

# Selling the Palos Verdes dream a natural pitch

**By Montique Sugimoto and Dennis Plotowski**

Frank Vanderlip's purchase of the Palos Verdes Peninsula "sight unseen" in 1913 was an extraordinary occurrence. So too were the campaigns to finance the construction and advertise the "most beautiful and desirable residential area" in Southern California.

In 1921, E.G. Lewis, the man behind the development of Atascadero and University City in Missouri, devised an underwriting scheme and promotional campaign that would be called "the greatest achievement of its kind in the history of real estate financing."

With his advertising genius, Lewis took out full-page display ads in newspapers and sent promotional material to businessmen, merchants,

manufacturers, realtors, teachers and other professionals emphasizing the sound and smart investment opportunity and potential high returns.

After the first subscriber's meeting in downtown Los Angeles in 1922, the LA Times reported Lewis made over \$8,000,000 in underwriting subscriptions. In just under two years, there was sufficient funding to start construction of what is now Palos Verdes Estates.

The subsequent advertising campaign was equally impressive. The Palos Verdes Project used a number of promotional tools and media — traditional ads in magazines and journals, colorful brochures and flyers with spectacular home designs and photographs, and even radio programs.

With titles such as Palos Verdes the New

City, Palos Verdes the City of Dreams Come True, and The Riviera of America: Where Beauty Wins Over Commercialism, promotional materials espoused the opportunities, merits and value of living as "nature planned it" — in a beautiful residential suburb with unsurpassed ocean views and ample open space, well protected from the ever-expanding City of L.A.

A unique feature of the campaign was the use of music. Well-known pianist and composer Jean de Chauvenet and his talented soprano wife Helene created the musical hit, *Waiting for You in Palos Verdes*.

A charming fox trot, the song's lyrics tell of an idealized life in Palos Verdes, with a couple anxiously awaiting "When we'll be climbing over the



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The promotional campaign to sell Palos Verdes as a great place to live included advertisements in multiple publications.

hills in June time/Sailing over the waters at moon time/Cooling in our cottage at moon time/Singing of our haven of love."

A 25' x 38' model of the extraordinary development was exhibited in downtown L.A. for potential buyers to see the vi-

sion for themselves.

The ad campaign did more than sell homes for the Palos Verdes Project. In 1922, Sales Manager

H.E. Clark announced that since the start of the advertising campaign, lot prices in San Pedro, Redondo and Hermosa

Beach and Lomita had increased between 25 and 100 percent.

Lewis' involvement in the Palos Verdes Project ended abruptly in 1923. He sued to recover \$1,000,000 he spent on the campaign and \$5,000,000 in damages but was later forced into bankruptcy. In 1928, Lewis was convicted of mail fraud for projects unrelated to Palos Verdes and sentenced to five years at McNeill Island penitentiary.

While Lewis may have had his troubles, claims about the beauty, life and idyllic surroundings of the Peninsula in the Project's advertising almost 100 years ago are still very true today.

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