

President's Message

Tom Davidson

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A Happy Spring to all. What a great time of year this is- getting the garden up to speed, cleaning up around the home, getting out on our trails, and enjoying our parks. We are all so very fortunate to have these amenities.

Congratulations to Mark Maize on winning the Gary Bandy Memorial Trophy. As a true advocate for our trails for many years and volunteering countless hours toward the maintenance of them, Mark is truly deserving of this great award!

A huge thank you goes to Laura Thomas and everyone who helped make Denim and Diamonds so successful this year. In spite of a bad economy we had over 100 people attend this fun event. Congressman Ed Royce was in attendance and presented Mark Maize with a proclamation from the US Congress- Thanks to Congressman Royce!

The Grand Marshal for this years 4th of July Parade will be Julie Maurer. Julie is the keeper of the e-Tree and the ultimate volunteer- we are so proud to have her as this year's Grand Marshal- congratulations Julie!

The theme for this year's 4th of July Parade is, "Honoring Our Volunteer Firemen". We have a rich history here in OPA with the volunteer firemen and we hope the Orange County Fire Authority can see these great volunteers as an asset to the county.

This Spring is an especially important time as we find ourselves under attack from a developer and a few self appointed activists from outside our community who think they can plan what is best for Orange Park Acres. Orange Park Acres is in its 81st year and we have a Specific Plan that was adopted by the City of Orange 36 years ago. Why do we have a specific plan? We have a specific plan because OPA is so unique it needs protection. 36 years ago our leadership felt we were under attack as developers eyed the large lots and the open space and we are under attack again.

JMI and their carousel of consultants now think that the Orange Park Acres Specific Plan means little, if anything, to them. They want their own specific plan for their own project. They want to ignore the land at Sully Miller that lies in the Orange Park Acres Specific Plan and build 460 apartment type units on 25 acres! That does NOT work with the OPA Specific Plan and it should NOT work with any neighborhood that surrounds the project.

This developer will not tie the Ridgeline and Sully Miller projects together- if we follow the developers lead we will lose golf, swimming, tennis- that for generations have been enjoyed by seniors, students, families, junior summer programs, and much more. Why were all these activities shut down? Because a developer who evidently paid too much money for land can't make money- we the people lose! Now the developer tells us that he must have senior housing in order to make his project work. A bad economy and bad timing on land purchases should not dictate what kind of a development gets approved.

The OPA Board (the elected board, not a self appointed board) is unanimously in favor of the 40 plus acres of open space zoning being talked about north of Santiago Creek on the Mabury Ranch side. We would unanimously support a change in zoning of the 12.6 acres of residential property that lies on the Mabury Ranch side of the creek, but not at the risk seeing the Orange Park Acres Specific Plan compromised.

Now is the time to band together! It does not matter whether the 460 apartment units are used for senior housing, condos, or whatever- if any of us sell out to a developer and ignore our specific plan we are saying bye- bye to one of the most unique neighborhoods around. This will be the beginning of the end for OPA.

The developer is threatening us with loss of our arena if we don't follow along. For what? The loss of our neighborhood? Give us a break!

Two years ago the developer was going to build on larger lots at Sully Miller, include recreation amenities lost at Ridgeline, help to improve the OPA arena, contribute to a 4H site on the arena property, and contribute to other upgrades on the OPA arena site. Just like the arena and the "riding club" proposed for Ridgeline- oh wait! We were promised a covered arena at Ridgeline at one time- and now? Now all that is proposed at Ridgeline is dirt that the greater OPA community is supposed to improve- at OUR cost! The developer calls this Ridgeline Equestrian Estates and expects us to build an arena for his buyers- if he can get his project approved. This is NOT good for the community!

Because the economy is in the tank and this developer is in trouble we are supposed to make bad decisions that will affect the future of OPA. WRONG! We must work together to see that this type of development does not ruin our neighborhoods.

As one JMI consultant pointed out senior housing is needed- no one will argue that. But it must be built in the right location. The consultant went on to say these would be active seniors, but they don't drive very much. The consultant also went on to say there would be NO increase in traffic-Wrong! There is no traffic on this site right now. Driving is the only connection seniors have to the outside world. They drive to the doctor, market, drug store, shopping, if they are active, they are on the move. If they are not active then the services come to them- food, laundry, doctors, 24-hour care, round the clock shift changes, emergency vehicles coming and going. Senior housing needs to be near the amenities its guests need. If we allow this type of commercial enterprise what would be next?

The process for this project has started and comments and concerns must be received by the City of Orange no later than June 12, 2009. If you are concerned send your comments to; Mr. Chad Ortlieb, Senior Planner, City of Orange, 300 E. Chapman Ave., Orange, CA 92866, Re: Rio Santiago. Include your contact information; name, address, etc.

This is the time to protect OPA. This is NOT the time to say oh well the poor developer should make money. We are ALL capitalists- I love it when people can make money! But NO developer should be allowed to have a project that goes directly against OUR specific plan- or any other specific plan for that matter- that's why we have specific plans!

Thanks for reading. Pray for our troops and pray for OPA.

Happy Trails,
Tom Davidson
President, Orange Park Association