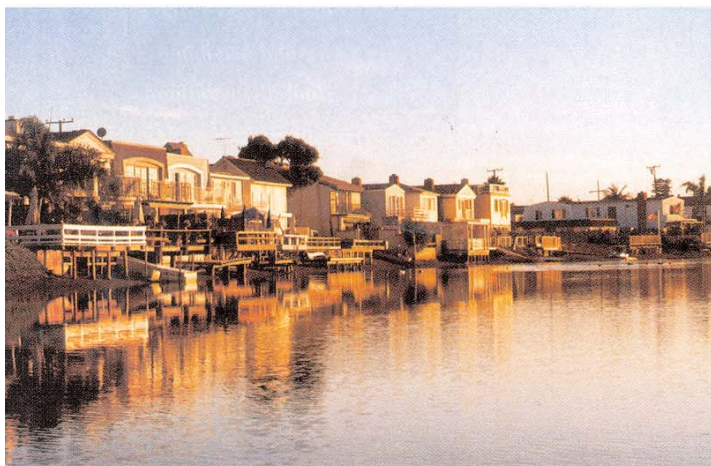


## Neighborhoods

### NEWPORT SHORES: RED TAILS, TENNIS TOURNAMENTS AND THE OXBOW INCIDENT

By Duncan Forgey

The red-tailed predator flew in large concentric circles balancing in the ocean breeze. With precision and grace, the birds stalled into the cool winds, dropped its legs and screeched in pride. Below, in the waters beneath the bluff, a stately Snowy Egret moved in slow and methodical steps closer to the tiny fish that would become a meal. Still deeper in the marsh-like setting, migrating Mallard ducks skimmed across the canal, and an endangered Least Tern called desperately for recognition by a mate. For generations, this unique setting of water, sand and bluff tops have been home to hundreds of species of birds.



The modern history of Newport Beach started at McFadden's Wharf, then over the years moved south and east towards Corona del Mar. Growth and development were in neighborhoods such as The Bluffs, Dover Shores, Irvine Terrace, Big Canyon, Belcourt, etc. Each subsequent development had the indistinguishable fingerprint of an Irvine Company project.

There was one area that languished behind the others. This was in West Newport and was known as the "Oxbow." The Oxbow, sometimes known as the Seashore Colony, was a sandy and muddy spit of land running from the Santa Ana River south to approximately 60th Street. Underdeveloped for years, due to the fact that it lay in a riverbed, The Shores, as it would become known, did not start to evolve until a few risky individuals built homes in this natural flood plane.

These few homes, plus the property of Signal Oil Company lay in wait for the right time to create a neighborhood full of charm and romance. This opportunity came in the late 1950's when developer

Donald Ayres, the Signal Landmark Company and the City of Newport Beach developed a game plan that would sister both the Italian and Los Angeles versions of Venice. Canal-front homes, a clubhouse unparalleled in Newport Beach with two pools, a tennis court and swimming beach, and an acre recreation park were part of the plan.

There was only one small problem. The 437 lots sat four feet below flood level. This meant that if not properly rectified, the residents could be waist high in water if the tides and the rains so desired. Ayres' Newport Shores Company campaigned to dig out the Santa Ana River Channel with a six-yard dragline, which created the present day configuration. With this accomplished, it was the end of the Oxbow.

In 1960 construction was started and "Newport Shores" became a reality. Original prices ranged from \$18,200 to \$29,560. Down payments were from \$2,100. The purchase did not include the land, but lease agreements cost \$25 a month. The low prices, compared to other areas of Newport Beach, made this development look like a natural.

Newport Shores, however, was a victim of circumstance. Rumors of foul smelling air, tenant dominated party zones within the community and flooding problems kept some home buyers away. Others, however, saw the glass half-full, with a beach-oriented community close to restaurants and the ocean, plus a great environment to raise children. Many of these residents still live here and their children are now moving in to raise the grandchildren. One such family is Gil Lukosky and his wife Valerie who moved here in 1973.

"The Shores had swim teams composed of 170 children. Even more intense than the kids' competitions were the numerous tennis battles that pitted resident against resident in three-day tournaments that had a carnival like environment," said Lukosky.

Another aspect of Newport Shores has been the ongoing saga of the Santa Ana River Marina, which was proposed to transform the entire region into a high-end luxury neighborhood with expensive view homes and a boat marina for 2000 yachts. This concept has been kicked around since the 1960's, but every attempt was thwarted. The idea has slowly drifted off into the memories of old timers with an occasional, but not so serious, mention now and then.

Today, most of the land is now fee ownership and prices in the Shores range from the mid \$400,000s to \$800,000. There has yet to be a million dollar sale in this unique neighborhood, but that day is not far off. It still stands as one of the best deals in Newport Beach. Prices are fair and the amenities are many. Even if the projected Banning Ranch project goes in on the bluff top, it will help property values in Newport Shores. The only true victims may be some of the treasured winged friends that do so much to enhance the skies of the forgotten "Oxbow." ■