

Laguna Woods History Center
Community Oral History Project

Recording Log

NARRATOR: Morris Meadow
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FILMOGRAPHER: Cindy Keil
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ABSTRACT: Born in Canton, Ohio in 1935, Morris explained his educational background at USC and move to California in 1953. He worked for the Leisure World, now Laguna Woods, management company Professional Community Management (PCM). Morris emphasized the logistics of this planned community. He moved to the community a year ago and shared about the amenities. He serves on the Laguna Woods History Center board of directors and is this community history project coordinator.

0:00:16 JK: We're here at the Laguna Woods History Center conducting an oral history project on the community. Morry Meadow here, it's May 2nd, 2016 and the first question we have prepared for you is when were you born?
0:00:17 M: January, 24, 1935.
0:00:21 JK: And where were you born?
0:00:23 M: Canton, Ohio
0:00:27 JK: Would you share about your upbringing?

0:00:30 Parents were European immigrants; Morry attended Lincoln High School; considered dental school; first career with Los Angeles County government with personnel work

0:02:40 JK: What years did you establish this career?

0:02:44 L.A. County from '57 to '85.

0:02:48 JK: "Okay. We're going to go back a little prior to those-um just to learn a little bit more about your childhood. Did you have any favorite hobbies growing up that would lead to this career? Is there anything that signaled that prior?"

0:03:04 Childhood hobbies such as model airplanes and pick-up basketball

0:03:27 M: Worked in dad's store.

0:03:34 Parents were role models

0:04:03 Discusses half-siblings from parents had prior marriages

0:05:02 JK: And what country did your parents emigrate from?

0:05:05 M: "They're both from what is now the Ukraine."

0:05:14 M: "My dad arrived in this country as a... I guess around twelve years old, so that would be about '97, '98, 1897 or '98. My mother arrived, oh, probably around 1922 or '23 and she experienced the Russian Revolution. Times were very hard there. And it was not a very pleasant place for people of the Jewish faith, so she took my half-brother and her mother and they came to the U.S. Both worked very hard. My mother was employed in a ladies garment industry and an early member of the union. And my grandmother, who was a fantastic cook, got a job as a chef and in Michigan for a resort, I believe."

0:06:52 Mother immigrated to New York City and dad immigrated to Pittsburgh where he then moved to Baltimore, Omaha, and settled in Akron, where his parents met

0:07:31 M: "Oh, I was very aware that growing up at the tail end of the Depression we were not impoverished, but-uh in my...my parents always kept food on the table, we had a...a modest home in Canton. My dad's business occupied him very much. A dollar really met something in those days and I guess that still carries over to me. If I see a penny on the ground, I will pick it up."

0:08:28 Move to California; "It was...well I had visited here, let's see, I came out in 1953, I had visited briefly. My mother and I came out to visit my half-brother in, I think it was 1948, '48, '49. And it seemed like a...a really nice place to live. And that helped me to decide to come to USC. Where I started school at SC, went back the first summer vacation, said I'm going back to California and I never returned to

Ohio. Things were quite different then. Population was one-third of what it is now. Traffic was not insurmountable and I enjoyed life in California.”

0:09:55 JK: And your profession in L.A. County-- would you go into more detail about your role there?

0:10:33 First position with L.A. County was in the personnel office of the county probation department as a part-time intern in '57; Los Angeles County Flood Control District in their personnel office; promoted to L.A. County Engineers Department as the Departmental Personnel Technician; conducted studies for the Arthur Young Company; measured productivity

0:18:05 JK: This experience in Leisure World. So when you are ready to transition there, we want to learn about the first time you heard of this Leisure World being created and just your development into this career as well.

0:18:20 M: “Well, I was aware of Leisure World, seeing commercials on tv back in the 60s, but I had no intention of coming to work at the time. But after I took an early retirement from L.A. County, my new wife and I moved back to Pennsylvania, she had accepted a position with Bryn Mawr College teaching at the school of social work. And after a year, a couple of years there, we decided that life in California was really better. So we came back here and came back in 1985 and I was casting around for a new career and I joined an organization called Forty Plus, which helps you prepare for midlife career changes and was very helpful. They taught me how to network, which leads me into coming to PCM in the course of networking I met with the general manager of the South Coast Water District. And as it turned out, he worked for the flood control district at the same time I did. Although we never had any opportunity to connect. And I had asked him, I told him I was looking for a new career, and he said my background was quite good. He didn't have anything suitable, but he gave me some names. Then he called his executive assistant in and she gave me some names. One of whom was a person in the personnel office here. And-uh I called and made an appointment and we talked for like two hours and she said we don't have anything available right now for a person with your experience level, but we're definitely interested and we will keep your file right here. So a couple of weeks went by and I called to let her know I'm still interested. And she said well there is one job and it's...it's an entry level administrative assistant to the Maintenance Director. And I said, "I'm not doing anything. Can I interview?" So she said I'll set you up for an interview. I'll let you know. We were living in Westwood at the time, so it was quite a drive down, even in 1985, and she called me back, she said we've set up an interview for you, bring some examples of your work. So I kept some copies of studies and projects and I bundled them up put, them under my arm and came to

see the Maintenance Director Del Mauer and in the course of talking with him it turns out that his wife was a social worker, as mine was.”

- 0:22:26 Wife, Diane, taught at USC; offer for Administrative Assistant position for PCM; created Productivity Improvement Program; designed work productivity reports for management and increased efficiency
- 0:31:14 JK: Let’s return to this planned community as early as you can recall it with your possible encounters with the founder himself, with Ross and the Rossmoor Corporation. Is there any kind of dialogue you have between the early founders of this community with those early visits or at any time did you have that opportunity?
- 0:31:39 M: “I...I never met Ross Cortese. I saw him from a distance once I think I talked to his daughter, Heidi, on one occasion. That was later when I had become the business manager, which was an interesting part of my career here.¹”
- 0:32:09 “When Mr. Cortez first envisioned Leisure World in this area, he was able to obtain FHA financing to build the co-ops and it was his intention, I believe, to build out 12,000 plus co-op manners. But about halfway through, FHA money dried up and so he embarked on building condominiums. So thirty mutual condominium and mutual fifty towers condominiums together are a little bit more than half of the total community.”
- 0:33:29 Funding ran out approximately the fifteenth year of the community.
- 0:34:01 JK: Okay. And how do you think that affected the community with the shift from manners into condos?
- 0:34:08 Establishing Co-ops; FHA financing
- 0:36:43 Resale of house after the 2008 recession
- 0:37:51 Community’s adjustment with the 2008 recession
- 0:40:06 JK: We’d like to return our conversation back to the beginning of this community, as far back as your connection starts to its founders and its development. So, would you please share with us?
- 0:40:17 Maintenance Center administration building which new services such as automatic payment of monthly assessments; Meadow started a new residents orientation program that lasted two hours twice a month; he taught the new resident orientations with a curriculum; resident confidence with community knowledge; half of the residents attended

¹ Morris worked in the maintenance division between three and four years.

- 0:45:43 History Center newsletter; *The Village Breeze*; Local media outlets such as Channel 6 and The Globe
- 0:46:56 Community perceptions with move into Laguna Woods
- 0:49:51 Multiple generational residents and resale trends; move from Dana Point; community amenities such as club houses and the Par 3 Golf Course
- 0:54:43 Participating in community classes and clubs such as photography, Introduction to Digital Slideshow Production, The Saddleback classes, movie club; socializing with attendees and developing friendships; Laguna Woods convenience to Saddleback Hospital Medical Center; city's nucleus for three surrounding cities; Irvine's El Toro Marine Air Base transformation to the Great Park versus local movement to stop airport due to marine jet in 1967; city's 1999 incorporation which gave the residents increased power; local political leaders Bob Ring² and Bird Hatch who stopped the local airport Marine Corps base; change from Leisure World to The Village; 50th Anniversary in 2014; compared Dana Point to community; renaming the community from Leisure World
- 1:09:31 The History Center and connection to Bob Ring; community's outside recognition; Bob Ring's use of the French expression, *raison d'être* with revitalizing the oldest homes, tearing them down and rebuilding them to modern standards; hopes community will improve plumbing; HOA special assessments ; average resident age since '86 is about seventy-eight; continued problem with maintaining the age limits
- 1:24:35 JK: Anything else you'd like to share with us?
- 1:24:39 M: "I think you've covered my...my bio pretty well"; parting conversation

² Former Leisure World Mayor