



viewpoints

April 2000

Volume 31, Issue 3



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GMIA annual

ART &
GARDEN
TOUR

May 7, 2000
Noon – 4 pm
Rain or Shine!
Watch for your
invitation in the
mail soon!



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History of a Place We Call Home

Enter Col. Ed Fletcher...

Few would argue that Ed Fletcher had more to do with shaping the development of the Grossmont-Mt. Helix community than any other single person. In 1888, at the age of 15, Ed arrived in San Diego from Massachusetts with \$6.10 in his pocket. By the turn of the century, Ed had earned a reputation as a capable salesman and business owner, peddling produce all over East County. And peddle he did. In his memoirs he wrote, "A year after I arrived in San Diego, I was sent out on a business trip, motoring on a bicycle all over the back country." His bike took him to as far away places as Warner Ranch.

Ed loved East County, and in 1900, an opportunity presented itself that he worked passionately to make a reality. The Villa Caro Ranch--with its elaborate mansion ranch house in the valley just east of what is today Grossmont High School--was for sale, along with most of the original Alta Ranch. Before the crash of 1888, the ranch had been valued at \$125,000. The 1900 asking price was \$11,500. Ed decided to buy it, but there was one small problem. He did not have \$11,500, and his friend and president of the San Diego Trust and Savings Bank, Joe Sefton, thought the venture too risky to lend it to him.

In Hubert Guy's book, *Grossmont Isn't Just a Shopping Center*, he writes, "Fletcher argued that the land on the valley flatlands already

was fully equipped to function as a prospering ranching operation with buildings, a reservoir (today it's the pond at Anthony's Fish Grotto), a railroad spur, and the flume terminal all in place. More importantly, Fletcher added, the largest part of the property was a magnificent mountainside that could be developed into an exclusive suburb of unsurpassed beauty. Joe Sefton disagreed about the

potential of the mountainside, which Fletcher claimed he could develop profitably into a fine residential area. The bank, with good reason, claimed that without water, utilities, or access roads, the suggestion of a subdivision was 'sheer folly.' Their evaluation concluded that there were too many boulders, steep inclines, and deep ravines to allow any kind of residential settlement and certainly would restrict any ranching activity. In a

word, Joe Sefton said, the mountain was 'useless.'"

Ed Fletcher at 28 was not a visionary who gave up easily. In 1901, on his way back from visiting family and friends in Massachusetts, he returned via Yellowstone National Park. Enter William B. Gross. Yes, that name sounds familiar, and no, he did not own shopping centers. The relationship between Fletcher and Gross is story for another time.

Submitted by John D. Mead

Grossmont Isn't Just a Shopping Center can be purchased at the Hitching Post, 9639 Grossmont Summit Drive. Another fascinating read is the *Memoirs of Ed Fletcher (1952)*. Unfortunately, it is out of print but can be found at the library.



Ed Fletcher overlooking the El Cajon Valley, 1910.
The large boulder is at today's intersection of
El Granito & Sunset Avenues.

GROSSMONT - MT. HELIX



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Letter from the President

Here we all are in the year 2000! I trust your New Year transition was relatively uneventful, and this last year in the century is rolling along nicely.

Since the last newsletter, we have had some successes and a disappointment. On the success side, the transfer of the Mt Helix Park/Nature Theatre from the County of San Diego to the newly-formed

Mt. Helix Park Foundation has been completed. This was a monumental effort that took over a year and hundreds of hours of a few dedicated GMIA board members. This is now truly a community park, and the success of its operation will depend on participation of people who are committed to raising money and balancing the provisions of the trust with the interests of the Mt. Helix community. *Viewpoints* will continue to update our GMIA membership on Park and Foundation activities – the current need is for additional Foundation Board members, as well as monetary contributions. There is contact information elsewhere in this issue of *Viewpoints*.

The disappointment is that SANDAG continues to fund freeway projects in other parts of the County ahead of the 94/125 connectors that will relieve some of our surface street traffic. Funding for a temporary ramp between westbound 94 and northbound 125 is in the plan for the relatively near future. And, although the permanent interchange project has been split from the SR 125 widening project, the timeline is still 10-15 years in the future, and our plea for current funding for the environmental and planning studies went unheard.

Your board has decided to wander into the Internet domain, so to speak. We are exploring establishing a website, and will keep you posted.

We are in search of new board members. With the creation of the Mt. Helix Park Foundation and other changes in peoples' lives, there are both current and anticipated openings. If you are interested, please contact Jack Phillips at 619-670-0986.

As this GMIA fiscal year winds to a close on June 30, my service as your President and a Board Member will end. I moved from the Mt. Helix area, yet committed to stay until the transition of the Park was accomplished. That is done, and it is time for me to end my participation and give other good people an opportunity to carry on. In my 15 years on the board, I have seen GMIA grow and attain status unparalleled in the County for a homeowners' association. I hope you believe I have served this community well!

The years have proven to be challenging, fun, and filled with friendships. I wish the best for the community and GMIA.

See you at the Art & Garden Tour on May 7, and the Annual Meeting and Dinner on May 15.

GMIA Makes Recommendations for Mt. Helix Park Use

by John D. Mead

We are fortunate to have one of, if not the most, unique outdoor theaters and hilltop parks in the country, right in our own community backyard. In 1925, when the White, Yawkey and Fletcher families teamed up to create the memorial park and "Nature Theatre," there were only a few homes that dotted the remote hilltop community of Grossmont-Mt. Helix. It was a grand vision they had, and in 1929 a trust was set up to ensure that the vision was carried out, and that the park could be enjoyed forever.

Providing a majestic theater to hold Easter Sunrise Services was an important priority of the memorial park's creators; however, their wishes extended beyond a yearly religious ceremony. In 1929, the Trustor dedicated the property *"to the use, enjoyment and inspiration of all people, and desires the same to inure forever to the use of the Public in general and of the Citizens and Residents of the County of San Diego and the State of California in particular."* The trust instrument goes on to say that it is to be used *"to promote knowledge and culture, to relieve the distressed in body, mind and/or spirit, to cultivate a love for the beautiful in art and nature, to foster an interest in and love of music and the drama, and to promote all things which tend to elevate and refine mankind."* An ambitious but achievable directive.

When they built the 2,500 seat amphitheater their intentions were noble. Unfortunately, they could not foresee that over the next 55 years more than 300 homes would be built within a 1/4 mile radius of the park's upper and lower property. For those 55 years the park was used for many events. Yet it wasn't until 1980 that the small, newly formed Christian Community Theatre (CCT) began using the facility in the spirit for which it was intended: to put on summer musical productions that rivaled those of the best theater companies in San Diego.

The community embraced CCT, and in less than 20 years it grew from one production performed for a few small audiences to 34 productions for audi-



The Nature Theater on Mt. Helix, after its completion in 1925.

*(Photographs on this page and the next from
"Grossmont Isn't Just a Shopping Center" by Hubert Guy)*

ences of up to 1,300. With this success came traffic and noise. As a result of the increased activity, objections have been raised by a number of neighbors who feel their quality of life has been compromised.

Throughout GMIA's 64 year history, the organization has served its members to preserve the character of the area and the quality of life—for all the area's residents. When issues affecting a particular neighborhood arise, it has worked to do what is right for the entire community, with respect and sensitivity to the people most impacted. In the summer of 1999, a small group of residents asked for GMIA's help in reducing the impact the summer theater productions were having on them. A subcommittee was formed to work with the neighbors who had a use issue, and a resolution strategy was planned. The first step was to survey 300 homeowners living close to the park and find out the degree of impact, and then solicit ideas for making improvements.

Volunteers spent several hundred hours over the course of six months to assess the situation. With survey results in hand, and after considerable subcommittee and full-board debate, the GMIA board came up with 12 recommendations to make to the newly appointed Trustee of the park, the **Foundation for the Preservation of the Mt. Helix Nature Theater** (Mt. Helix Park Foundation). GMIA feels that if the Foundation adopts these rules and guidelines, a great majority of the residents who live near the park, as well as the 3-acre parking area surrounding the fire station at the corner of Vivera and Mt. Helix Drive, will welcome the CCT summer musical productions. We have presented our recommendations to the Mt. Helix Park Foundation. The recommendations address park hours, attendance limits, number of events, noise levels, parking, use of busses, care for the flora and fauna, commercialism, visual impact and security.

The GMIA Board wants to thank the subcommittee, neighborhood volunteers and the 150 neighbors who responded to the survey questionnaires for their efforts in helping to formulate the recommendations. We have faith that the Mt. Helix Park Foundation will review, consider, and implement our recommendations and take appropriate steps in the best interest of our GMIA community.



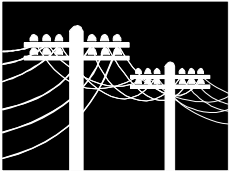
The Helix Post Office, built circa 1885 at the present location of Campo Road and Conrad Drive, shows Mt. Helix in the background.



Easter Sunrise Services were held on Mt. Helix beginning in 1917. Before the Nature Theater was built, those who braved the hike up the mountain stood, or sat on boulders.



The Fletchers observe the early stages of construction of the Nature Theater.



Cracking the Area Code Crisis

by Dianne Jacob, County Supervisor

619, 760, 858, and 935...442 on the horizon...who can keep them all straight? It's not only difficult and frustrating - but, also unnecessary. How did we get here when not too long ago, San Diego had only one area code? We now have three, with two more slated for implementation this year: 935 in east county and south bay, and 442 in the north coastal region. It's anticipated that the State's current 25 area codes will leap to 41 by the end of 2002!

This is unnecessary and we're fighting to stop any new area codes from coming to this region.

On February 9, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved my proposal to join with other local governments and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to work with our State and Federal legislators to do three things: Require

the FCC to grant waivers to allow for technology specific area codes for devices such as cell phones and pagers; shorten the deadline requiring the availability of local number portability which would allow wireless users to transport their numbers to new providers without changing their phone numbers; and immediate release of the enormous stockpile of unused phone numbers.

There are as many as 145 million unused phone numbers within existing area codes in this state. (*North County Times*, January 13, 2000). There are 23.4 million phone numbers in San Diego County. Let's do the math. There are approximately 7.8 million phone numbers for each area code. With three existing area codes, that equals the 23.4 million phone numbers in San Diego County. And, with about 2.7 million people liv-

ing in this region - this equates to about 8.7 phone numbers for every man, woman and child!

Unfortunately, the fact that there are millions of unused telephone numbers that could alleviate the need for new area codes has been lost in the debate over the imposition of the controversial new 858 area code. And, overlays are not a solution - they are only adding to the problem by forcing all consumers to dial 11 digits. This is cumbersome and unnecessary. I say, it is time to stop punishing the consumer!

The time to take action is now. By working with other local governments and the CRUC, I am hopeful that we can crack the area code crisis and prevent any new and unnecessary area codes from coming to our region. ▲



Planning and Land Use

For those of you living on Fuerte Drive and Avocado Boulevard, some relief for the traffic problem is in sight. The temporary ramp from westbound 94 to northbound 125 will be started soon. However, this only solves half the problem. At a hearing in February, GMIA board members Penny Halgren and Jack Phillips, together with Supervisor Jacob's office, pleaded for the SANDAG board (San Diego Association of Governments) to start environmental and project studies for the complete ramp project in the present budget (1999-2004). This would ensure that groundbreaking could start as early as 2005.

SANDAG members apparently didn't think our 20-year old problem was that urgent and put off starting work on the project until 2005. That means the actual construction of the complete ramp project will probably not begin until 2010 and may not be completed until about 2015. We gave it our best shot and, with your help, we did get some things that we wanted; namely, the temporary ramp started and separating the entire ramp project from the very expensive widening of a section of 125 north of 94. If all goes as planned, and other future county projects are not considered more urgent, our grandkids and great-grandkids will enjoy a more peaceful neighborhood and an easier ride to work

For those of you that have enjoyed dining at the "Ox Bow Inn" in Casa de Oro, plans are to replace it with a much larger res-

taurant called "Rendezvous" that specializes in Memphis-style barbecue with that real southern hickory-smoked flavor. We don't know the exact date of the opening (perhaps by Labor Day), but the new owner, Bob Muller, doesn't plan on tearing down the Ox Bow until the new restaurant is completed. For those service clubs that have met at the Ox Bow for many years, don't worry, the upper floor of the "Rendezvous" will be reserved for you.

The Rancho San Diego Library at the southeast corner of Brabham and Via Rancho San Diego (next to the fire station) is in the planning stages. Plans have been drawn, but many design details are yet to be resolved before it is finalized. There is money available and according to our 2nd District Supervisor, Dianne Jacob, it will be built as soon as possible.

We haven't heard when the Senior Housing Project in Rancho San Diego will be breaking ground. Hope it's soon as some of us will be needing it in the near future!

On the other hand, for those of you that enjoy concentrated exercising, a new "24-Hour Fitness Center" has been approved for the Rancho San Diego Shopping center on Avocado Blvd. It will be located on the vacant parcel east of Dixieline. In addition to all the regular facilities associated with health clubs there will be a swimming pool and basketball courts. Also, the Von's market in the shopping center will be expanding by approximately 10,000 square feet. ▲



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★ Annual Dinner Reservation ★

Reservation Deadline: May 1, 2000

We encourage you to respond promptly as seating for dinner is limited. Your reservation will be held at the door. For more information, call Carole Sobel at 619-464-6858.

**I would like reserve space at the
Annual Meeting & Dinner on May 15, 2000.
\$15 per person**

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Number
Attending

Amount
Enclosed

 \$

Please seat me/us with (max. 10 people per table) :

I will not attend dinner, but I will be
present for the 7:30 p.m. Annual Meeting.

M a

GMIA

Annual Meeting & Dinner

May 15, 2000

La Mesa Community Center
4975 Memorial Drive, La Mesa

Social Hour:	5:30 pm
Buffet Dinner:	6:15 pm
Entertainment:	7:00 pm
Meeting:	7:30 pm
Speaker	8:00 pm

Special Guest: *Dianne Jacob*

Entertainment Courtesy of
Christian Youth Theater

For more information, call Carole Sobel at 619-464-6858.

Please mail your check and reservation form to:
GMIA
P. O. Box 2751
La Mesa, CA 91943-2751