

When Dan Lee flew his plane from Oregon to the Livermore Airport for a job interview in 1959, Livermore had a population of 15,900; when he retired in 1989, the population was about 50,000. He was hired as the director of the city's public works department. During those 30 years, he was in charge of the upgrades necessary to the rapidly growing city's infrastructure.

Born in 1926, Dan Lee grew up in Rapid City, South Dakota. After his sophomore year of high school, he joined the Navy as a volunteer at age 17 during World War II. He served his hitch at Midway Island in the South Pacific doing electrical work on submarines stationed there. When he returned to the U.S., he applied to the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City. He aced the entrance exams. By this time, his wife, Leota (Taylor), said, "He was motivated to do well in school." Neighbors in Rapid City, they were married in 1949.

Dan graduated in 1951 and was hired by the Oregon State Bridge Department. The Lee family made seven moves in nine years. Dan was determined to leave the bridge department to stop the merry-go-round. He took the Oregon State proficiency test for his professional civil engineer's license and passed it easily. He began working for various cities in Oregon as an engineer. When he applied to Livermore, Dan discovered that the Oregon professional civil engineer test had no reciprocity in California, so he had to take the California version of the two-day test. He passed that, too. His appointment as the Director of Public Works for Livermore was approved by the City Council on August 17, 1959.

His first major tasks were the coordination of the movement of the airport to a new site west of the city and the establishment

Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian



Daniel Lee



Dan Lee (on the right) receiving an award in 1993. Photo courtesy of Leota Lee.

of a golf course next to it. One of the reasons for his being hired was his recent experience in Albany, Oregon, where he had been in charge of moving that city's airport. He also learned how to fly there. He was given lessons by a crop duster friend, receiving his pilot's license in 1956. Dan worked many hours on the design of the airport and the golf course. He also had a major public relations job convincing Pleasanton and Dublin of the feasibility of the new site. After his retirement in 1989, he was appointed to the Livermore Airport Advisory Commission for several years. He was very proud of the successful completion of the Airport Protection Plan in 1991; he did not want to help move any more airports. The plan created a buffer zone around the airport where no new housing would be permitted. Dan said, "This is precedent setting. Not only is it vital to the Livermore Airport, it will show the way for other cities that need to protect their airports." The *Inde-*

pendent said that during his work for the Commission, "He became a real activist, convincing city and county decision-makers to approve the all-important Zone." Because of his work for the airport, the Dan Lee Terminal is named in his honor.

Another large project Dan shepherded through to completion was the shifting of the double-track system of the Southern Pacific and Western Pacific railroads through Livermore onto a single track as well as the building of the underpasses on Murrieta Boulevard, P Street, and North Livermore Avenue. This involved long negotiations with the two railroad companies to come to a compromise. City planning commission meetings ran late into the night.

In his spare time from 1976 to 1978, Dan built a VariEze plane in his garage, using a design by Burt Rutan. After Dan's death, Leota gave it to the Oakland Aviation Museum. My husband and I went to see the VariEze several days ago at the Oakland Airport. It is hanging from the ceiling of the museum,

so in a place safe from visitors' fingers. Calling the plane "a pretty little puppy," the docent said that it only has 300 hours on it. The immaculate white plane is very unusual in design, with small canard wings in front in addition to regular wings at the back. It has a "pusher" propeller, meaning that it pushes the plane from the back. My husband remembers seeing it fly over our house a number of times, probably on the way to Sacramento. The VariEze is small—only 580 pounds—and can travel at a maximum speed of 195 mph. It is a two-seater. Leota often flew with him.

Another important undertaking as the head of Public Works was Dan's revamping of the city's sewer and storm sewer systems. The sewer plant had been moved from Rincon Avenue to its current site at Kitty Hawk Road and Jack London Boulevard just after Dan Lee came to Livermore. Leota remembered that Dan went alone down into the new storm sewer built on Portola Avenue and found several problems that the contractor had to fix. John Shirley, mayor during Dan's tenure, remembered him well: "He studied a situation very carefully. When he made up his mind, he would stay with his decision. He was strong-minded, his own man."

Dan and Leota had four children—Mark, Celia, Dennis, and Robin. He built a second story on their Sunset house. The Lees often went on hiking and backpacking trips. In the winter months they skied at Lake Tahoe. Dan taught all but the youngest of his 11 grandchildren to ski. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at Wente Vineyards Restaurant. Dan died suddenly of a stroke while he and Leota were staying at a motel in Colorado Springs. He was 76 years old.

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