



Neighborhoods

Big Canyon: Landfill to Luxury

By Duncan Forgey

The three Bandel brothers were the best “box sliders” east of the Back Bay. Being part of the largest family in Corona Del Mar, these three, of 18 Bandel siblings, were well known for their maneuvers on the slopes. Like commandos on a mission, they passed through barbed wire fences and found the perfect hill for their adventure. They were armed with thick Amana refrigerator cartons and enough Abba Zabba bars for the day. The only thing that concerned them was that one of the trucks carrying an Irvine Ranch security guard might discover them.



Aerial view of Big Canyon shows high density of exclusive village built around golf course.

The boys gathered at the top of the hill and alternately rode the “wave” down the hillside to the canyon floor. It was a fine display of childhood enthusiasm and innovation.

But in 1970, the hillside and canyon floor, with its tranquil cow pasture, were transformed from an early California “plein air” landscape to a highly complex real estate development by The Irvine Company, whose goal was to create a totally new “lifestyle” for Newport Beach.

Big Canyon would be Newport Beach’s opportunity to join the “establishment” of the finer neighborhoods of the Los Angeles Basin. It would be a golf course community sculptured after the Los Angeles clubs – very exclusive and very private.

Originally destined to be a landfill, Big Canyon’s ultimate role was to play home and host to some of the most powerful people in Orange County. Many a business partnership would come together while putting for par or buying a round at the 19th hole. The membership roster of The Big Canyon Country Club and its resident owners reads like a *Who’s Who* in Orange County business and finance.

The original developers chosen for the project were Richard B.

Smith, McLain Development, Deane Development Company and Broadmoor Homes. This group developed a blend of apartments, condos and single-family homes. Additionally, lots were offered for custom home sites, ringing the golf course with views of the various holes.

The whole package included guarded gates for privacy, a clubhouse with stylish amenities for its members, including swimming facilities, tennis courts, banquet and restaurant services and additional parks to create a unique and full service family neighborhood.

Marion Buie, who currently represents The Irvine Company and its Newport Coast Development, was an early “pioneer” and a member of the first family to move into Big Canyon on September 1, 1971. Buie’s home was without electricity when they moved in and Broadmoor Homes was kind enough to put up a temporary pole in the back yard until the project was completed.

Big Canyon hit the local real estate scene with a bang. People from many parts of town “moved up” to Big Canyon. Prices ranged from \$71,000 to \$81,500 for a Broadmoor home. The 104 original custom home sites sold for \$120,000 and up. The Deane Condos originally sold for an aggressive of \$65,000 to \$80,000, for what was marketed as “Luxury Condominiums.”

Today, those prices have grown exponentially with the times. Currently, there are 12 custom homes for sale with the prices ranging from \$1,595,000 to \$3,985,000. The hottest product on the market is the original Broadmoor Homes, which can be purchased for around \$1,000,000 and then used to build a new

custom home on the site. This can push the price to \$2,995,000, similar to the one built by WMC Development at 17 Cypress Point.

Like many of the “older” developments of Newport Beach, Big Canyon’s sales in the early 90s were temporarily affected by the new home building up on the Newport Coast. In the initial stages of the sales on the hill, it appeared that the “tired” homes in Big Canyon would lag behind.

It did not take buyers long to see the value of the mature nature of Big Canyon and its lifestyle compared to the stark newness of Newport Coast. Many new families came into Big Canyon during that period, starting an amazing resurgence that continues today.

Big Canyon’s 390 acres have become a new playground for a new group of kids that hit golf balls at 9 am, eat sandwiches at the Club at 11 am, swim at noon, play tennis at 3 pm and take a quick trip to Fashion Island for some dinner and the latest flick. Not a bad place to hang your hat, wouldn’t you say?