

Chapter 5

THROUGH THE DOLDRUMS

Spending eight years on the Governing Board of the Santa Clarita Community College allowed me to gain some seasoning, and learn the meaning of patience. I had developed a feeling that rotation of offices was in order, largely as a result of Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn's being shut out of the chairmanship so many times. However, the rotation of offices was not something anyone on the board of trustees cared about, even though I raised it annually. I was elected vice president-clerk in my fourth year on the board, and spent three years in that position before being elevated to the presidency during budget cutbacks, at a time no one else wanted the job.

The one job I loved was making the two-minute president's speech and handing out diplomas at graduation. Pete Huntsinger served many times as president, but graduation week was also his week of vacation on Balboa Island, so I got to handle the president's duties five times in eight years.

While I was determined to do my job and stay out of the limelight, as well as the papers, unless I was speaking for the district, one change I worked for was a system of gauging real spendable income accurately. In 1977 I presented the problem to the White House, thinking that they would appreciate the suggestion.

As a college trustee I must support a negotiator who tells teachers they cannot have a cost of living raise. As a teacher I see my spendable real income decline every year. As a taxpayer I frequently see rates going up at the same time my \$20,000 house is reassessed at \$65,000.

The problem is that in all three positions I want to do, and receive, and pay, what is fair.

I have no way of find out what is fair because the federal government does not, to my knowledge, publish any meaningful figures except those for cost of living.

I feel strongly that we need some "standard of living" figures to be published in addition to the COL each month.

I was writing to the Carter administration. Perhaps they did not want to publish anything about the standard of living because we were not doing well in an era of stagflation. There was some correspondence, but it went nowhere.

However, no one seemed to understand what I wanted, including fellow board members, teachers and fellow taxpayers. I thought perhaps Cathie Wright, then our representative in the State Assembly, would understand it, if we spoke one-on-one about it, and the state legislature might lead the way. She did not.

In 1980 I was summoned to Governor Brown's office to receive an award on behalf of the district. We were working hard on energy conservation, with great success. A number of us gathered in his outer office for a reception, and I was standing near the door to his inner office when he came out with an aide. I heard him ask, "Why am I here?"

The aide replied, "These people are here to receive awards on behalf of their agencies because of their success in conserving energy."

I made no effort to shake the governor's hand as he circulated around the room. I thought that if he did not know what was going on, a handshake would mean nothing. Later, I learned to appreciate what he was going through. His schedule was far busier than mine would ever be.

Bob Rockwell retired as Superintendent-President, and the board hired Leland B. Newcomer as his successor. Lee had had every chief executive experience an educational administrator could have except that of serving as president of a community college, and came on board in the midst of a Proposition 13-induced budget crisis. He was tough. Faculty and administrators had hanged him in effigy after he had cut sixty-eight positions in the Grossmont Unified High School District in San Diego County. A Dec. 17, 1965, *Time* article had cited his skills in bringing efficiency to the Clark County, Nevada, schools. His job was to cut the budget, and student senator Don Benton and student body president Joe Heath were determined to help the faculty stir the pot.

Benton criticized the board members for spending money to attend the annual conference of Community College Trustees in Honolulu, saying that only William Broyles had saved the district money by not going. I did not buy that argument. Broyles was a cipher on the board who literally contributed nothing to the public debate. He did not know how, and would never learn because the conferences were the primary source of education in board member skills. The year Benton had been a student board member he attended the conference, albeit in less glamorous Detroit, and managed to run up a bill nearly 50% higher than mine. I had no qualms about spending \$220 on air fare to go to Hawaii and stay in an \$18 a night hotel to attend a conference, particularly when I needed to develop every skill I could to help make intelligent decisions about the multi-million dollar budget. But then Benton was warming up to run for public office.

Broyles had written a letter to the Board to inform us of a recall movement against Pete Huntsinger, Fran Claffey and Kevin Lynch, with the cause given, "These board members have consistently failed to act in the best interest of the community." I was disgusted that anyone could even consider a recall on such a vague premise.

It went nowhere.

Meanwhile the Canyon County Formation Committee stayed alive, electing officers in February 1981. Harry Fedderson was named president, Carl Cribbs, Nancy Albrecht and Bonnie Mills as vice presidents, Carmen Sarro as secretary, and Robert Silverstein treasurer. I was chosen as executive vice-president, which meant at the time that I kept up the filings with the state and paid the minimal bills out of my own pocket. We kept the organization alive so we would be ready if county formation would prove practical.

A couple of months later Rich Varenchik, then with the *Daily News* in Van Nuys, which was the successor to *The Valley News and Green Sheet*, asked me what I thought we should name our proposed city. In jest I said, "I'd like to name

it after my birth place, La Mancha.” After all, I thought, I had been tilting at windmills for years.

Diane Velarde Hernandez, my former student and later a colleague at San Fernando High School, said that was a terrible name for a city. Someone calling himself Sancho Panza II told *The Signal* that it could mean “blemish” or “scar,” or even “herd of cattle.”

On April 17, 1980, I wrote to Richard B. West, who was still in the Statistical Research and Consulting Division of the State Board of Equalization. We had mapped out seven different areas of the Santa Clarita Valley and I requested reports on each of the seven areas. We wanted to take a strong combination of areas and move for cityhood. He responded on May 6, with a copy to Ruth Benell of LAFCO.

Enclosed are revenue estimates for the entire Santa Clarita Valley. We are not able to provide similar detail for the several communities within the valley. As you recall, it was upon your suggestion several years ago that we created a special area code for Santa Clarita Valley and this now provides machine tabulated data for the entire valley but not for its components.

Growth in taxable sales has been exceptionally strong over the past three years, averaging about 20 percent a year. Eliminating the effects of inflation, however, real sales growth was approximately 11 percent a year. I am not prepared to offer estimates beyond calendar 1981....

I hope this information will serve your purpose.

It did more than that. It let Ruth Benell know we were getting good numbers, even if they did not provide the precise information we wanted.

Months would go by with little mention of incorporation, but in July 1981 we had a relatively successful meeting at Placerita Junior High School, attended by about forty people. It was obvious that public interest was slight, but the meetings were helping to define why people were interested.

With Proposition 13 having eliminated property taxes as a major concern, having a government that could represent our valley to other governments, local meetings accessible to the public, and bringing land use under local control were major attractions.

In August we were joined by Ruth Benell of the Local Agency Formation Commission, who lent credibility to our budget presentation. By this time we had been getting figures regularly from the county and the state. We showed revenues of \$8,508,663, and expenditures of \$8,381,603, allowing for a surplus of \$127,060. That was before other probable sources of revenue which Mrs. Benell, a former mayor of Pico Rivera, reviewed. At this time popular support for the name Santa Clarita was surfacing.

I made a quick trip to New Hampshire to see my grandmother, aged 97, my Aunt Ruth, and a visiting English cousin, Mabel Allsop. There was moonlight on the woodshed, which meant fine weather ahead, but her heart failed before the end of the year.¹

In June I had filed, reluctantly, for reelection to the community college board. Don Benton was the only person who had filed for my seat. We had adopted numbered seats to make it easier for challengers, and with Linda Cabbage filing against Kevin Lynch for the other seat I no longer had the option of allowing those two to gain election to two seats. "To be blunt," I said, "I just don't think the board should be used as a stepping stone for partisan politics." Benton had said he wanted to be a U.S. Senator from California. He did make national news as a state senator from Vancouver, Washington, leading the protest of thirty-six of the forty-nine at the lost of their private dining room and French chefs during a capitol renovation project.²

I had not campaigned at all for reelection four years before, and had won a majority of the vote against five opponents. In this election I did go out walking door to door one day, distributing some flyers someone had had made for me. However, Benton was campaigning hard, and raised thousands of dollars in his bid for the \$20 a month seat. On election night Chris woke me up about 2:00 and said that the final results were in, and that I had lost by about 100 votes. I felt that I had let the college down by losing, but rolled over and went back to sleep. The final canvass showed that 4,136 people had cast ballots. In the race for Office No. 1 Don Benton received 2,000 votes and I had 1,788. For Office No. 3 Linda Cabbage defeated Kevin Lynch by 1,985 to 1,865.

I did get two notes of thanks. One was from Judge Adrian Adams. "My thanks for a job well done. In my days on a school board we didn't have these problems. If challenging incumbents in such offices continues to escalate no one will run but incompetents. Anyway, my sympathies and appreciation." Ron Myron, the Executive Director of the California Community College Trustees, also dropped me a note. I continued to serve on the College of the Canyons Foundation as long as I could, but resigned in June 1982, expressing the hope that the new board members "might become interested in public service rather than political power."

Late in November 1981 we were talking about forming a city of 150 square miles with a population of 80,000. Martin Burns of *The Signal* asked about Los Angeles County Fire and Sheriff's Departments opposition to the formation of Canyon County, and whether that would apply to the city. Carl Mason, Gil Callowhill and I answered that with county formation we would have eventually given up the services of Los Angeles County. As a new city we would still be part of the county, and our protective services would not change, except that the Sheriff's Department would replace the CHP in the area of traffic patrol.

By this time we had a steady flow of figures from the Regional Planning Commission on population, and sales tax data arriving regularly from Richard B. West, the creator of our "artificial city" for reporting purposes. Thus we had solid figures for sales tax, cigarette tax, motor vehicles in lieu and gas tax 2106 and 2107 revenues. The engineering allotment was static. The bed tax came from figures provided by the motels, and fines and forfeitures came from the court. We estimated franchise fees and mobile home fees on comparable cities (less 25%).

Our share of property taxes was a very conservative estimate based on county publications, and that left only county aid to cities, which was a rough estimate.

Westlake Village had just incorporated with an approved budget of \$256,378. We projected revenues of \$9,383,663 and expenditures of \$8,340,203. However, the failure of the Canyon County movement had dampened public interest in any attempt at self-government, and when the fire department changed its figures a couple of months later, increasing their estimate by \$750,000, Harry Fedderson announced that we would put our efforts on hold for a year. For the first time we had circulated petitions, and had gathered 2,500 signatures out of 9,000 needed.

Only nine volunteered to serve on the nine-member board for 1982. Nancy Albrecht, Gage Biren, Gil Callowhill, Mike Djordjevich, Harry Fedderson, Gail Klein, Frank Lorelli, Carl Mason and Alex Skinnider were elected. I announced my retirement from the board because I was considering going overseas to teach. My own life had been on hold too long.

However, by late March it was obvious that federal budget cutbacks would keep me where I was, at San Fernando High School. I applied for a vacant seat on the board of the Castaic Lake Water Agency. Ben Curtis had resigned from the seat, creating the second vacancy in six months. I was stunned when I was selected. In November I had to run for reelection, and defeated Edward "Jerry" Gladbach by 100 votes. With Ralph Killmeyer also in the race, I had only garnered 38% of the total in winning, and said publicly that I wished there had been a provision in the law for a runoff.³

In March 1983 Nancy Albrecht, Gil Callowhill, Gail Klein, Harry Fedderson, Don Benton, Bobbie Trueblood, Don Jennings and I met.

By May 1983 I had prepared a petition for incorporation of a huge area, 150.21 square miles, which included Castaic and Val Verde, and some lands not in the Consolidated Fire Protection District. The budget figures showed a minimum surplus of \$1,000,000 a year. I had everything documented with letters and reports on budget figures from official sources. No one wanted to circulate the petition. Most of the people who had worked on the Canyon County drive in 1978 pleaded that the political process had exhausted them.

I had continued to serve as vice president of the College of the Canyons Foundation, but when Peter Huntsinger resigned from the district governing board in the middle of the board meeting on June 3, and Lee Newcomer quit under pressure a week later, I had had enough. I sent in my letter of resignation, showing up at the next meeting to assure the presence of a quorum and acceptance of the letter. I could not work with the existing board majority, which had frankly aroused my ire for having the bad manners to vote down an innocuous agenda item without warning. There had been no debate, or argument against the item. Don Benton told me, when I asked him about the vote, the majority did it "just to show them we could do it."

Another governing board attracted my attention briefly. One day I got a telephone call from Derek Vanderwal, a member of the Northwest Los Angeles County Conservation District board, which met at Van Nuys Airport, asking me

to attend the meetings. This Dutchman from San Fernando was disturbed about what was happening in this hidden special district, which had been around since the 1930s. The Board of Supervisors had always appointed the members of the board. There had never been enough candidates to merit an election.

When I attended I was appalled by the behavior of one of the board members, Joy Picus, who turned and slapped one of the other members across the face in the middle of the meeting. Picus, who later served several terms on the Los Angeles City Council, was an angry person. I began to doubt the value of the Agency. It was a government that was ignored because it only cost the average homeowner about two cents on the tax bill, but it had gotten away from soil conservation, its original purpose for being.

Then some young people, Pierce College students, decided to contest an election. Dorothy Riley, a hard working conservationist and oak tree specialist from Placerita Canyon in Newhall, ran against Steve Fox and Glenn Bailey from the college and some others. When the county election officials looked into the codes governing the contest they were shocked to find that they had to set up a special election for property owners only. Very few people voted, and Fox and Bailey were elected. They proceeded to try to get cars purchased by the District for board members, so they could drive around and inspect the area, but settled for bicycles.

Gail Klein filed an application for dissolution with the Local Agency Formation Commission. At a hearing in which Baxter Ward supported our point of view, the district argued that it had some assets, a typewriter and a filing cabinet, and therefore could not be dissolved by LAFCO. The Legislature finally did the job of putting them out of business.

From 1983 to 1985 cityhood was the topic of conversation in the press on the occasional slow news day, or when a letter to the editor arrived from Jim White of Saugus, David A. Taplin of Valencia, or Dam Kim Nhung of Newhall. One bright aspect of our community growth was the success of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society. Bobbie Trueblood, later the wife of Senator Ed Davis, asked Ruth Newhall, Arthur Evans of the Forest Service and a leader in the Canyon Country Chamber of Commerce, Jerry Reynolds, a state historian, and me to form a historical society. Joined by Lavaughn Yetter, Mimi White, Tom Mason and Dorothy Riley, we got it incorporated in record time, with Arthur Buckingham Perkins, as President Emeritus in recognition of his many years of preserving the history of our valley. Art Evans was named president, Jerry Reynolds was vice president, Lavaughn Yetter served as secretary, and I as treasurer. Ruth Newhall was among those who signed the Articles of Incorporation, and Lloyd Houghton, another old timer, signed in my place. Soon hundreds were attending meetings, which included a memorable presentation of slides by Charles Outland, who had written the outstanding book on the St. Francis Dam disaster.

1984 passed with my losing the CLWA seat to Jerry Gladbach. Again I did not campaign, although I had no desire to lose to a water industry professional.

The agency board really needed members who understood public policy, who could hire water professionals. As my last act I was able to get unanimous approval of a motion to assess developers for water plant expansion. Otherwise, the expense would have been born by the existing water users, who would not have benefited from the continuing growth.

In 1985 members of the chambers of commerce began to discuss incorporation of the City of Santa Clarita. I knew nothing about the effort until shortly before the petition drive began on January 2, 1986. I called the leaders of the effort and offered to be a foot soldier in the campaign to gather signatures on petitions. At a meeting I said I would have sixty per cent of my precinct completed in four weeks, and challenged others to do the same. I had worked Del Prado so many times I had a good idea of what to expect, and although we had moved a couple of weeks before the 1976 election we still lived in the same precinct. The biggest problem would be finding people at home.

In thirty-six hours I turned in seventy signatures. It was taking about twelve minutes to answer questions before anyone would sign, but almost ninety per cent were signing. However, Morris Deason of Saugus turned in over eighty signatures the same day. By the end of the month Charles and Maisie Ives of Friendly Valley, Morris Deason and I had each gathered over 250 signatures going door-to-door. Mike Moon was another leading signature gatherer, but ultimately Carla Swift got the most. By the end of the second month, however, the pace had slowed. A major concern was the possibility of tax increases. We were able to say that an increase could not be passed by a city council without a supporting vote in favor by two-thirds of the electorate.

Morrie Deason was a supervising engineering inspector for the Los Angeles County Air Pollution Control District, who knew enough about the county organization that he did not want to have it imposed upon the Santa Clarita Valley. He retired from the South Coast Air Quality Management District in 1983. Five years before the district had been the subject of state legislation making it a multi-county creature. Morrie became involved in city formation the when he read about it in the newspaper. He wanted to see home rule, rather than rule by the county. His wife Geraldine worked with him. He attended meetings at Harry Fedderson's house in Hasley Canyon.

Morrie and Geri said that everyone was very upbeat about incorporation. There was lots of enthusiasm. They knew that their taxes were going "over the hill." A major problem was that the Newhall-Saugus-Valencia and Canyon Country Chambers were fighting with each other. However, when Bob Kellar became president of the Canyon Country Chamber of Commerce he pushed for cooperation that led to the two chambers consolidating.

Later the Deasons reminisced about meetings, the headquarters in the Old Saugus School, and Jill Klajic's untiring efforts as the office manager. They talked about how the population kept increasing during the petition drive; that as we kept registering more people to vote the requirements for the number of peti-

tion signatures increased. It seemed as if eighty per cent of the newcomers were from the San Fernando Valley, and all wanted home rule.

When interviewed in March 2002 about the value of the Canyon County formation efforts, Morrie and Geri pointed out that a lot of the same people worked on the two Canyon County campaigns as well as city formation. The 1976 and 1978 campaigns gave the people the experience used to make sure that the first city incorporation election was successful.

Ruth Benell of LAFCO, and Fran Pavley, founding mayor of Agoura Hills, were among those helping us to get the facts out to the public. The last Wednesday in February of 1985 the Santa Clarita Valley Zonta and Soroptimist Clubs sponsored a meeting featuring Benell and Pavley as well as Lou Garasi of the incorporation effort, Dave Hanson of the county fire department and Ron Dayhoff of the Sheriff's Department. As the *Daily News* reported on February 28, cityhood could be a very positive step. The truth was coming out.

The first weekend in March we put on a "blitz," which resulted in over 900 more signatures. *The Signal* reported on March 5 that Jan Heidt placed first in a competition by collecting sixty-one names and won dinner for two at Le Chene.

However, it seemed to me that it was no longer possible to continue to go door to door for signatures, collecting them in roughly the same order as the voter registration lists to allow easy checking. We had to make our drive more visible. Ruth Newhall answered my complaint that we were getting no news coverage with the rejoinder that we were not making any news. It was difficult to gather signatures quickly enough when we had to explain to everyone individually what cityhood entailed.

I went to a steering committee meeting at Gruber Systems and said we must become more visible. We must set up at shopping centers and gather signatures in a more public way. We were running out of time. The committee agreed and we set up in front of Kmart, which was the biggest traffic area of the valley at the time. Our success rate began to climb, even if checking the signatures became much more difficult. I was also asked to join the committee.

Someone named John Coleman wrote misleading letters to the editor of *The Signal*. He charged that we were misleading the voters by saying an overwhelming number of voters favored cityhood. What we had said was that an overwhelming number were signing the petitions calling upon LAFCO for a feasibility study. He held up the prospects of a tax increase, which we answered by saying that the issue would not get to the ballot if a tax increase was involved. LAFCO would not allow it. His charge of gerrymandering was no doubt the product of our map, which was responsive to the LAFCO staff recommendation that we exclude all possible state fire lands. The layers of government argument was met by mention of the layers we already paid to: the county, the county schools, local schools, districts for libraries, flood control, fire protection, sanitation, sewer maintenance, street lighting, lighting maintenance, area wide landscaping, local landscaping and others. The charge that Dan Hon was running again for public office, that he had run for Canyon County Supervisor, was met

with a request that he check with the Registrar/Recorder, for Dan Hon had never run for anything except the office of Judge.

Others raised objections, too, but we managed to collect the signatures we needed even if we took the full six months allowed to do it. Checking signatures took several more weeks. However, Lou Garasi, Gil Callowhill, J.J. O'Brien, Connie Worden, Bill Roberts, Charles and Maisie Ives, Jim Schutte, Chris Kudija, George Pederson and I gathered in front of our borrowed office south of Bouquet Junction to deliver the petitions to LAFCO. The top five signature gatherers rode in a limousine hired anonymously by a local businessman, who, I discovered later, was attorney Dan Hon.

We were a happy lot, with our petitions boxed and tied with a white bow.

When our efforts were totaled, Carla Swift had collected 847 signatures, Mike Moon 720, and Morris Deason 683. I had 660, and Maisie Ives at 523 and Charles Ives at 415 had combined for 938 signatures.

We were received in Ruth Benell's small office in the county Hall of Administration. She inspected the fifteen copies of the application, the forty copies of the map, and the petitions, and then asked us for \$1,000. We had a check for \$500, not knowing that the fee had just been doubled. Fortunately J.J. O'Brien had his checkbook with him and wrote out a check for \$500 more.

Meanwhile Herbert Goldstein wrote a letter asking a lot of questions. I appreciated his honesty in asking questions rather than making charges, and appreciated even more Ruth Newhall's willingness to answer the questions as an editor's note in the same issue of the paper.

Then came the announcement that we were 424 signatures short of the number required. This was because the number of registered voters grew from the 47,659 there had been when we started circulating our petitions, and stood at 50,536. The law allowed us to make up the deficit, which we did in a weekend, coming in seventy over the mark. The county purged the voter lists before the election, dropping the number to a little over 49,000, cutting funding significantly.

Jerry Reynolds wrote that Mr. O.C. Abbott made the first proposal for incorporation on July 23, 1920, when he held a meeting at Conrad's Dance Hall. His proposal met overwhelming defeat. Newhall Land and Standard Oil used the power of a landowners petition to block an effort in 1954. Finally, we were getting official consideration. My only real gripe was that we had to pay a fee of \$1.23 per signature to have our petition counted, which was why we had handed in so few signatures. I did not think that this infringement on our constitutional right of petition was legal, but it was cheaper and quicker to pay than it was to fight. Years later I was told that the East Los Angeles group had the charge for signatures "waived."

While we waited for the LAFCO study I called a Ventura County official for some information. He asked me, "By the way, have you checked to see what Santa Clarita says when spelled backwards." It seemed that the people in Moorpark had not checked, and were sorry.⁴

The Tuesday before Christmas of 1986 the Cityhood Committee met for the first time with the press present. Laurel Suomisto, a particularly able writer for *The Signal*, who went directly from our local paper to the Associated Press, recognized that our “excitement was pervasive” as we prepared for the final drive. By this time the eleven-member steering committee consisted of Lou Garasi and Jim Schutte as co-chairmen, and Connie Worden, myself, Don Hale, Gil Callowhill, Louis Brathwaite, Vera Johnson, Bill Roberts, Art and Glo Donnelly, Carla Swift and Jill Klajic. Mike Kotch and Jan Heidt, who had both been active as homeowner association leaders and critical of county planning, were also active. We had decided to hold public meetings to inform the people about incorporation, even before LAFCO began to meet.⁵

Our steering committee was strong. Lou Garasi was a refugee from the Hungarian uprising of 1956. His family was involved in plumbing fixtures, and he ran a business with customers throughout the world. Jim Schutte was owner of Canyon Lumber and Hardware, and a leader of the Canyon Country Chamber of Commerce. Connie Worden had a history of being active in such organizations as the League of Women Voters. Don Hale was a local engineer. Gil Callowhill was retired, and had won a seat on the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board after having spent \$10 on business cards, which he passed out door-to-door.

Louis Brathwaite was identified as “the owner of a computer furniture firm,” who had served on the William S. Hart high school board. Later he received a letter releasing him from secrecy about his real job, working on special projects for the Secretary of the Air Force. Vera Johnson was a local activist with roots in the homeowners’ movement. Bill Roberts was head of the local branch of the Auto Club. Art and Glo Donnelly were in real estate, and acted as fundraisers for the committee. Carla Swift and Jill Klajic were writing a book together. Jill had a story to tell and Carla knew how to write. Mike Kotch was a computer wiz and Jan Heidt, who was active in Sand Canyon, and the wife of Jerry Heidt, a Hart board member and developer.

We stayed away from issues like growth. As Mike Kotch pointed out, those would be discussed in the city council race. As Laurel Suomisto observed, “The phrases ‘planned growth,’ ‘controlled growth’ and even ‘slow growth’ are sprinkled throughout the conversations of city backers, but ‘no growth’ has failed to make an appearance. I raised the issue of better representation with the county and state that a city would bring, and Bill Roberts, then 58, spoke of better accounting of our tax dollars. Lou Garasi, 52, spoke of getting more roads built before new houses added to our traffic.”⁶

Lou Garasi approached me at a New Year’s Eve fundraiser held at California Institute of the Arts and asked if I would be chairman of the Santa Clarita City Formation Committee. He indicated that there was some dissension in the ranks, and that he thought I could be a neutral. I agreed to take on the job, momentarily forgetting that I had been recruited to run for the Del Prado board twice at New Year’s Eve parties. At the meeting on January 6 I was elected chairman of the committee, while Connie Worden and Art Donnelly were elected co-chairmen of

the campaign. Ruth Benell of LAFCO spoke that evening of the Santa Clarita incorporation being bigger than anything she had ever been involved in.⁷

The next day we took Ruth Benell on a tour of our valleys, and she said she was beginning to recognize a number of us. She had been to the valley a number of times already because of the numerous proposals we had already discussed. Days later Greg Warnagieris of *The Signal* wrote of the “incredible discretion” of the three members of the LAFCO staff, who in addition to Ruth Benell were administrative assistant Michi Takahashi, and engineer Charles Shannon.

Rochelle Browne, of the legal firm of Richards, Watson and Gershon, had sued LAFCO successfully on behalf of the City of Agoura Hills, and warned us that the staff had tremendous power. She advised us to work hard through the political players and LAFCO members to preserve the large proposal we had mapped.

Meanwhile, dissent was being voiced locally by people concerned about taxes, the schools and the diverse interests of our communities. We kept pushing the idea of public attendance at our information meetings, the first of which was held at 21616 Golden Triangle Road, at The Skate 'N Place. To me the only reason to vote no on incorporation, provided that LAFCO approved the proposal as financially viable and put it on the ballot, was a lack of good candidates for city council. I had no idea who was going to run, but knew that I had been involved too long to shrug it off on others. When asked by Pat Aidem of *The Daily News* whether I would run for the council, my answer was, “Probably. I am used to being involved, but I think I’ll be up against 40 or 50 other people.” The issue was premature. I was criticized by John Charles Auguste Simas I of Saugus for being spotted on television participating in a “strike movement” by the Los Angeles teachers. I had been involved in a number of protests; I was fed up with the way the district was run. I ignored him, and so did virtually everyone else.⁸

We found out from Dick West of the State Board of Equalization that Ruth Benell had asked that figures be broken out for the areas east and west of I-5. The impact of this was to cost us Magic Mountain, an industrial development planned for Hasley Canyon, and 4,600 homes to be built by developer Dale Poe. We did not know at the time that the developers, including Newhall Land, were behind these requests, and that LAFCO had a reputation for not including territory which landowners wanted outside the boundaries of a city. Laurel Suomisto kept digging for *The Signal*, and educated the public a lot about the financial aspects of our plan. Sophi Buetens and Greg Warnagieris also put in overtime covering the effort.

One of the financial questions revolved around whether we would take a share of the property tax pie. We got little of it. We did elect to stay with the county for the provision of fire and sheriff services. It made no sense to have separate jurisdictions, particularly when the county could provide those services efficiently. Jim Gilley, the city manager of Lancaster, described at length, in an article on Jan. 25, how that city had enjoyed capital improvements, even building a courthouse for the county.

However, Jim White of Saugus, wrote, in a letter published on Jan. 28, of the “same bucket of swill that has been handed to the public by political aspirants for centuries.

“Do you know why so many people are moving to this valley? Because they like it the way it is.”

He asked who would pay for “their salaries,” but did not say how much they would be, which was \$600 per month.

Who would pay for city hall? At first this was a room in the Old Saugus Schoolhouse, and then later a storefront. Yes, we did move into a three story office building which the city bought at the first opportunity, continuing to rent out enough space to private firms that the city hall cost the taxpayers nothing for years. By the time it did begin to show a net cost the services provided by our local government had expanded so much that the county’s need for space was cut sharply. Even then city hall was a good deal financially, for the space was more than paid for out of the savings on “undistributed overhead” we had been charged by the county.

As for his charges of chauffeured limosines, councilmembers drove their own cars. Yes, I did visit New York and New Orleans at city expense while taking an active part in setting policy for the National League of Cities. Tokyo and Berlin? Chris and I visited those cities as chaperones on student tours. While Jim White was the model for many critics to come, he took his lumps too. Bob Grunbok characterized his statements as better bagged “by Bandini and sold to green-up half the lawns in the Santa Clarita Valley.”

The LAFCO staff report was published on February 5. It recommended that the commission scale our proposal back, saying that there would be a \$2.5 million shortfall if we incorporated the territory outlined by our full map. We began to smell a rat, but reacted very mildly. LAFCO was in control. Ruth Benell had admitted that state and federal grants could make up the suggested deficit, but in our conservative community we did not want to talk about depending on them. Mayerene Barker of the *Los Angeles Times* treated LAFCO’s study as advice on Feb. 6, while two days later Andrew C. Revkin of the same paper wrote a story that was headed “Backers Cling to Cityhood for Santa Clarita.”

Nonetheless, when we studied the report we found that Los Angeles County had indeed balanced its budget for the area with the use of \$3 million of federal funds for roads. Had the funds not been available the impact on the local people, whether governed by the county or a city, would have been the same. The LAFCO proposal was going to cost us Castaic, an area where more than 50% of the registered voters had signed the petition.

At our forum on the second Tuesday of February our audience got a pep talk from Lancaster city officials. City Manager Jim Gilley, and councilmen Jack Murphy and Arnie Rodio told our gathering of 150 how well they were doing in spite of having no property tax revenue at all. Murphy depicted the county as seeing the north county area as being the dumping ground for garbage and prisoners. Gilley said the county was not able to deal with the specific needs of

our valley. Rodio spoke of Lancaster's new city hall, parks, public works department, and influence at county, state and federal levels. He also spoke of developers being required to pay up front for their impacts.

Rodio spoke of incorporation as a "mission" which they accomplished only on the fourth try. They finally banned committee members from being allowed to run for public office to eliminate the charge that they were incorporating for personal political gain. Their publicity group issued factual rebuttals to opposition claims within six hours. Murphy said, "Speak up and get on the offensive. You never score unless you've got the ball."⁹

Jim Gilley pointed out that tension between homeowners and developers would increase, and county employees who feared losing their jobs could become "worthy adversaries." He pointed out that Proposition 13 had at least taken the question of increased taxes out of the campaign. We all knew that the two-thirds voter approval required for special taxes precluded any tax increase.

One person in the audience was not convinced. Harold Nelson of Lake Havasu City, Arizona had seen that new city originate sewer fees twice the size of his water bill. At least that example was out-of-state.

The next Saturday a dozen of us circulated new petitions in Castaic in an effort to convince the LAFCO board that Castaic should not be pared from the city proposal. Where we could not find people at home we left postcards. To the concerns of the residents about local problems we responded only with the promise that a local government would resolve local problems with local solutions.¹⁰

Laurel Suomisto's article for the Progress 1987 section of *The Signal*, published on Feb. 15, pointed out many benefits to city formation but raised two problems which I felt were serious. We would lose the California Highway Patrol and the State Fire Protection Subsidy. These were two things the county enjoyed that under state law the city would lose. While we could afford these losses I could not see the fairness.

On Feb. 19 we were handed a serious setback. Ruth Benell released a new budget indicating that we would be \$4.5 million short. On Feb. 25, however, the LAFCO board, acting in front of somewhat more than seventy-five people from the Santa Clarita Valley on a biting cold day, voted to continue the public hearing, in essence telling staff that they had more work to do. Meanwhile we were enjoying the *pro bono* efforts of city attorney Charles Vose and Arthur Young & Co. However, the pressure of not being able to make the November ballot was beginning to make itself felt. We had to concede the loss of Castaic and territory west of I-5. Henry Pellissier, who was the public member elected by the other LAFCO commissioners, had said, "I would hope that we could adjust the boundaries so they can start a city." Thomas E. Jackson had voiced similar views. He had served many years on the council of Huntington Park. Kenneth Chappell, councilman from West Covina, was most supportive, and Hal Bernson, who represented that part of the San Fernando Valley just south of us on the Los Angeles City Council, seemed to favor us.

Richard Wirth of the Building Industry Association attacked our proposal as much too large. He was the front man for the developers, who had little to say. Tom Lee of Newhall Land was forthright enough to say that he was concerned about budget.¹¹

However, as Connie Worden put it to the *Los Angeles Times*, “We’d just hoped to stay alive today. I now see light at the end of the tunnel. I only wish that the tunnel weren’t so long.”

A continuing problem was that Ruth Benell was passing through figures reported to her by the county, without questioning them. We kept hammering on the figures for “street construction,” \$7 million worth of invisible expenditures. We believed that \$3.3 million had been carried over on paper from the 1985-1986 fiscal year. The real issue seemed to be whether the developers or the people were going to control our political destiny.

After all, we had twice voted for Canyon County formation, by margins of 54% in 1976, and 59% in 1978. Neither LAFCO nor the developers had had much say about county formation because the process was different. We had been defeated by the votes of the remainder of Los Angeles County, not by the process. The County Formation Commissions established by the Governor had seen through the “estimated actual” figures propounded by Meg Gilbert of Supervisor Baxter Ward’s office and the county staff. They were independent, but LAFCO was dependent on staff.

Dick Wirth was obviously hung up on the issue of a moratorium on building. We said there would be none. He said there should be an environmental impact report. We knew that the act of incorporating a city would have no impact on the environment, and that the city would have to require EIRs on proposed developments. It seemed ironic that the Building Industry Association representative was calling for an EIR to bedevil us. We were concerned, because this requirement could have caused a lot of delay.

Pat Aidem reported March 2 in the *Daily News* about the alleged budget shortfall. She homed in on Jean Granucci, a spokesman for the County Public Works Department, who could not provide the basis for the figures given to LAFCO. She also cited Ruth Benell, who conceded that she had not listed \$600,000 revenue from the CHP scales because the scales might be moved in six to eight years. On March 18 Greg Warnagieris and Laurel Suomisto reported on our meeting with Supervisor Mike Antonovich. He told Connie Worden, Art Donnelly, Lou Garasi, Jill Klajic, Mike Kotch and me that he would be supportive if we could show a breakeven budget, and that he would support a November election date. However, August 6 would be the last day for the Supervisors to take action to place it on the ballot, and Hal Bernson and Ken Chappell were not optimistic LAFCO would pass it on to the Supervisors in time.

Jan Heidt invited us down to her beach house in Malibu for a brainstorming session conducted in part by Karen Cameron, whose husband Allan was becoming increasingly active. She had Jack Boyer, a local insurance agent with roots in Saginaw, Michigan, playing the part of Supervisor Antonovich, and Art

Donnelly became Tom Lee. I played the part of Dick Wirth of the BIA, while Jill Klajic was *The Signal*. Tom Lee and Dick Wirth picked up most of the power chits, and Supervisor Antonovich the money. We learned deal making.

Los Angeles Times reporter Claudia Puig wrote an article published April 2 which was characterized by the editor as “The Incredible Shrinking City.” To Ruth Benell’s proposal that we become the “rich little city of Newhall Valencia,” I said, “It’s got to be an April fool’s joke.” The proposal really worried me, for the proposed mall and auto dealerships would all be in the reduced area, leaving Saugus and Canyon Country as poor county territories. I feared the people of the city would never support annexations because each one would cost the rich little city money. Yet all of our problems were essentially valley wide.

The press kept the pressure on Ruth Benell, and county staff members were not helping her when they answered questions from astute reporters. We learned that Sand Canyon was being considered for omission when a county staffer confirmed that a bridge in Sand Canyon was no longer part of the deficit. Ruth Benell was trying to help us, I thought, but she would tell us nothing. We went to see her frequently, made statements and watched for body language. There was none. We knew the lack of communication was going to make for some bad decisions.

Fortunately we had a mole. Michi Takahashi was on our side. She was a very smart lady, well qualified for her boss’s job. She would not tell us much directly, but she did tell us ultimately that Ruth’s proposal was going to be V-shaped. We pushed to get Sand Canyon back in, and were successful, although we did not know that until the last minute, and lost Pinetree as a tradeoff, for which we had not bargained. By early April we were campaigning to keep people in the city, but preparing the public for disappointment in terms of retaining undeveloped lands. We did know that the core of undeveloped land, the Berrite plant, would remain, and that was important.

Jill Klajic put it well. “We know we’re viable. [Benell] knows we’re viable. So does Newhall Land & Farming and so does Dick Wirth. The issue is the boundaries.” Connie Worden made clear our understanding of Newhall Land’s fear of a moratorium. Had we all sat down together we could have worked out the boundaries with little difficulty and a lot of understanding for each other’s concerns. Sadly, since incorporation, the history of the city has been marred by a lack of diplomacy, communication and trust.¹²

Senator Ed Davis introduced Senate Bill 373, which would have required the state to provide wildlands fire protection funds to cities as well as counties. However, the county was uncooperative in releasing revenue estimates. Davis’ chief of staff, Hunt Braly, said, “It’s been like hitting your head against a brick wall.”

Our proposed city did look like a turkey, or a duck, on the map. The only way we could fight to preserve it was to pack the LAFCO meeting on April 22. We campaigned to let the people know they had to attend. However, when we went to Castaic for a public forum only ten people turned out for a presentation

from our committee and Carl Claasen of the League of California Cities. It was increasingly obvious that LAFCO was going to chop the head off the duck.

We met with more developers. Jack Shine of American Beauty homes had built more residences than Newhall Land in our valley. Larwin Company, Dale Poe Development Corporation and Paragon Homes, Inc., were also represented. On April 10 another report came from LAFCO's Ruth Benell. We lost Castaic and the entire area west of I-5, a lot of territory just south of the national forest, and most of the area east of the Antelope Valley Freeway. However, we got to keep Sand Canyon. The shocker was the omission of Pinetree. Our budget was in the black by \$3.5 million. We put on our happy faces for the press. Lou Garasi said, "Solomon's judgment. She cut the baby in half."¹³

A large part of the surplus was from newly discovered sales tax funds for transportation that the county said previously said was included. She still left out half a million in manufacturer's sales tax funds that Dick West, of the State Board of Equalization, called to our attention in writing.

"We've gone from being a \$4.5 million drain...and suddenly they discover we're viable and now the county is arguing we would be taking money from them," observed Connie Worden, who was quoted in *The Signal* one week before the hearing. We were meeting almost daily, but fortunately knew our collective positions well enough that we did not diverge from each other much in our statements to the press. We quickly drew a seventy-five square mile map with a smaller budget surplus, but at the same time let it be known we were not prepared to war with LAFCO. All we could do was beg.

We were making our case for future annexations, and the idea there should be only one city in the Santa Clarita Valley. We wanted to avoid the kind of rivalry that existed between Palmdale and Lancaster. At least our Supervisor had written to LAFCO member Ken Chappell asking that we be allowed to vote on cityhood in November.

Shortly before the April 22 hearing Assemblywoman Cathie Wright moderated a forum on cityhood. Formerly a mayor of Simi Valley, she had been the only local legislator to back incorporation openly. I suggested that we drop the fight to include Castaic and other territories. We needed to get on with the election, for if we incorporated as a result of the election in November our income would start immediately while the county should provide services until the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 1988. Jill Klajic broke our united front, saying, "They're selling us out. They made that decision on their own. There is no guarantee we will make the November ballot, even if we do cave in."¹⁴

However, Lou Garasi, Connie Worden, Art Donnelly and I stuck together. At the forum, which had been attended by fifty people, a three to one majority of the committee voted to accept Ruth Benell's smaller proposal, plus Sand Canyon. Jan Heidt said, "We need a toehold – now! I say take it and run and come back and get the rest of it.

"We can't afford to wait. If we wait, the county will continue to think it can build its way out of the problem."¹⁵

Jill Klajic, Allan Cameron, Louis Brathwaite, Gil Callowhill and Mike Kotch wanted to fight for the seventy-five square miles. After the meeting Cathie Wright said she would have wanted to fight, too, but I saw no prospects of our people putting a tremendous amount of pressure on LAFCO. Benell's proposal, at about forty-one square miles, was as big as the territory of Long Beach, and our population would make us instantly the sixth largest city in the county.

"We've got seven commissioners who can't conceive of even a forty-one square mile city," I explained. Daniel Hon and Glo Donnelly were vocal in wanting to move on. At the time we had no clue we were forming "the largest newly incorporated city in the history of humankind."

The final vote of the committee was nine to three, with Mike Kotch, Jill Klajic and Louis Brathwaite voting no on Benell's proposal plus Sand Canyon. I argued that I had learned to read Benell's body language and that going on with our proposal would work, and that 87 of 138 pending development proposals were in the city boundaries.

Throughout this period there were a number of other people who were trying to solve problems with some success. Lyda Ragusa had been isolated in the senior citizen complex at Friendly Valley since shortly after her husband died of leukemia. A major, he had been an "observer" at the Nevada atomic test site. Following one blast he drove in a badly damaged bus for twenty miles back to his base before he could take a shower. She worked for years to get her husband's disability.

She wanted a public transportation system. One friend, who was epileptic and partially blind, had difficulty getting to medical appointments at Soledad Canyon Road and Sierra Highway. No one in Supervisor Antonovich's office had any idea where Friendly Valley was. With help from Ed Dunn and Daniel Hon she begged the use of a bus from Antelope Valley Bus Company, and for twenty-five cents the seniors were able to take an outing to Tip's Restaurant on I-5. So many were really happy to be able to get out, but a question remained. How many seniors really needed public transportation, and where were they?

Many were in the mobile home parks. Service began with small red and white busses, but eventually bigger vehicles were necessary. By the time of incorporation the county had organized a system for the entire Santa Clarita Valley, and when the city took over the service it became the fastest growing one in the United States. The seniors make great use of the dial-a-ride system, when many of the regular bus riders are students, or adults who do not have a car.

¹Greg Walter, *Philadelphia Daily News*, Aug. 20, 1981.

²He has not achieved that ambition, and never bothered to complete his second term on the board, but after he moved to Washington state, he was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1994, and to the State Senate in 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012. I became aware of his opportunity for political success during the 1994 campaign, when a reporter from Vancouver, Washington,

made some calls to Santa Clarita looking for background information. I was told that he was the only Republican to file against a popular Democrat who got caught in a scandal during the 1994 campaign, with the result that although he was not considered a strong candidate he won the election. The AP story concerning the dining room was published in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 2002, page A31.

³*The Signal*, Nov. 5, 1982.

⁴*The Signal*, Dec. 10, 1986.

⁵*The Signal*, Dec. 26, 1986.

⁶*The Signal*, Jan. 4, 1987.

⁷*The Signal*, *The Daily News*, Jan. 8, 1987.

⁸*The Daily News*, Jan. 14, 1987.

⁹*The Signal*, Feb. 14, 1987.

¹⁰*Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 15, 1987, Valley section, p. 6.

¹¹*The Signal*, Feb. 27, 1987.

¹²*The Signal*, April 3, 1987.

¹³*The Signal*, April 12, 1987.

¹⁴*The Daily News*, April 17, 1987.

¹⁵*The Signal*, April 19, 1987.