

More than fifty years ago in March 1961, the Marnel Development Company filed articles of incorporation for Palm City Association, a development of 550 acres in the Coachella Valley in Riverside County. It was the first retirement community in California. A little more than a year later, after the promising growth of Palm City, on 8 June 1962 the Marnel Development Company broke ground for a second retirement community for "active adults" on 1,000 acres northeast of Livermore. The site of this new development, called Springtown, was a treeless valley northeast of the city; the area had been annexed to Livermore in May.

The California Water Service, which supplied the city of Livermore, refused to provide water to the leapfrog development of Springtown—it was a considerable distance from its existing pipes. The city, in cooperation with the Marnel Development Company, started its own water system, Livermore Municipal Water. Marnel paid for a water storage tank off Dalton Road and for a water main from that tank site to the intersection of First Street and Mines Road. At that point, the new main was connected to Zone 7's water pipeline; thus, Springtown, unlike the older part of Livermore, receives its water entirely from Zone 7.

Home ownership in Springtown was limited to people 50

years of age or older, and the builders claimed to have designed the homes with the special needs of senior citizens in mind. Children under 18 could visit but not reside permanently in the community.

The June 1962 groundbreaking ceremony marked the beginning of construction of Springtown's nine-hole golf course, which meanders through the development. Photographers captured the moment with Livermore Chamber of Commerce president A.L. Clement, Mayor Manuel Medeiros, and Marnel president Nels Severin holding a shovel full of golf balls.

The grand opening several months later in January 1963 of the entire 1,000-acre complex lasted four days over New Year's weekend. Two- and three-bedroom houses were priced from \$14,250. Free champagne and soft drinks were served each day from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Music was provided by a trio each afternoon. The official opening moment came when the 40-foot

## Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan

### SPRINGTOWN



fountain was turned on in the lagoon. Today, the fountain no longer is in use, and most of the residents call the lagoon the "duck pond"—many ducks and Canada geese are in residence there.

In October 1964 Sproul Homes took over the development from Marnel and began its own section of homes no longer reserved for seniors. In the new family tract, air-conditioned homes sold in the \$16,950 to \$25,900 range; all came with two baths; one of the models had a sunken living room. By 1967, as houses in the retirement community were sold and bought by new owners, the age requirement had become a non-issue. Although the original developer noted an age restriction in his sales brochures, it was never officially included in the Springtown Homeowner's Association bylaws. Realtors revealed that they had never enforced the age ruling. Palm City had dropped any restrictions by 1964.

Several weeks ago I visited

the original buildings on Larkspur Drive, just a left turn off Bluebell Drive as you come in from Interstate 580; Rebecca Mathers, the office manager for the Springtown Association, kindly gave me a guided tour of the remaining community holdings. The smallest pool has been filled in, but the other two remain for Springtown residents to enjoy on hot summer days. The croquet and shuffle courts built near the pools are gone. There is still a building with locker rooms for those who are using the pool. The largest building houses the meeting hall. The facility, which can seat approximately 400, has a stage, a kitchen, dressing rooms, and rest rooms, can be rented by the general public. It is clean and freshly painted. Rebecca said that all the windows and blinds in the buildings had been replaced two years ago. The street-facing structures are attractive with their porticos held up by brick columns and the landscaping of green grass and palm trees.

The arts and crafts building

has undergone the most changes during the years. It now houses the office and snack bar for the golf course, a music store, and the office for the Springtown Association. Rebecca brought out the original blue prints, and we looked at the plans for this building. It included a photography room with a dark room, a sewing room, a room for people who wanted to work on jewelry or leather, a ceramics room with kilns, and an art room. Another building houses the social rooms, with a main room nicely decorated with stuffed furniture and two smaller rooms, one with poker tables and one with smaller tables where we interrupted five ladies who come regularly to work on fine needlework. They said that they were the remnants of an adult ed class that was once held here.

The golf course is now run by a private company called Sycamore Golf. Golfers can play nine holes or eighteen holes by using different tee-boxes when they go around the course again. Although no parks had been planned for the development in addition to the golf fairway, now there are two parks: Marlin Pound and Ralph Wattenburger. No schools exist in the original Springtown—the closest are east of the area off Scenic Drive. Today, Rebecca counts 505 homes in Springtown.

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