

THE INDEPENDENT • THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2012

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian

Masud Mehran

A native of Tehran, Iran, Masud Mehran was born in 1920. His father, who worked for the government in Tehran, died when Masud was only 16 years old, leaving his mother and her six sons and one daughter to face the disruptive World War II years. In 1943 after completion of a law degree at the University of Tehran, Masud Mehran emigrated from war-torn Iran to the United States with his wife, Maryam. The journey was long and difficult, first by car to Pakistan, then by train to Bombay where they waited two months for their ship, which took 70 days to reach the United States as it tried to avoid German submarines.

He enrolled at Cornell University; by 1946 he had earned a master's degree in economics. After graduation he and Maryam and their new son, Casey, traveled around the United States and Canada with a trailer. Then Mehran and his family returned to Iran. He found the country under the threat of communism and with a shaky economic situation. They decided to return to the U.S.

On their tour, the family had particularly liked Northern California. They came to Livermore, where they enjoyed the beautiful scenery and the mild climate. Energetic 5 ft. 7-inch tall Masud chose construction as his career because he wanted to work with something that had tangible results, and he felt that it

could be a highly profitable business. Masud bought five lots in the neighborhood of Second and Q Streets. Borrowing money, he began construction and sold his first five homes for \$10,000 each in 1951. He and Maryam had another son, Alexander. He called his business the Sunset Development Company.

In 1957 he bought a 506-acre vineyard south of Livermore from William Wagoner and convinced the city to annex the area. Mehran built Granada Village there; upon completion in 1964, the subdivision had 1,800 homes, a grade school, a shopping center, and a swimming club. The average home price was \$18,000. Mehran's homes were well built with many amenities. He said that houses were no longer just a shelter—they must have finesse and charm. "Quality is our biggest selling point," he liked to say. His new homes come with a five year warranty.

When I moved to Livermore with my family in 1970, we bought one of Mehran's Sunset homes in Granada Village on Ontario Drive. It was well built,

and I still remember fondly its indoor barbecue and two ovens. Our children enjoyed swimming at the Cabana Club, and we watched Smith Elementary School being built. Mendenhall Middle School and its accompanying park were just over the back fence. An article in the *Herald and News* in 1969 said that Sunset Homes at that time housed one-third of Livermore's population. Their new houses were selling from \$29,950 to \$36,950. By 1975 Sunset Development Company had grossed \$109 million.

Through much of the history of California, population growth and the development of cities to accommodate it have been unquestioned as being in the public interest. But the environmental movement that began in the 1970s denounced unbridled growth as a threat to the quality of life. In Livermore in the fall of 1971 a grassroots group of citizens concerned about school double sessions, lack of water and sewage facilities, and increasingly smoggy days, formed an organization called Save All Valley Environments (SAVE).

The group pushed the city council to put their growth-limiting proposal on the ballot in April 1972. The measure passed, closing the door to new housing projects if adequate school, water, and sewage capacity were not in place. Open seats on the city council were won by SAVE's candidates, Don Miller and Archer Futch. During the 1970s the council limited growth in Livermore to 2%. This, of course, set up confrontations between the council and the city's premier growth exponent, Masud Mehran. In 1973 he decided that when he had finished his two newest developments, The Meadows at Portola and North Livermore, and Shadowbrook on Arroyo Road, that he was leaving Livermore. He said that it had become too difficult and uncertain to continue building homes here. His final gift to the city was Ravenswood and its accompanying 32.6 acres.

Mehran became a United States citizen and has remained proud of the opportunities available to us here. In a newspaper interview Mehran said, "In a free country such as ours, if a person engages in a legitimate activity, familiarizes himself as deeply as possible with the complexities of his field, works hard continually, and remains loyal and faithful to people surrounding him ... such a person cannot fail." His father was a poet, and per-

haps Mehran has followed in his footsteps by making an art of homebuilding.

Discouraged by the atmosphere in Livermore, Mehran moved to San Ramon and took up commercial real estate, developing the Bishop Ranch Business Park; he remains chairman of the board of Sunset Development Company; his son, Alexander, is president and CEO; and his grandson, Alex, the general manager. In an interview in the *Livermore Herald and News* by John Oliver in 1970, Masud Mehran said of his adopted country: "People who are born here don't appreciate what America has that other countries don't have. . . . In some ways I'm more American than men born here, because when a man comes here, as I have, he realizes how great are the advantages." Mehran was elected to the California Business Industry Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1990.

(Readers can reach me at am50homan@yahoo.com.)



TRAVEL BUG

In Downtown
Livermore

(925) 447-4300

2269 Third Street

www.travelbuglivermore.com