

Laguna Woods History Center
Community Oral History Project
Recording Log

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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 50th anniversary book with Bob Ring.

00:00:00 JK: It's January 29th, 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...

Keywords: 1977; board; city council; community; degree; editor; journalism; Leisure World News; manager; meeting; Peabody; policy; reporter

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 15th anniversary parade, a 20th 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...

Keywords: administrator; Bob Price; broadcast; Channel 6; column; coverage; editor; live; narrate; news; newspaper; obituary; parade; Rob Merritt; Ross Cortese; Rossmoor; show

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...

Keywords: announcements; Apple; baseball; basketball; bowling; Bridge; cell phones; Christmas; club; column; computer; e-mail; fishing; golf; internet; *Leisure World*; letter; machine; Macs; Moulton Parkway; news; newspaper; paper; Scrabble; Selectric typewriter; shuffleboard; sports; technology; tennis

00:15:05

Technology

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...

Keywords: Apple; articles; Billards; Christmas; club; computer; e-mail; email; fax; machine; Macs; newsletter; office; paper; publicity; Selectric typewriter; technology; typeset; Word

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...

Keywords: Administration Building; Clubhouse 6; editor; El Toro Marine Base; Gate 14; Golden West Publishing; interview; Irvine World News; Leisure World; Leisure World Estates; Marine Corps; Maryland; military; Rossmoor; The Towers; Valencia

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...

Keywords: African-American; American Legion; community; El Toro Base; female; homogeneous; housewives; husbands; Kiwanis Club; Korea; military; patriarchy; patriotic; race; service; servicemen; Vietnam; war; women; WWI; WWII

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 5th District down here. Yeah, very...Ross was a very...he wasn't a big man, but a very intimidating...very intimidating personality...

Keywords: 20/20; 5th District; 99%; ads; advertising; Al Ceresa; boards; Capistrano Valley News; classified; clubs; columns; develop; Don Corleone; editors; Golden West Publishing; husband; internet; interview; Italian; Koll Company; Laguna News- Post; Leisure World News; Media General; minutes; newspaper; Orange County Register; parties; permit; publication; readership; recession; Republican; Ross Cortese; Saddleback Valley News; spaghetti; subscriber; survey; Thursday; Tom Riley

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...

Keywords: advertising; Capstrano Valley News; clubs; company; content; gender; Golden West Publishing; internet; Kiwanis; Laguna; Leisure World News; newspapers; Orange County Register; publication; readership; Saddleback Valley News; space; weekly

00:51:18 **Residency**

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...

Keywords: community; dinner; events; husband; parties; party; Republican

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...

Keywords: base; board; board of supervisors; businesses; city; cityhood; El Toro; Irvine; Koll; Laguna Hills; Lake Forest; Lake Forrest; Leisure World; Mission Viejo; money; park; politics; post office; Rossmore Corporation; SACC; Saddleback Coordinating Council; schools; tax; unincorporated; vote

01:00:41 **50th 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...

Keywords: 50th; anniversary; archive; archives; Bob Ring; book; celebrate; commemorative; crop; digitized; GRF; interview; newspapers; pictures; research; write

01:03:57

2014 Celebration

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...

Keywords: club; community; dance; Historical Society; live; Long Beach; party; Seal Beach; senior; sport