hills city. Now, this was also after Irvine made a run. This was during Ross Cortese's attempt to get the Koll Center. Ross had gone to the...to Irvine and suggested that they annex Moulton Parkway, that they cross Lake Forest Drive come up Moulton Parkway and annex the area that included Leisure World and what his Koll center would be. And Irvine had a, along with Rossmoor Corporation, had a secret meeting which they invited the board members. Of course nothing, nothing here is secret...

JK: Right.

MN: ...was ever secret which they attempted to convince the mutual board members and GRF that it would be a great idea if Irvine annexed Leisure World. Irvine eventually said, "No way." It was just too complicated, but that's what Rossmoor actually...eventually wanted. Well, when Laguna Hills decided to go for its cityhood effort and was going to include Leisure World, Leisure World people got all upset because, gee, that would mean that we'd have to support all those parks for children and schools. I mean, we don't have children. What most of the people did not realize was that Leisure World people pay school tax. Part of their real-estate bill includes a tax, school tax, Saddleback Unified School District, whether or not there are schools here or you have...where you have children in schools. But that was, you know, one of the rallying cries. Well, you know, we don't want to have to pay for parks for kids to use, and soccer fields, and baseball fields, and so forth. They voted totally against it, totally against it. It came up a second time and again Leisure World people - "No way." The third time Laguna Hills said, "Forget Leisure World. We'll go on our own." And they became a city. Leisure World didn't really have a tax base. Laguna Hills took the mall, I mean that was going to be part of Laguna Hills. There was no tax base here. There's no revenue. There's no businesses at the time in Leisure World. I don't think the Home Depot Center was developed, yet. I'm not quite sure. Willow Tree was just...was fairly new. So, Leisure World really had to scramble to find a tax base. And, of course, a big...the big problem was that you have a private community and legally you can't use public tax money to support a private community. So, most of what Leisure World was spending was paying in real-estate tax was going to other places 'cause you cannot use private money...public money in a private community. What tipped the balance was the El Toro Marine Base. When it was going...there was the effort to make the El Toro Marine Base close. And there was the effort to make it a[n] international airport. And Leisure World,j being an unincorporated

area ruled basically by the board of supervisors which was in support of the airport, Leisure World de facto became a supporter of an international airport. That did not sit well, I mean the last thing they want was...it was enough that you had the Air Force, you know, that the Marine planes coming overhead. They were our planes. That was fine. They didn't...they, you know, they didn't run at night. They weren't flying at night. An international airport would have made planes overhead 24 hours a day, every single day. That did not sit well. That basically was one of the things that tipped the balance when cityhood came up. And they voted very...they actually did not vote very strongly for it. It actually was a close vote, but that's what, you know, Leisure World became a city. And of course when Leisure World became a city, they had to pick another name, you know, couldn't be Leisure World because Leisure World was a copyrighted name of Rossmoor Corporation. And Rossmoor Corporation wasn't giving it up so they had to pick another name. And they came up with a whole...there was a whole bunch of names and Laguna Woods actually was the one, you know, that won and became a city. But they did...the name changed with the cityhood folk. But the El Toro Marine Base closure and the international airport threat and Leisure World being in the column of supporting this because it was an unincorporated area, actually was a big factor in becoming a city. They did not want to be in that column, in that if the board of supervisors...

JK: And of course you were involved with the commemorative 50 year book.

MN: Yes.

JK: So, would you share about how you became involved with this project and your role, please?

01:00:41

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book**

MN: Well, Bob Ring who was, you know, the former Mayor, former GRF President, former whatever, called me one day after I retired...this was a few years after I retired and said, "We're writing this 50 year commemorative book. You know, you wanna...would you like to help?" And I went, "Yeah, sure. Why not? You know, why not? You know, it could be fun." Bob and I were friends. It was good timing. It was a fun thing to research and to write and to do. The book came out beautifully, you know. Do you have a copy?

JK: Not on hand, but on-site we...I know there's plenty, certainly. So, yes.

MN: Yeah, there are. Yeah, well it would be nice to show it.

JK: Yes, that's right.

MN: Yeah, it was a fun...it took us a couple of years. Actually, we started about two years before, had a lot of meetings, a lot of research, a lot of, you know, went through a lot of pictures with Pat and Bob and I...interviewed a lot of people, gathering a lot of information. The book came out really nicely. It was...it's...fun, just a fun fact, Leisure World's anniversary which is September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1964 was when it was officially opened, when the first people officially moved in. Well, September 10<sup>th</sup> is also my anniversary.

JK: Neat.

MN: So, we always celebrated together.

JK: That's nice.

MN: It was sort of, you know, something that I felt, "Wow! Gee! You know, that's why I'm here because I have this...I share the anniversary."

JK: So, I imagine just...you spent some time with Bob in the archives and covering and looking...

MN: Yes.

JK: ...I'm sure plenty of your own newspapers.

MN: All of our own newspapers.

JK Yeah.

MN: I mean, they were gathering newspapers from the very, very beginning, of course, before they were digitized. You know, so it was all the old newspaper. In fact, we had given them the *Leisure World News*. We had books of newspapers that the company had, at one point, we were... these great big books of newspapers. And we donated them all to the Historical Society along with a lot of information. And if...when I look back somewhere, I was looking in the files particularly of pictures, I could turn over the picture and note in the back our old notations about cropping and whatever, you know, newspaper, had to crop pictures and what percentages of whatever that we used in the old days.

JK: Right.

MN: When we had cropping wheels, you know, so yeah. A lot of the pictures and a lot of the information, and a lot of the articles, and a lot, you know, came from the *Leisure World News*, which was before the Historical Society, which was our archive.

JK: Right.

MN: We had tons of information. Now, that we just turned over here was a lot easier for them to store than for us.

01:03:57 JK: And...want to explore how you and the community celebrated in 2014. So, just a little bit about your personal events when...

MN: We had...I know there was a big party.

JK: Yes.

MN: I had a lot of...it was a lot of fun. I always loved the parties because...

JK: Yes.

MN: ...people here dance. You gather and you have an orchestra and people actually dance. And I love to dance...got to drag my husband out to the dance floor. I love to dance and unlike parties that I go to with my friends, people here dance. Well, of course the Historical Society had its, you know, its big event and a lot of people, a lot of the old timers, you know, came out of the woodwork and then helped celebrate. There was some good parties.

JK: Sure.

MN: Yeah, 50 years is a long time for this...for a community, a private community to celebrate and of course this isn't the oldest one.

JK: Right, Long Beach and others.

MN: You know, there were...well, Seal Beach and their...and Walnut Creek. And then they're a couple back east in Arizona, so. But this is the largest and was actually the most successful of the Rossmoor Leisure Worlds.

JK: Did you get involved with the Historical Society prior to this book? So, other than giving these private holdings to the archive, were there any other relationships that you had with board members?

MN: Only...no.

JK: No. Okay. And just kind of being onsite and doing this interview today, more of like a reflective question, what do you see for the future of the society and your kind of your hopes for it?

MN: My thoughts on this community is... it is a unique place to live. When the community started, actually the age limit was younger. You only had to be 52, now it's...by virtue of, I think the legislation, senior community is now 55, but at the time you only had to be 52. But that it's a unique place to retire. It has every type of sport you could want, other than baseball and basketball. And at the [time], we did have a group that played baseball outside of the community - a group of men that got together and played baseball. And at times we had, actually basketball in the gym, but not as a formal group. But activities abound, everything from, you know, tennis, table tennis, to music groups and theater groups to learning opportunities to economic groups. It's a great place to live. You...it's a very accepting community. We got all kinds of people that are here now. And it's a very...it's a fun place because you have the very...now you have the various ethnic groups. So, you know, it's kind of neat to go to an event for the Korean group and watch dancing and food, or the Chinese, or whatever. It's just a fun place, you know, a nice place to retire and relatively quiet if you want...except the, you know, sounds of the fire engines and the ambulances, it's relatively quiet...and security. Security was always a big selling point for this community. Yeah, there are always going to be some issues, but not like there are in the outside world. Once you're in through those gates, it's a much more secure, comfortable...the landscaping is always upheld beautifully. So, you can walk and exercise and go to your gym, you know, there's plenty of shopping. You don't have to go far to the mall or the supermarket. I understand we have a new supermarket opening at Willow Tree. Yeah, there's a new supermarket opening at Willow Tree in place of Vons. So, that'll be nice. It's just a good retirement place and not everybody who lives here is retired. In the "old days," virtually everyone was retired. Now, you got a lot of people who are moving in in their late 50s, early 60s who are not retired, who are still working. And that's, you know, that's a good, comforting thing, too. But they just want that little bit of security. So, yeah...great place, lots of activities. If you don't find something to do here, it's your own fault. There is an activity for just about every taste. If you don't find something to do, it's because you're not trying hard enough.

JK: Any other closing thoughts on your own experiences? But you've covered it well. So, if there's anything else you can add to...?

MN: Oh, I enjoyed...the 27 years that I was here was very...both interesting, exhilarating, exciting, fun, and it was a learning experience because of all the highly intelligent and interesting people that I met from early educators to female doctors to people such as the gentleman who was the father of the NASA safety program. You know, just exciting

people that live here, that are still here, that have done some really exciting things in the world. And they have a lot to teach, a lot to...a lot that they can teach the younger generation. And, hopefully, we still have groups that go into the schools and interact with younger people. And I hope they keep that up.

JK: Great. Well, it was a pleasure conducting this interview with you. So, that concludes our set of questions. So, we appreciate your time and creating this body of work for future listeners.

MN: I enjoyed being here. Thank you very much for inviting me.