

## VALLEY VOICES

### **How we got here way, way back**

By Joseph W. Brady and Holly Noel

*Editor's note: This is the first in a series of three op-ed pieces on the Victor Valley. Next Sunday's article will look at where we are now. On July 24, the final article will examine where we go from here.*

Records tell of politics in our region as early as 1857 with the first polling place set up in a home. The 1860 census shows only 10 people living in the area, so we wonder what that vote was about. In 1885, the new town next to the railroad was named Victor.

Fifteen years later, the name was changed to Victorville to avoid confusion with a Colorado town. Nowhere can we find reference to this name change resulting in threats of recrimination. The decision seems logical, albeit inconvenient; maybe it did to them as well. If there was a dust-up, it would appear that the leaders and citizens put aside their differences and did what was best for all concerned.

Yet at the same time, we know that the Federal government sent troops to squash attacks by Mojave Indians on trains in the area. It would seem that even then, we couldn't "all just get along." In 1878, evidence of political activity and government involvement in local matters is found, when, after years of fighting over the high cost of the privately owned "toll road" through Cajon Pass, (sound familiar?) the County Board of Supervisors ordered the property owner to upgrade the road. To avoid this, the owner sold the toll road franchise and it remained in place until 1882 when the charter finally expired.

It seems that transportation issues in the Victor Valley have a long history. The irony of a fight over the future of Cajon Pass more 125 years later should not be lost on any of us.

In 1926, US Route 66 literally put us on the map as the primary street through Victorville. In 1940, civic leaders approached the US Army with a proposal to develop an airfield, promoting our mild climate, open space and availability of services from Victorville and Adelanto. In 1941 Victorville Army Airfield opened and pilot training began. The name change to George Air Force Base occurred in 1947.

### Moving forward

Post World War II, the Victor Valley was moving forward.

Many stationed at George liked the climate and affordable land and stayed or returned to start businesses, find jobs, create homes and begin families.

For many years, George AFB was the economic and social force within the region. Property owners happily rented to the military that paid on time and maintained the property. Local businesses had customers with steady incomes. For many years, "the sound of freedom" rang through our skies.

Our desert attracted entrepreneurs including M. Penn Phillips in Hesperia, Clyde Tatum in Victorville and Newt Bass and Bud Westlund in Apple Valley. The interconnectivity of these mavericks, beginning in the 1940s and continuing for decades, is apparent. Tatum constructed the first homes at George. Community leaders needed one another and the citizens and vice versa. When Bass and Westlund developed Apple Valley, they also built a water system, a radio station and a country club. When Bass donated land for the hospital, Tatum built the first building.

Phillips built the Hesperia Golf Course and created the Hesperia Chamber. Tatum built the Green Tree Inn, the golf course and the more than 1,000 homes surrounding it.

The small size of each of the communities dictated a need to work together and those who wanted to be financially and professionally successful did so. Stoddard Jess built his turkey farm and later turned it into the current Jess Ranch. The area had a very pro-growth attitude and development was welcome. The first McDonalds in the 1970s was front-page news. Construction on Victor Valley College began in 1963 and Continental Telephone was a major employer.

The creation of so many of our landmarks, along with a diversity of major employers, tells us that somehow community leaders managed to get along. If they didn't always see eye to eye, we imagine they put aside personal differences and thought about the needs of their community.

How do we know? The end result speaks for itself. Things got done, jobs were created, progress occurred. Through the end of the 1980s, the High Desert had it going on. Until it didn't.

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