



It's a High Time in the Village Tonight

By Duncan Forgey

The cobblestone streets are alive with activity. The inviting storefronts are like magnets to the many that frequent these streets. Sandals, bikes and trams traverse the bumpy streets. Exciting sounds and exotic aromas waft through the air, as if blown by a gentle sea breeze. It is a time of nostalgia as the pulse of the old town has finally come alive.

Antique stores, restaurants and an eclectic group of businesses give the town a unique ambiance. From the City Hall to wharf front, revelers and artisans abound. There is music on several street corners spotlighted by the authentic old street lamps that are reminiscent of the town's glory days. Smiles are the dress of the day.

Where is this magical place? Could it be the Gas Lamp District of San Diego or Seventh Street in downtown Long Beach? They, like most other cities, are redeveloping the downtown with fervor.



This fantasy should describe the Cannery Village and its neighboring Lido Village in Newport Beach. This historical center has been forgotten in a city gone amuck with newness and neon lights. Renovations exist in the minds of the locals, only to die on the desks of politicians. Once the heart and soul of Newport Beach, The Village, as Cannery and Lido Village used to be known, now lies dormant.

In the beginning it was not a fantasy. A lot of hard work and risk was taken by the hardy old-timers who saw a great value in the harbor. At the turn of the century, developers with names like Collins, Huntington, Lancaster and Hanson knew that the key to economic stability was McFadden's Landing. The Village grew slowly. \$40 lots before the turn of the century soon sold for \$600, then trebled to \$1800 by 1907. All looked rosy for the 30th Street area, until the Redondo Beach boom virtually stopped all beach purchasing to the south.

One of the earliest explorers in the Newport Harbor business dis-

trict was O.F. Bennra and his fish cannery. The fish were "canned" in glass jars but he was eventually shut down due to pollution and problems with the economy. Clarence Reed built an icehouse on 30th Street in 1923. Locals would deposit a quarter and listen for the cacophony of metallic clangs, as the frozen blocks traveled the long plank to the street as late as the early sixties. Also key to Newport's economic independence from other "big" cities was the Newport Lumber Company. It was built just after World War I and provided the staples needed for the building destined to come.

"Blue collar" Newport built the Village. Due to the distance to Los Angeles few professional people resided in Newport Beach until the 1950s. At that time, with successful promotion of Lido Isle by P.A. Palmer and others, The Village took on a prominent role in the development of Newport Beach.

Hosting the City Hall, government offices and the police station, The Village was the hub of civic activity. Restaurants like Karem's, Berkshire's, Sea Shanty, Crab Cooker and, of course, Frank Muldoon's Stuff T-Shirt made it an area renowned for entertainment, drink and good food. Other key businesses were Baxter and Cicero Sails, Richard's Lido Market, Schock Boats, and Hans Dickman Boatyard, to name but a few. But as environmental concerns and political restrictions squeezed out boatyards, canneries and metallurgy businesses, the whole area seemed to freeze in time and has stayed that way ever since.

In 1966 the Irvine Company broke ground on the 450-acre site for Fashion Island. It has slowly drawn the lifeblood out of The Village. First the restaurants, then the clothes shoppers, then the police department and finally the moviegoers were dragged over to the East Side of the bay, leaving a void in the Village.

Many shop owners have indicated that times are improving but still hope the city will provide the support that the area needs. Business has recently picked up at Atkinson's Men Clothing Store, one of the oldest remaining shops that reflects the small town flavor that people still desire.

Today's lots valued at or around \$300,000 are some of the best-valued land in all of Newport Beach. They do not often come up for sale. As was recently reflected by the "ping pong" publicity of the sale and resale of the Cannery Restaurant Property, the locals desire to upgrade the area, yet maintain The Village's historical importance.

Tread with care as you wake up the politicians. Then, dust off your soft-soled shoes and get ready for our own French Quarter – Newport style. A down home-down town complete with dining and dancing.