

The Irvine Ranch History

Irvine, California

The Irvine Historical Society is dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of the Irvine Ranch, once one of the largest private ranches in the United States

Irvine Ranch Gives Way to Urban Development

At the beginning of the Second World War, the Irvine Ranch operated as one of the largest and most productive farming businesses in California. By the end of the war, urban pressure to develop was in full swing in northern Orange County. To the central and south county, the privately held farms continued to keep the developers away.

Myford Irvine Takes Reins

James Irvine, Sr.'s unexpected death in 1947 left the presidency of The Irvine Company to his only remaining child, Myford Plum Irvine. Myford was ill-suited for the job, and his short eleven-and one-half -year tenure led the ranch away from his father's agrarian pursuits, straight into commercial and residential development. Myford was the first major landowner to allow development to proceed southwards in the county.

Myford was not a farmer. He leaned heavily on the advice of his father's ranch manager, Brad Hellis, whom he allowed to completely control The Irvine Company's agricultural operations.

Myford loved the San Francisco social life, and did not share a consuming love of the land as had his brother, his father, and his grandfather. After attending Stanford University, he had elected to take over the management of his father's San Francisco offices and of his stocks and bonds.

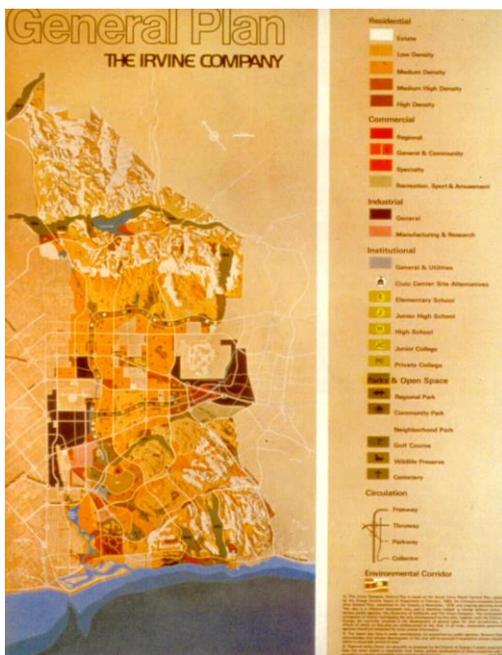
Known to everyone on the ranch as "Mike," Myford Irvine was a gentle soul - too gentle to run an empire. His first love was music. He was a gifted composer and could play the piano and organ beautifully, as well as many other instruments. And he was trusting - too trusting to have the reins of the Irvine agricultural empire placed in his hands.

James Irvine knew that this son was not the right man for the job of running the Irvine Ranch. He had never wanted Myford to be the one to take over after his death. He had planned for Jase, his first-born son whom he had carefully groomed for the responsibility, to be in charge.

When Jase died in 1935, James Irvine set up the James Irvine Foundation, a charitable organization to hold controlling stock in The Irvine Company. The foundation would have "exercise of a controlling voice ... to perpetuate the operation thereof and thus insure an adequate foundation for the charitable purposes herein provided."

In 1937 James Irvine signed the indenture of trust giving controlling interest in his stock to the James Irvine Foundation upon his death. When he died ten years later, the foundation acquired 53.7 percent of the stock. It would help needy causes, but more importantly in Irvine's eyes, it would hold onto what he had worked almost a half-century to build - the agricultural empire of the Irvine Ranch.

James Irvine installed two trusted friends at the top level of the foundation. They were Arthur J. McFadden and N. Loyall McLaren, both gifted and talented men, experts in agriculture and accounting, respectively. But they gave Myford Irvine a free hand in running The Irvine Company.



Irvine Master Plan photo

The master plan for Irvine Ranch development (left) drawn up by William Pereira shows residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional areas, as well as circulation patterns, open spaces, and an environmental corridor. Designed in three sectors northern, central, and southern - the southern sector was to be developed first. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)



Boy Scout Jamboree photo

Dr. Schuck, left, and Howard Gilstrap were among the more than 51,000 scouts in the first international gathering of scouts in the western United States, held in 1953 on the Irvine Ranch. Below: To prepare for the Jamboree, The Irvine Company cleared land and leveled hills to fill in dangerous ravines. An eight-mile "Jamboree Road" was graded to get to the camp headquarters site (today's Fashion Island). (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

Irvine Hosts Boy Scout Jamboree

One of Myford Irvine's first orders of business was to work with Bill Spurgeon, grandson of the founder of Santa Ana and a vice president of The Irvine Company, and the Boy Scouts of America to provide a place for the third National Boy Scout Jamboree. Myford's sister-in-law, Athalie Irvine, had asked Myford to give consideration to the Scouts' request for a host. Myford was enthusiastic about the idea; Mrs. Irvine followed through to make sure the event would take place.

The first National Boy Scout Jamboree had been held in 1937, but the coming of World War II put future Jamborees on hold. The second was held in 1950, and the third, in 1953, was a momentous occasion.

More than 51,000 Boy Scouts, Explorers, and their leaders participated in the Jamboree which lasted for one week - July 17-23. Fifteen hundred troops represented all 48 states, the "territories of Alaska and Hawaii," and 16 foreign countries. The Irvine Ranch was host to the first international gathering of scouts ever held in the western United States.

A lot of preparation was necessary for the Jamboree. The Irvine Company cleared land and leveled hills to fill in ravines. An eight mile road was graded (Jamboree Road) to get to the camp headquarters site, commemorated today with a plaque at Fashion Island. The event cost Myford Irvine a quarter of a million dollars, but he didn't care. To make 51,000 boys happy was good enough reason to host the event. It also brought some of the infrastructure needed to turn a budding dream into reality.

The Jamboree site was just north of Pacific Coast Highway and between today's Jamboree Road and MacArthur Boulevard in Newport Beach. The tent city, called "Jamboree Town," covered today's Newport Center and East Bluff residential community.

Eighty-eight miles of pipe brought more than three million gallons of water to Jamboree Town each day. Telephone and electrical wires stretched for miles on utility poles put in place strictly for the Jamboree. The town even had its own fire station, 150-man police force, medical facilities, 75,000-seat amphitheater, U.S. Post Office, telephone exchange, and a zoo.

Thirty-five thousand tents were divided into 36 sectional camps, each with its own health lodge, headquarters, commissary, equipment tents, post office, shower building, and most importantly, trading post. Each section quartered 34 troops. There were 1,292 troop camp sites, each 90 by 90 feet.

Cooking was done over charcoal fires. It took 48 railroad carloads of charcoal to supply the fuel for the week. The food consumed that week was staggering - 18 million gallons of water; 623,656 quarts of milk; 169,594 loaves of bread; 500,000 eggs; 500,000 rolls; 200,000 pounds of meat; and 62,800 pies. More than 15 tons of garbage was generated daily.

Each day 18,000 boys were transported by bus to and from the beach for a promised swim in the Pacific. Marine helicopters and Coast Guard life guards made sure there were no accidents.

The Boy Scout Jamboree was the largest gathering of people for a common purpose in the history of the Irvine Ranch. The greatest Hollywood stars were there to entertain the boys and 30,000 guests, among them Vice President Richard Nixon.

The Jamboree was an overwhelming success. The Irvine Company had created a city with the population of Miami Beach on a small portion of the ranch lands. A beautiful road had been graded to the ocean. And Myford Irvine was already thinking about what he would do next. He would take the area where the Boy Scout Jamboree main camp was located (Newport Center) and turn it into a development of expensive homes. Myford moved from his home in San Marino to the ranch so he could be more involved with the area's development.

"Myford considered the area too environmentally sensitive to house a financial business area like there is today," recalled his friend Rich Bassett. "Myford could see that there shouldn't be much traffic generated, because it would devastate the area. Irvine Terrace had already begun and other developments were slated, but no business was to be associated with that area. But Myford died before he could see his dream fulfilled."

Irvine Coast Country Club Built

Myford Irvine loved to play golf. His home in Marin County had a private nine-hole golf course. He envisioned a public golf course on the site where UCI is now located, but the trustees

convinced him to put the site elsewhere, closer to the coast where development was already taking place on Irvine Company land. Myford finally agreed, and the private Irvine Coast Country Club was opened on Valentine's Day, 1954. Bassett, an avid golfer who helped Myford with the layout of the Irvine Coast Country Club, said "Myford envisioned expensive homes surrounding the golf course with fabulous views of the ocean - not Big Canyon with views of nothing. It was to be the Beverly Hills of Orange County."

Myford Irvine often stopped by the Irvine cafe and talked to the farmers. After his father died, he hosted the annual Irvine Company Christmas Party and entertained the employees with his music. Myford moved the location of the party from the mess hall at the main ranch to a restaurant, and after the completion of the Irvine Coast Country Club, to the golf club.

The Irvine Coast Country Club is now known as the Newport Beach Country Club

Buffalo Ranch First Outside Business

In 1954, Myford Irvine agreed to let the Newport Harbor Buffalo Ranch lease property a short distance behind the Jamboree site. This business, a sight-seeing attraction for Southern California residents, became the first outside business on Irvine Ranch property.

Approximately 100 bison were shipped from Independence, Kansas to 115 acres of ranch land near the current intersection of Ford Road and MacArthur Boulevard. The bison grazed near the current development of Harbor Ridge, and became a popular tourist attraction. The Buffalo Ranch provided a glimpse of the colorful days of the Old West with its authentic buildings, animals, cowboys, chuck wagons, refreshments, and Indians, including Chief Kuthle Geronimo III, grandson of the famous Apache chieftain, who rode herd on the magnificent bison.

Philco Corp. First Industrial Lease

In 1957, Myford Irvine granted a lease of 200 acres on a hilltop overlooking Newport Beach to the Philco Corporation, the aeronutronic subsidiary of the Ford Motor Company established to develop weapons systems. It was the first industrial lease to be granted on the Irvine Ranch - the only one to be granted while operations were under Myford Irvine's control.

Residential Communities Developed

Myford was interested in the development of residential communities. Under his guidance, Irvine Terrace, Cameo Shores, Cameo Highlands, Harbor View Hills, Harbor Highlands, Westcliff, Baycrest, and Irvine Cove in Laguna were developed.



Development Increases

Top: The Irvine Coast Country Club opened February 14, 1954. Myford Irvine planned to build the "Beverly Hills" of Orange County on the hill overlooking the club

Negotiations for UCI Location

In 1956 the regents of the University of California system presented a report to the legislature entitled "A Study of the Need for Additional Centers of Public Higher Education in California." The report noted the major shift in population from central Los Angeles to the South, and recommended that a new campus be installed in the southeast Los Angeles-Orange County area. In October, 1957 the regents retained the firm of Pereira & Luckman to study possible locations for a new university.

William Pereira visited the Irvine Ranch, looking to the northern sections. He was advised to look to the southern areas, closer to Newport and the Back Bay. An Irvine trustee told Pereria that he might be able to secure 100 acres as gifted land. Pereira said he needed at least 10 times that much - the trustee told him that would be impossible.

The trustees were not receptive to the news that Pereira & Luckman had identified three sites on the Irvine Ranch as potential locations for a new U.C. campus. When asked to donate 1,000 acres to the university, Arthur McFadden told the regents, "The Irvine Company will not give one nickel to the richest university in the world."

Myford Irvine thought it would be impossible to convince a majority of the company's board of directors to make a gift of the thousand acres. He felt he would be unable to convince the directors that this gift of land would continue giving back to them in the future.

The Irvine Company officials were not the only ones reluctant to put the new university on their property. The regents wanted a university, but the majority of the regents themselves were not at all convinced that the Irvine Ranch land was the most advantageous place to locate the campus - it was too far out in the sticks.

The local community wanted the university on the Irvine Ranch. James Irvine's granddaughter, Joan Irvine Smith, wanted the university on the Irvine Ranch. The publisher of the local Globe-Herald and Pilot newspaper (*Daily Pilot*) wanted the university on the Irvine Ranch.

In the autumn of 1958, P.A. Palmer, of Newport-Balboa Savings and Loan, and Howard B. Lawson, developer of Los Angeles' Miracle Mile and several Orange County enterprises, met with A.J. McFadden. They said they would form a group which would either purchase approximately 12,000 acres from The Irvine Company, or purchase Imperial Valley land to exchange for the ranch land (The Irvine Company farmed 11,150 acres in the Imperial Valley).

The plan was for the group to then give a thousand acres to the university, provide 600 acres for low-cost faculty and married student housing, and develop the remainder into Pereira's envisioned "ideal" university community.

Again, the answer was absolutely "No."

Joan Irvine Smith knew what the university would mean for the development of the Irvine Ranch land and the local communities. She went to work on the company directors, and they reluctantly agreed to provide 650 acres for the preferred site on a hill overlooking the ocean. Community leaders went to work convincing the regents.

By the time enough progress was made to secure the site, it had been sold - for a cemetery. Joan Irvine Smith proposed another site for the cemetery, complete with a beautiful view, and agreed to supply water and a road. According to the *Daily Pilot* University Dedication Issue published June 18, 1964, "The cemeterians refused and quickly brought in some bodies and buried them to insure their hold on the first site."





UCI photos

William Pereira (top) identified three sites on the Irvine Ranch as promising locations for a new University of California campus. The current site, below, never the first choice of the regents, was deeded to the university in 1960 - 1,000 acres gifted; 500 sold. (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

Myford Irvine Dies

One of the bodies which would soon be buried on the hill overlooking the ocean in Pacific View Memorial Park was that of Myford Irvine.

On January 11, 1959 Myford Plum Irvine's body was found in the basement of the Irvine family home. Myford, a man who knew a lot about guns, had - according to the coroner's report - shot himself twice in the abdomen with a .16-gauge shotgun, and once in the right temple with a .22 caliber revolver. The findings of the coroner, based on no evidence of foul play and powder burns on Myford's left index and middle fingers, termed the death suicide.

Interesting that Myford, who was right handed, used his left hand to shoot himself - twice in the abdomen in the first attempt, and since that didn't seem to kill him, he then apparently crawled across the basement floor and finished the job by shooting himself in the right temple.

To justify the reason such a gentle man as Myford would want to take his own life at 60 years of age, stories of gambling and unhappiness began to surface. A sampling of the stories included: underworld figures had demanded immediate payment of promised monies; the house his wife Gloria wanted in Corona del Mar was too pretentious for his taste, and he was embarrassed to have to move there; too many people had their hand out for gifts from The Irvine Company; and, he was having difficulties coping with the responsibilities of the agricultural holdings after Brad Hellis resigned.

Rich Bassett, a close friend, had no idea that Myford gambled. "Myford didn't gamble at all, as far as I knew. When they installed parking meters close to the Rotary Club, Myford refused to waste a nickel in the meter, choosing instead to park down the street a block or two."

On the day of Myford's funeral, the directors of the Irvine Foundation met and elected Loyall McLaren president of the foundation and Arthur McFadden vice president of the foundation and president of The Irvine Company.

Master Plan Developed

The Irvine Company continued away from agricultural pursuits and directly into full-scale development of the property. The mild climate and beautiful setting in Southern California was attracting thousands of people from all over the United States. As the north county development moved closer to its borders, taxes on the agricultural land began to rise. The Irvine Company could not ignore the profit from real-estate development and business opportunities.

But the first order of business was the university campus. The regents selected an inland site in March, 1959. William Pereira advised the group that this second choice Irvine Ranch site would be very acceptable.

The Irvine Company did not have a master plan, and the foundation board seemed to be having a great deal of difficulty placing the university on its lands. Joan Irvine Smith, fed up with the inability of the Irvine Foundation leaders to act, wrote in an open letter to McFadden to "either give the company the vigorous and alert leadership which is the obligation of the president, or step aside."

In July, 1960 The Irvine Company offered a gift of 1,000 acres to the University of California and a provision for the sale of an additional 500 acres. Twenty-three regents voted yes; one regent voted no. The deed was transferred on September 30, 1960 and recorded by the regents on January 20, 1961. The University of California campus at Irvine was going to be a reality.

The selection of the Irvine site for the university enabled an entire community to develop around the campus, using it as the nucleus. William Pereira & Associates was hired by The Irvine Company to create a master plan for the Irvine Ranch.

Martin Schiesl, a history professor at California State University, Los Angeles writes that the Irvine Ranch property sat at a central point in the state's network of roads. The legislature approved plans in 1959 for three major freeways which linked the Irvine property with the Los Angeles metropolitan area. "Pereira's plan for the new campus promised permanent assurance against encroachment by outside developments and pointed the way to the avoidance of uncontrolled suburbanization of ranch property," Schiesl writes.

In 1960, The Irvine Company converted the old Irvine mansion into offices for Pereira. In 1962, after Pereira moved out, the home was used by the Planning Department of The Irvine Company. The garages that Myford Irvine had added in 1949 were converted into a draftsman's office.

Across Myford Road from the Irvine family home, the agricultural headquarters building was doubled in size to make room for the Real Estate and Planning Division of The Irvine Company.

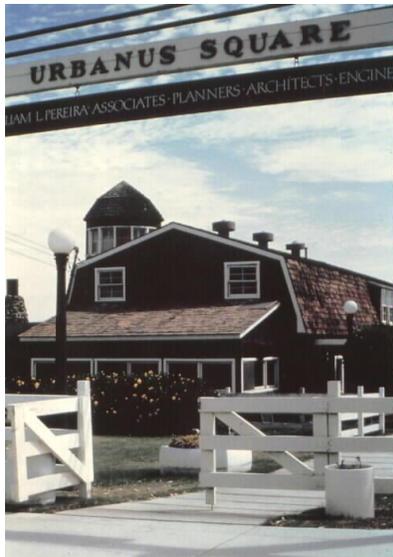
Shortly after Myford's death, The Irvine Company had evicted the Newport Harbor Buffalo Ranch tenants. In 1961, Pereira acquired the land lease and occupied the Buffalo Ranch as one of his seven offices nationwide. Pereira was a self-described "barn freak" and he moved in other barns to create additional office space.

Renaming the old Buffalo Ranch site "Urbanus Square," Pereira and his staff produced the plans for the UCI campus and several of its structures, many of Newport Center's buildings, and the development of the surrounding area. Pereira could see both the UCI and Newport Center sites from the silo, one of his favorite places.



Planning Department Offices photo,

This four-car garage, built by Myford Irvine when he moved into the Irvine Mansion in 1949, was converted to office space for The Irvine Company Planning Department draftsmen. (Photo courtesy of Hardy Strozier.)



Urbanus Square photo

William Pereira took over the Newport Harbor Buffalo Ranch property in 1961 and renamed the site "Urbanus Square." Here, he produced the plans for the UCI campus and Newport Center, along with several buildings on each site. (Photo courtesy of Lange Financial Plaza.) Right: An overlay of current boundaries of the Irvine Ranch on a map of Los Angeles highlights the vastness of the future development. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

Pereira would later move one of his barns down to the Farm School at the university as a lasting memory of his legacy.

Adjacent to the bison ranch buildings, Pereira built a circular concrete platform which served as a helicopter landing pad. This platform was one of the first private helicopter landing sites in Orange County.

Pereira's plan divided the ranch into three planning areas, north, central, and south. The remote mountain areas to the north were given the least priority based on major topographical restraints that would make infrastructure development difficult and expensive. The central section - truly the best agricultural land on the ranch and representing the greatest investment of money and resources - received secondary priority. The highest priority went to the southern section, basically from the coast to the alignment of the San Diego (405) Freeway. This section included the new university and surrounding communities.

Schiesl writes that each planned community was to contain distinctive residential districts with a sense of place and identity to which inhabitants could relate on an intimate scale. Each village would have its own schools, churches, and shopping centers.

The master land-use plan proposed the development of major industrial areas, including the airport area's Irvine Industrial Complex. Newport Center was envisioned as "a downtown for the south coast of Orange County." The 700-acre site was to contain high-rise office buildings, medical centers, service businesses, and a regional shopping center.

Pereira's master plan for the university established the campus in the shape of a giant wheel, with six principal quadrangles radiating from a 16-acre central park. The park was to contain a lake and an amphitheatre - it was to be "the focus of university life."

"Among the advantages of the circular campus plan," Pereira wrote, "is the fact that all major academic buildings, as well as athletic facilities, will be within a 10-minute walk of each other. Wherever possible, the natural topography of the terrain will be followed, with the building areas precisely designated and all the other land preserved for all time as open space."

UCI Dedicated

The University of California at Irvine was dedicated on June 20, 1964. President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson gave the dedication address. Classes began in September 1965.

An advertisement purchased by The Irvine Company in the Pilot's Dedication Issue, stated: "We feel privileged to have donated the 1,000-acre campus to the University. In this, our centennial year [sic], we are additionally engaged in an era of magnificent developments encompassing space age facilities, residential communities, unlimited recreational opportunities, commercial centers and agricultural expansion to nourish a growing population. Our neighbors may be assured that our Master Plan for developing our properties also includes adequate provisions for educational institutions and cultural endeavors."

William Pereira became known as the father of the largest master-planned area on the North American continent. Famous for his other accomplishments, such as the landmark Transamerica Pyramid in San Francisco and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Pereira counted the development of the Irvine Ranch, together with the University of California campus and Newport Center, as one of the most challenging projects of his career.

The South Irvine Ranch general plan was approved by the Orange County Board of Supervisors in 1964. Schiesl quotes then Irvine Company president Charles S. Thomas as saying that The Irvine Company was undertaking the "finest land development in the world" and expected to see "enormous progress and prosperity" for the local area.

'Old' Irvine Becomes East Irvine

On September 2, 1965 a meeting was held in the San Joaquin School District Auditorium in the old agricultural shipping center town of Irvine. The U.S. Post Office gave the patrons an opportunity to vote on the new name of their town. The printed ballot contained "East Irvine" and "Myford," but residents could also write in the name of their choice. At least 51 percent of the heads of families or businesses had to be in agreement on one name for it to be chosen. The ballot was to be turned in to the post office before 5:00 p.m. September 10, 1965.

The patrons selected "East Irvine." At the close of business September 30, 1965, the post office changed its name once again. To the south, what would one day be the city of Irvine began to develop around the new university.

East Irvine was far enough out of the way that the developers ignored it for the time being. As more of the agricultural lands on the ranch were being converted to housing tracts during the 1960s, East Irvine continued to operate as the shipping center for the dry crops still grown on the Irvine Ranch. The town's 41 residents, representing the population of the town of Irvine before the name change, eschewed modern development, and were content to retain their rural lifestyle.



Irvine, 1966 photo

The town of Irvine served as the agricultural shipping center dry crops grown on the Irvine Ranch...: Rancho San Joaquin Jr. High School had its beginnings in the school complex seen upper left. Sand Canyon Avenue runs through the town, past the rows of oak trees, and Harkleroad citrus camp is seen on extreme right . (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

The California legislature passed the Williamson Act of 1966 and The Irvine Company took full advantage of the act, which enabled agricultural land to be placed in a ten-year preserve and reflect lower property taxes based on the land use. The Irvine Company placed 49,000 acres in the preserve in 1969 so that it could be developed in an orderly fashion, rather than piecemeal to meet the assessor's tax bill.



Irvine Industrial Complex photo

The Irvine Industrial Complexes have targeted and attracted many of the top 50 Fortune companies. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

"Many aerospace companies, electronic firms, and research and development industries found their way to southern Orange County and located in the 4,000 acre Irvine Industrial Complex," Schiesl writes. "They provided thousands of new jobs and lured large numbers of people from different areas of Southern California. Most conspicuous among them were affluent white-collar employees and their families who sought comfortable housing, ready access to the outdoors, and better than average educational and recreational facilities. The Irvine Company contracted with reputable home builders and concentrated upon producing and marketing the image of an 'amenity-packed' community. Developers were required to preservice ranch lands with roads, water supply, and sewer systems. Company planners, moreover, closely supervised residential and commercial projects and made sure that they conformed to specific architectural and landscape styles outlined in the master plan. Many houses, for example, were clustered and located near open space areas and path systems. The company also devoted special emphasis to leisure-time activity and provided tennis courts, golf courses, and club houses."

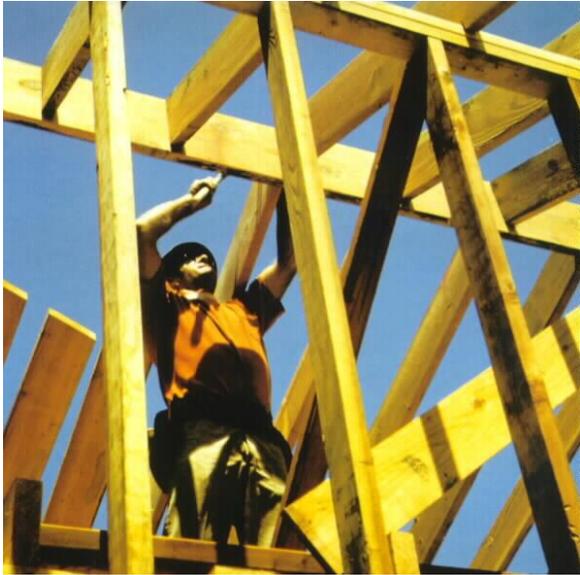
Once the southern section and industrial complex was well underway and successful, The Irvine Company looked to the agricultural property in the central section. All tenant farming on the Irvine Ranch ceased in 1969; enough land had been sold by that time that the land could simply no longer support the tax base for agricultural operations. The Planning Division moved to The Irvine Company's twin towers in Newport Center in 1969, leaving the agricultural headquarters for the exclusive use of the agricultural headquarters. Major growers took over the job of raising crops. Grain and beans were being totally phased out, and the Irvine Bean and Grain Grower's Association began winding down their operations. By 1971 they were closed. The Frances citrus packing house closed in 1971.

Although East Irvine was not yet in development's way, a short time after changing the town's name a bulldozer crew arrived one morning and gave warning that anyone who wanted anything out of the old railroad depot better get it within a half an hour, because it was coming down. The old Irvine School, built in 1899 and converted into the town meeting hall, was removed in a similar manner within six months.

Few citizens outside of the East Irvine community realized that an end of an era was taking place. Indeed, few citizens outside of the East Irvine community knew that East Irvine existed.

Whereas a few short years before, The Irvine Company felt that the preservation of agriculture on the ranch was essential to the continued economic health of Orange County, company executives now felt that the central portion of the ranch should be maximized in its development. In 1970, a master plan for this section was presented to the county. It was not well received. The plan called for 24 separate residential villages, 2,400 acres for parks and recreation, and 7,500 acres for commercial use. The new plan increased the acreage of developed areas to 53,000 with a targeted population of 430,000 by the turn of the century. The plan called for a city to take over the government of the area within five years.

County planners noted that The Irvine Company development did not take into consideration the needs of the county, and they recommended that several environmental elements be incorporated into the plan, including wetlands preservation, additional green belts, and the protection of prime agricultural areas. They also suggested that the company re-think the proposed housing from being affordable only to the upper-middle and upper-class, to include affordable housing for low and moderate income people who would service the community.



Housing Construction photo,

The first housing developments were University Park and Turtle Rock. The Racquet Club and Culverdale (now part of Westpark Village 1) followed close behind. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)



Color Coded Land Use photo

The initial planning stages of the Irvine Ranch included color coding like use and creating a circulation plan. This mapping was completed in February 1971 after the county denied The Irvine Company approval of their central sector master plan. (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)



Irvine Town Center photo,

Irvine Town Center, so-called before incorporation, was located across Campus Drive from the university administration building. It became the new city 's city hall and council chambers. The Irvine Ranch Water District was headquartered on the second floor. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

Shipping Center Ceases Operations photo, page 92

When Irvine incorporated, the shipping center for dry crops - East Irvine - ceased all operations. The Irvine Company brought in a backhoe and other construction equipment to demolish the 1895 warehouse. After several attempts met with failure, the building was abandoned and later partitioned off and leased.

Incorporation of Irvine

As development progressed according to The Irvine Company's master plan, the neighboring cities of Santa Ana and Newport Beach looked upon the emerging tax base with their best interests in mind. The Irvine Ranch Water District, formed in 1961 by The Irvine Company for the development of UCI, played a key role in preventing some of the annexation attempts. Irvine Company executives, fearful that some of the surrounding communities' annexation attempts would be successful before the land could be incorporated into a city, started a campaign to create that city. A new city government might not be as difficult to deal with as Orange County's. The Irvine Company campaigned vigorously for cityhood, and on December 28, 1971, the city of Irvine was incorporated in an area of 41.6 square miles. However, The Irvine Company failed in its first attempt to place people on the council that strongly supported the company's plans.

Some of the city council's first actions made The Irvine Company realize it would not, to quote Schiesl, "have an easy time with its building policies and programs." The new council voted a temporary moratorium on all future construction in the city while it examined the master plan for major revisions. The council created a planning commission and staffed it with a group of environmentalists. A consulting firm was hired to help prepare the 1973 Irvine General Plan, which set goals and policies for future growth.

The 1973 plan outlined the circulation system of bicycle, hiking, and equestrian trails to link recreation areas in an attempt to reduce dependence upon the automobile and provide greater access to recreational facilities.

Schiesl states that "The Irvine Company's industrial parks had attracted a large number of manufacturing firms and service businesses from older cities in the county and other parts of Southern California. Many of their employees could not find affordable housing and commuted an hour or more to their jobs. None of this disturbing situation was of great concern to Irvine city officials. They generally subscribed to the pro-growth philosophy of The Irvine Company and saw large-scale commercial and industrial expansion as essential to the continued economic health of the community."

By the time Irvine became a city, it was all over for the little town of East Irvine. The Irvine Bean and Grain Grower's co-op disbanded, and The Irvine Company sold off all the machinery for \$10,000 to a man in Idaho who owned a bean warehouse. William C. Cook, the manager of the bean and grain operation from 1946 to 1968, was still shaking his head about the sale ten years after it happened. It was worth 50 times the amount for which it was sold.

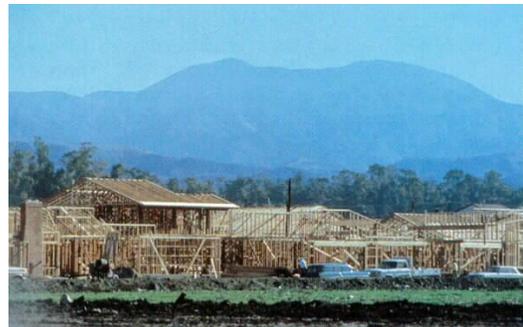
Foundation Sells The Irvine Company

Joan Irvine Smith lobbied the U.S. Congress, which was investigating non-profit foundations set up by large corporations as tax shelters, for special legislation to force the Irvine Foundation to relinquish control of The Irvine Company. President Richard Nixon signed the Tax Reform Act of 1969 which forced the Irvine Foundation to sell its controlling stock in The Irvine Company.

The company's 2,000-acre Irvine Industrial Complex East, located east of the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, together with the airport area Irvine Industrial Complex-West, made The Irvine Company the owner of the largest industrial development in the United States .



Ivi



City signs along University Drive near University of California , Irvine , include date of incorporation. Left: The financial area of Newport Center, with the Back Bay and miscellaneous islands of Newport Beach Lido, Balboa, etc. - in background. According to local historian Jim Sleeper, Newport Center/Fashion Island is built upon a petrified redwood forest, most southerly site of silicified redwood ever reported in California . Above: Saddleback Mountain towers above a new crop of stucco houses being built on the Irvine Ranch. Saddleback is an unofficial name for the peaks that make up the landmark. Santiago Peak, to the right, is 5,691 feet - approximately 200 feet higher than Modjeska Peak, on the left. The two peaks are one mile apart. (Photos courtesy of Judy Liebeck and Irvine Historical Society.)

The Irvine Family: Significant Role Players in Irvine Ranch History

First Generation

James Irvine I

Born December 27, 1827 . Immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1846. Relocated from New York to California for the Gold Rush in 1848. Acquired Southern California property between 1864 and 1868. Bought out business partners in 1876 and became sole owner of 125,000-acre holdings.

Married **Henrietta "Nettie" Rice** on July 25, 1866 . Two sons, both born in San Francisco . First son, James Harvey born October 16, 1867 . Second son, Harvey Rice, born in March 1874, lived only seven months. Nettie died shortly after the child, on October 23, 1874 - one week after James Harvey's seventh birthday.

Married **Margaret Byrne** in 1880. (James Harvey was 13 at the time.)

Died March 15, 1886 , six years after second marriage. Buried in San Francisco .

Second Generation

James Harvey "J.I." Irvine , Sr.

Born October 16, 1867 . Inherited the then 108,000-acre Southern California ranch in 1892 on 25th birthday. Incorporated The Irvine Company in 1894. Operated one of the most successful ranches in the world.

Married **Frances Anita Plum** in 1892. Three children: **James Harvey, Jr., Kathryn Helena,** and **Myford Plum.** Frances died in San Francisco of consumption in 1909.

Married in 1931 to **Katherine Brown White** (affectionately called "Big Kate"), founder of the Assistance League of Santa Ana. She died in 1950.

Died August 24, 1947 , while fishing at his Bozeman , Montana Flying D Ranch. Buried in San Francisco .

Third Generation

James Harvey "Jase" Irvine , Jr.

Born June 11, 1893 . Fun-loving, warm, caring person. Well-liked by the ranchers. Groomed since a young man to take over the ranch.

Married **Madeline Agassiz** in 1914. Divorced in 1928.

Married **Athalie Richardson** in 1929. One daughter, **Athalie Anita "Joan"**, born July 1, 1933 .

Died of tuberculosis on June 23, 1935 . Interred at Fairhaven Cemetery , Santa Ana . James Irvine, Sr. then created the James Irvine Foundation to protect the ranch after his own death. The Foundation, drafted on February 24, 1937 , was assigned 51 percent of the stock of The Irvine Company. After annually setting aside such funds that "sound discretion deem wise and expedient for investment" it was to devote the remainder to the advancement "of any charitable use or purpose in the State of California as now is or may hereafter be authorized in the Articles of Incorporation..."

Kathryn Helena Irvine

Born September 29, 1894 . Described by Dutch Bill, a colorful character on the Irvine Ranch, as the "sweetest, kindest person in the world. She rode a blind horse, and she could have had any horse she wanted. She was first-class."

Married World War I Navy flier **Frank Lillard**. One daughter in 1920, **Kathryn Anita "Katie"**.

Died four days after giving birth, of pneumonia due to complications from childbirth.

Myford Plum Irvine

Born April 25, 1898 . Also well-liked around the ranch. Talented musician and composer. Had a keen interest in finance.

Married **Thelma Romey** in 1922. One daughter, in 1940, **Linda Jane**, for whom Shark Island in Newport Beach was renamed Linda Isle. Divorced in 1950.

Married in 1950 to **Gloria Wood White**, the former daughter-in-law of Katherine Brown White, whom James Sr. married in 1931. One son, **James Myford**, born in 1953. Gloria died in 1968.

Died on January 11, 1959 . Buried at Pacific View Cemetery , Newport Beach .

Fourth Generation

Kathryn Anita "Katie" Lillard

Born 1920. Kept a much lower profile than her cousin, Joan.

Married **Charles Wheeler**, who took over the cattle operations on the Irvine Ranch and at the Flying D in Montana . Wheeler's guidance in the cattle industry led to the most productive years of cattle operations in the history of both ranches.

Athalie Anita "Joan" Irvine

Born July 1, 1933 . Played a major role in keeping the Irvine Ranch intact. After the death of her grandfather, James Harvey Irvine, Sr., the would-be takers came out of the woodwork. With only the power of the court at hand, spent years both successfully and unsuccessfully defending the ranch against any perceived or actual improprieties. Left a wide swath of enemies in her wake, but without her intervention, the city of Irvine would be a very different place at its 20-year anniversary.



Irvine Industrial Complex West photo,

This May, 1976 photograph shows part of the huge Irvine Industrial Complex West. Together with Irvine Industrial Complex East, it is the largest industrial development in the United States . (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

The new complex was zoned in 1975 and expected to employ more than 50,000 people, only a small number of whom were expected to be able to find affordable housing within the city. Several Irvine residents found this unacceptable, and sued to block the zoning of the new industrial complex. The issue escalated into a battle royale, ending only after The Irvine Company was sold and the new owners, anxious to begin the industrial complex, agreed to an out-of-court settlement that included provisions for company-provided low-income housing units and their necessary infrastructure.

The new owner of The Irvine Company was a consortium which included, among others, Donald Bren, developer of Mission Viejo; Alfred Taubman, a shopping center magnate; and Joan Irvine Smith. The consortium outbid the Mobil Corporation in 1977 and bought The Irvine Company for \$337.44 million.

The 1980s brought recognition for the city of Irvine as a “national model of comprehensive development that provided for all aspects of working and living,” according to Schiesl. However, affordable housing continued to elude the lower-income workers “whose skills were vital to the region's economic health,” Schiesl writes. “The relentless commercial construction, while supplying convenient and efficient services for large numbers of people, brought increasing traffic congestion and reckless destruction of historical landmarks and natural terrains. All of these conditions served as major topics in a fierce debate among citizen groups, business organizations, and political leaders over the future growth and development of southern Orange County . The Irvine Company, in the process, found itself forced to re-evaluate some time honored principles regarding economic prosperity and work more cooperatively with different segments of the community to assure a better and healthier living environment.”

Flying D Ranch Sold

The Irvine Company Trust leased the 82,000-acre Flying D Ranch in Montana to different companies and managers until 1969, when Charles Wheeler, James Irvine, Sr.'s grandson-in-law, assumed management. Improvements were made in fencing, leveling meadows, rotating crops, and building roads and irrigation systems. Under Wheeler's management, the Flying D became a profitable venture.

In 1978 The Irvine Company Trust sold the Flying D Ranch to "enable the Trust to divest itself of potential profitable real estate in order to maintain its tax exempt status." The sale of the Flying D property also assisted the Taubman-Allen-Irvine group, the new owners of The Irvine Company, in retiring their debt.

Owners of The Irvine Company

The Irvine Company was incorporated on June 4, 1894. James Harvey Irvine, Sr. was the only stockholder.

In 1977 The Irvine Company was put up for sale. Mobil Oil Corporation bid \$201 million for the property. Joan Irvine Smith, granddaughter of James Harvey Irvine, Sr. felt the price was too low, and forced a bidding war for the land. The selling price to the Taubman-Allen-Irvine, Inc. group in March, 1977 was \$337.44 million. The company was purchased from The James Irvine Foundation, which was forced to divest itself of Irvine Company stock through the passage of the Federal Tax Reform Act of 1969, and by eleven family descendants.

The Taubman-Allen-Irvine consortium was put together by A. Alfred Taubman, a Detroit shopping center magnate. He initially met with Ben Lambert, head of an old-line New York investment banking firm, to discuss his plans to add the 100-square mile block of Orange County to Taubman's already sizable investment portfolio.

Taubman knew he needed partners for capital and people who knew their way around Orange County and Southern California in order to successfully purchase and develop the land. The financial strength of Taubman's syndicate was comprised of close friends or business associates. A Southern California builder - Donald Leroy Bren - was anxious to become a partner, as well. Taubman and Bren were brought together when they both contacted the same New York firm - Eastdil Realty - about financing. The two would become the largest shareholders in the purchase of the Irvine Ranch.

Joan Irvine Smith and her mother, Athalie Clark, the next largest shareholders with the possible exception of Herbert Allen, sold their 22 percent interest for \$72 million and then purchased an 11 percent interest (550 shares) in the Taubman-Allen-Irvine, Inc. group.

The 12-member board of directors of The Irvine Company in 1980, each owning stock in the company, were as follows:

Chair - A. Alfred Taubman, shopping center magnate

Vice Chair - Donald L. Bren (largest shareholder) home builder who sold the Bren Co. to International Paper for \$34 million in 1969 and bought it back in 1972 for \$3.5 million

Richard Alden - partner with Latham and Watkins law firm, which represented Taubman-Allen-Irvine during bidding negotiations

Herbert Allen - senior member of Allen & Co., Wall Street investment firm

Max Fisher - chairman of United Brands; became wealthy building a chain of gas stations and refining oil

Henry Ford II - past chairman of the Ford Motor Company

M. Keith Gaede - married to Myford Irvine's daughter, Linda

Peter C. Kremer - installed as president of The Irvine Company

Benjamin Lambert - president of Eastdil Realty Co., a New York mortgage broker for Blyth-Eastman Dillon & Co.

Howard Marguleas - chairman of Sun World International, a Coachella Valley produce firm that is one of the largest date marketing firms in the world

Milton Petrie - owner of a number of profitable clothing stores plus a chain of dry good stores in Salt Lake City

Joan Irvine Smith - granddaughter of James Harvey Irvine, Sr., who teamed with her mother, owned 22 percent of The Irvine Company at the time of the 1977 sale.

The actual stock held was not revealed due to the fact that it is a privately held corporation. The best estimate of the board's stock ownership was:

Bren - 34.3 percent

Taubman - 15 percent

Allen and Company - 10 percent

Smith and Clark - 11 percent

Petrie - 10 percent

Fisher - 5+ percent

Ford - 4+ percent

Marguleas - 2+ percent

Gaede - 3 percent (Myford's daughter)

White - 3 percent (grandson of James Irvine, Sr. by marriage)

Irvine - 3 percent (Myford's son)

Alden, Kremer, Lambert - no estimate available

The consortium used a relatively new method of creative financing when they purchased The Irvine Company in 1977 for \$337.44 million. The Irvine Company assumed approximately \$240 million of the buyer's debt. This style of financing - known as leveraged buyout - is where the company's assets are used to buy the company, shifting the owner's personal debt to the company's books. The Flying D Ranch in Bozeman , Montana was sold for \$12 million to help reduce the debt.

In September, 1982, Donald Bren moved into an active role in the company management and became co-chairman of the board of directors along with A. Alfred Taubman - a rare occurrence in major corporations. At the same time, J. Robert Fluor, chief executive of the Fluor Corporation, joined the board of directors. Fluor had figured prominently in the unsuccessful attempt to arrange the purchase of The Irvine Company by Mobil Oil in 1976-77. John Galvin, senior vice president of Aetna Life & Casualty Co. of Hartford, Connecticut , also joined the board at this time, and Keith Gaede left the board of directors.

In April, 1983 Donald Bren bought out five stockholders who collectively owned 48 percent of The Irvine Company. These stockholders were A. Alfred Taubman, Henry Ford II, Max Fisher, Herbert Allen, Sr., and Milton Petrie. Bren also purchased an additional 3.8 percent from minority shareholders. Bren's previous 34.3 percent combined with the 51.8 percent equalled 86.1 percent of The Irvine Company.



Flying D Ranch Sold photo, page 97

"The Flying D Ranch in Bozeman , Montana was sold for \$12 million to help reduce the debt."

In order to finance his buyout, Bren established the Newco I Corporation, a Michigan-based holding company set up to control Bren's stock interests. The company acquired the 51.8 percent of stock from the other investors for \$518 million on April 15, 1983 . Bren owned 7 percent of the company directly and 79 percent through Newco I. Loans for the stock purchase were made through several banks.

In October, 1983 Bren attempted to combine the Newco I Corporation and The Irvine Company and use a large cash stockpile accumulated by The Irvine Company to pay off his debts. Basically, Bren planned to merge the existing Irvine Company into Newco and then rename

Newco The Irvine Company. This would effectively make Bren's personal debt a liability of the new Irvine Company.

By this time, an additional \$42 million in interest payments was owed, bringing the debt of Newco I Corporation to \$560 million.

Bren offered to trade Joan Irvine Smith and Athalie Clark two shares of the new company for each share they owned of Taubman-Allen-Irvine, Inc., or he would buy their shares outright for \$208,400 per share. If they accepted the two for one split with the proposed merger of Newco and The Irvine Company, Bren's share would fall back to 71.2 percent and Smith and Clark 's share would increase to 22 percent ownership.

Smith sued to stop the merger, but lost the suit in a November, 1983 Orange County Superior Court decision. She and her mother elected to sell their 11 percent, 550-share interest. Bren offered \$114 million for their stock, much less than the \$330 million Smith and Clark thought was a fair price. Smith sued one last time to make sure Bren didn't dictate the final terms of the agreement.

That final lawsuit, settled in June, 1990 in Michigan where The Irvine Company was re-incorporated after the 1977 sale to the Taubman-Allen-Irvine group, provided significantly more funding to Smith. Bren argued that the 68,000 acres of land he purchased in 1983 was worth \$1 billion at the time. Smith felt it was worth \$3 billion at the time of buyout. In the end, Smith and her mother received \$149 million, or \$271,000 per share plus interest.

And so ended the Irvine family involvement with The Irvine Company.

Irvine Historical Society Formed

The Irvine Historical Society was formed in 1977 as an outgrowth of the Irvine Bicentennial Committee. The society's first mission was to rescue Turtle Rock paddock artifacts (location of Turtle Rock Nature Center). Soon after, the society attempted to stop the demolition of the Frances Packing House in what was to become the Northwood area. The only part of the building - the first in Irvine to be placed on the *National Register of Historic Places* -to be saved was the facade, which was placed, appropriately, as part of the decor in the original Irvine Savings and Loan building in Heritage Plaza.

The Irvine Historical Society soon evolved into the "watchdog" for historic structures on the Irvine Ranch, a lonely job in an area where only a handful of people realized that anything happened in Irvine before housing tracts.



Turtle Rock photo

Turtle Rock, slated by The Irvine Company Planning Department to be broken up and carted away, was saved when the Pacific Coast Archaeological Society protested, advising company officials that the rock was an important Indian shrine. Bottom: At one

time the Turtle Rock Community Park site was the hub of the ranching operation for the Bommer Canyon cattle camp. The paddock building is the only original building remaining. It is marked by a plaque at the entrance and is now the Nature Center building. (Photos courtesy of Judy Liebeck and Gil Challet.)

East Irvine Preservation

Since the death of James Irvine, Sr., as each layer of new leaders has exercised control, the value of the ranch's history has been ignored more and more. At one time, the Irvine Ranch had the finest collection of tenant farm homes in the southwestern United States. Now, only about 20 of those homes exist. These remaining structures serve as reminders of the ranch's rich agricultural history. The families who lived in them were the labor force of the agricultural era, a period which greatly determined the future growth and development of Orange County. The structures represent more than 50 years of economic and social change, from the days when the Irvine Ranch was one of the most productive farms in the world to today's master-planned city of Irvine.

The Irvine Historical Society became aware that the historical community needed to begin the process to save historic buildings before plans for developments were finalized. At the society's request, The Irvine Company leased the oldest building on the ranch, a wing addition of the original vacation home of James Irvine I, to the city, who in turn leased it to the society for use as a museum to house the society's collection. Immediately after the opening of the museum in 1980, the society shifted its focus to saving East Irvine, the old shipping center for dry crops.

As early as 1981, plans were being discussed to preserve as much of East Irvine as possible. Sand Canyon Avenue, the two-lane road that bisected the town, was slated to become the third busiest street in the city of Irvine. The AT&SF railroad tracks, which bordered the town on the south side, were targeted for a multi-billion dollar Bullet Train project, and were to be lowered

four feet. A 35-foot high railroad overpass was to be built to accommodate the six-lane divided Sand Canyon Avenue. The Santa Ana Freeway to the north was to be widened towards the town, further encroaching on the dozen acres which made up East Irvine. In addition, plans called for the site of the historic warehouses to be the company's Irvine Industrial Complex East eastern boundary. The bean and grain warehouses were to be removed and an industrial warehouse built in their stead. A large residential development, known as Village 14, was to be built along the southwest. Jets from El Toro Marine Corps Air Station flew over the area daily, creating a significant noise impact and crash hazard area.

Saving the town was labeled "impossible" by everyone who understood what was involved in historic preservation. Under the leadership of Barbara Wiener, an expert in community affairs, saving the town became a reality.



Tenant Houses photo

At one time, the Irvine Ranch had the finest collection of tenant farm homes in the southwestern United States. Although the company rarely put money into the houses, the Mexican families who last lived in them lived well. Neatly trimmed yards with vegetable and flower gardens and spotless interiors reflected the pride of the families who worked the ranch. As The Irvine Company switched from tenant farming to outside leases, tenant homes fell into neglect. By 1990, only about 20 of the homes still existed.. He also stepped forward to save the three tenant houses shown in the bottom photo. The green one on the left was built for James Irvine, Jr. and served as the bean and grain warehouse manager's home. The center one, built for one of the orange growers and probably the first to have running water inside, was taken from Trabuco and Jeffrey Roads. The house on the right was the Cook residence that once sat in the middle of the largest bean field in the world - the 17,000-acre field taken over in part by El Toro Marine Corps Air Station. (Judy Liebeck photos.)

[\[top of page\]](#)

