

A Slice of Peninsula Development: 1953-1967

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA

The Peninsula is where the sheep used to roam



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Robert Boyd tends to his sheep in 1950. History column on page 5 focuses on development.

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In 1953, the Peninsula had 6,500 residents living in about 2200 homes, mostly in the Palos Verdes Estates area. The cities of Rolling Hills, Rolling Hills Estates and Rancho Palos Verdes did not exist.

While development was increasing on the Peninsula — Marineland of the Pacific was completed in 1954 — the Peninsula still had abundant open space. That changed when Great Lakes Carbon (GLC) purchased 6,800 acres of land, mostly in the present-day Rancho Palos Verdes area and came up with a plan for a “new

city.” GLC, its subsidiaries and various partnerships, would set in motion a development boom like no other. Two of the country’s most well-known architects and planners, Victor Gruen and Charles Luckman, were hired to research and lay out the general plans for the 6,800 acre site.

As one of the leading “community builders,” Gruen did not just subdivide the land into housing sites. He developed a plan that included all elements for a new community: a town center with shopping and business areas, medical facilities, housing (apartments and single-detached residences), recreational areas, schools

and an industrial park. The new city would have everything to live, work, shop and engage in leisure activities on the Peninsula.

In 1953, with Gruen’s recommendations, GLC announced its plan: a city of 60,000-70,000 residents in ten years.

The building of the residential areas started right away. In 1956, plans for Grandview Palos Verdes, one of the Peninsula’s largest residential developments, were announced. The 1,000 acres purchased for the Grandview tract was reported as one of the largest land deals in Southern California.

Construction of a ded-

icated shopping area started in 1957, and so did grading for one of the Peninsula’s amenities, a golf course. The 172 acres of land sold to Los Angeles County would become the Los Verdes Golf Course.

With the flurry of development, 1957 also saw the incorporation of the Peninsula’s second and third cities, Rolling Hills and Rolling Hills Estates, to gain more control of the rapidly developing area.

The passage of a Los Angeles County zone ordinance in 1958 set the stage for the creation of an industrial park. The “scientific research and development” classification was designed to per-

mit research and development that was compatible with surrounding residential areas.

GLC had 410 of the 6,800 acres rezoned to the new classification to form the Palos Verdes Research Park. Extending from Crenshaw and Hawthorne along Crest Road, the Research Park was designed to have a “campus-like atmosphere and inspired landscaping” to provide scientists an optimal environment for creative thinking.

In 1961, the Research Park got its first tenant, Nortronics, the electronics division of the Northrop Corporation. By 1967, the Peninsula had not one but two new cit-

ies, and efforts were under way for the creation of the Peninsula’s fourth. Just 14 years after GLC launched its plans, the Peninsula’s population had grown to 54,000.

Gruen reportedly said the Palos Verdes Peninsula had the potential to become “the most outstanding community development in the United States.” The flurry of development in the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for the flourishing Palos Verdes community that exists today.

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