

Desi and Seagrove Park A Lesson in Cooperation

James Brady's story in the October 7 issue of PARADE featured Lucie Arnaz and Desi Arnaz, Jr. The "I Love Lucy" show will be fifty years old on October 15, 2001. The story brought back a lot of memories, because those two, at the ages of 21 and 19, respectively, helped raise money for Del Mar's Seagrove Park.

"What? Are you kidding?" No, I'm not kidding! It all happened this way-----

In late 1969, the City Council was talking about acquiring the land at the foot of 15th Street. It was then owned by the Ed Fletcher Company. By the time the Del Mar City Council got serious, the Ed Fletcher heirs had bundled the remaining assets of the company into one package for sale. The Del Mar property was zoned for apartments or condominiums.

As Mayor, I was unsuccessful in persuading Ferdinand Fletcher to break this parcel out of the package. The Ed Fletcher Company assets were sold to National Pacific Development Company, and we had to deal with National Pacific's Robert Eichel, who is still doing business in **San Dieguito** to this day.

The 1-1/2 acre parcel was offered to Del Mar for \$215,000. The City Manager, Jack Shelver, told us we could spend only half of that. So, Councilman Ralph Staver persuaded a young developer named Doug Allred, who has since become one of San Diego County's most successful real estate entrepreneurs, to buy the whole parcel and sell the city the northerly half.

Allred told me recently, "I didn't have any money then, either, but I knew how to tie up a property!"

Del Mar closed escrow on the northerly half in December, 1971, having raised the property taxes by \$.30 per hundred of assessed valuation and borrowed \$100,000 from the sewer fund to pay for it. The action was not overwhelmingly popular with the taxpayers.

The price was \$97,500, and the council had pledged not to spend more than \$80,000 from public funds. Thus started a fundraising program for the balance.

Payne Johnson and Don McQuiston and Ronnie Delaney (for the PTA) joined the committee. At the kick-off party held at Helen Woodward's house on Sandy Lane, Desi Arnaz, who had accepted the role as honorary chairman, suggested to me that the way to encourage people to donate was to give them something in return. He mentioned a "show."

In June, I telephoned Desi and reminded him of his comment, and asked him if he really meant it. He did, and that very afternoon, Jack Shelver, Bill Arballo and I called on Desi at his beach house just north of 19th Street. Desi phoned Jimmy Durante, who promptly came over in his beach robe and red slippers with zinc oxide ointment protecting his nose.

Hollywood Stars for Parks! It was Desi's show from the get-go. Bill Arballo persuaded Ted Gildred to let us borrow the pool clubhouse at the Lomas Santa Fe Country Club. Arballo recalls that Desi planned the menu—hobo stew—so that most of the \$25 ticket cost could go to the park. According to Arballo, Desi said they would love it because it was his stew. He was right!

Bill Arballo, Del Mar's third mayor, Councilman Ralph Staver, Jack Shelver and Frank Losano, of the Country Club, did a magnificent job handling 1000 details.

Marcella Rabwin was in charge of ticket sales. Edie Arnaz sold the most. Bill Shoemaker bought a table. Margaret Mahoney and Carol Fletcher were Marcella's right and left hands. Our newly elected Congressman, Clair Burgener, was there.

Desi hired the 12-piece orchestra from the "I Love Lucy" show to play at Lomas Santa Fe on Friday, August 25, 1972. He persuaded his kids, Lucie and Desi, Jr. to join him. Lucie sang and danced; Desi, Jr. sat in on drums with the band. Liza Minnelli, who was dating Desi, Jr. at the time, flew out from NY just to sing for Del Mar. Her song: "Cabaret." Songwriter Sammy Fain played some of his famous compositions on the piano. And, of course, Del Mar's beloved Honorary Mayor, Jimmy Durante, was there with "Ink-a-Dink-a-Do."

As a closer, Desi sang Harry Belafonte's "Turn Around," made famous by The Kingston Trio. It brought tears to every eye in the house. He might have been singing about his own children, now grown up.

Four hundred guests paid \$25 each for the most fabulous show this side of a Hollywood studio, and raised \$8,900 for Seagrove Park.

Thank you, Lucie and Desi, Jr. I hope you see this story, and know that Del Mar remembers. And come on out and see the park that you and your father helped create.

You'll like it!



Tom and Desi Arnaz
August 25, 1972

###