

## Chapter 10

### FINISHING YEAR ONE

George Carvalho, 45, had been fired as the City Manager of Bakersfield. That did not bother me one bit. As a school board member I had supported the hiring of Lee Newcomer as Superintendent-President of the college district. Fred Wellington, our headhunter, had recommended him, but had said that if we wanted to be comfortable all the time Newcomer was not our man.

If being comfortable meant giving up the opportunity to hire a truly outstanding candidate I wanted no part of it. It might be said that my support of Lee Newcomer cost me my seat on the college board, but he had done his job extraordinarily well.

We needed someone special to be the first permanent city manager of the largest newly incorporated city in the history of humankind. We needed a man with vision. George understood that, and projected that in his interview. He came on board on Flag Day, 1988. The next morning Mark Salvaggio, a Bakersfield city councilman who had voted to fire George, was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* as saying, "If they are seeking someone aggressive and visionary and someone who will fight, George will fit into their scheme of things."<sup>1</sup>

Our new city manager's first task was to complete a budget, which was due July 1. I was not worried about the budget. We had time to work on that, for the monthly revenue figures had shown our income was far greater than we had dreamt they would be, and we were spending very little money.

We were also making progress on a financial settlement with the county. The council was developing a growing appreciation for good relations with other governments, our revenues were substantial, and the June election resulted in Mike Antonovich being forced into a runoff.

The League of California Cities was supporting Ed Davis' SB 2814 to allow the top two vote-getters on our council extended terms. My feeling was that having the entire council exposed to turnover at one time could lead to disaster. Dennis Koontz and I had been lobbying for the bill, and we could sense the value of good will.<sup>2</sup>

Dan Palmer did not enjoy our good will, and when an agenda item came up for routine approval that would facilitate his building Dockweiler Drive, we hit the roof. The item was a request from the county for the city to grant them jurisdiction so they could go through eminent domain to take the necessary land from seven property owners, including Chevron Oil and Tenneco. Our Community Development Director, Kyle Kollar, said rightly that this was an apolitical decision. The county had granted Palmer the rights just before incorporation, and therefore had to follow through on helping him get the necessary access road. However, the law did not say how fast we had to act. I had learned at least one tactic from Governor Jerry Brown. I suggested that "we let it hang in limbo."<sup>3</sup>

This was the same Dan Palmer who resisted putting in a freeway ramp to serve his project on Jake's Way right outside the city limits. He finally agreed to allow the state to look at the possibilities provided none of his planned buildings would be affected. There he built a huge rabbit warren of a project, which became the scene of the largest number of complaints to the Sheriff's Department in the entire valley. He was not giving up on his quest to build one-half billion dollars worth of real estate in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Meanwhile, Davis' SB 2277 to control LAFCO was not doing well. The Senate Local Government Committee had considered the opposition of the County Supervisors Association and the Building Industry Association, and had decided to move the bill to interim study, which was a device often used to kill a bill without saying that to the author's face. We had the good fortune to be represented by a gentleman who enjoyed good relations with his fellow senators. Ed asked if "this was a way of killing this thing without embarrassing me in front of my friends." Casey Sparks, the Committee's chief consultant, assured us that SB 2277 would receive serious consideration, even if a hearing would not be held until after the session ended.<sup>4</sup>

The 4th of July parade featured the Council, with the best floats by the Santa Clarita National Bank and the Filipino-American Association. Baxter Ward, who was challenging Mike Antonovich in the November election for Supervisor, received lots of applause.<sup>5</sup>

On August 9 the Newhall family resigned from *The Signal*. They had sold the "obscenely profitable" paper ten years before to Morris Newspaper Corporation of Savannah, Georgia. Founded in 1919, the paper had been a weekly, but was coming out three times a week and was obviously headed for daily publication. Scott Newhall had been the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* for twenty years before making the trip south to buy our local paper in 1963. His great-grandfather had founded Newhall and Saugus.

After Scott bought the paper, his sons Jon and Tony ran it for a while. Then Jon opened a news service in Berkeley and Scott's wife, Ruth, became the editor. In the early years business had been a little shaky. Art Evans, who had campaigned successfully that eastern Saugus be renamed Canyon Country, wanted to go into the newspaper business in competition. The valley could not support two newspapers, and Scott was worried. One morning, in the coffee shop joining the bowling alley on Lyons Avenue, Scott was overheard bellowing at a son, "I'll put another quarter million dollars into the paper, but not a penny more." The word got back, and Art Evans folded his effort immediately, not knowing that Scott did not have the money.

I had not always been happy with the stands taken in *The Signal*. It had given me a hiding more than once. But Scott and Ruth loved our valley, and, in spite of controlling a significant interest in The Newhall Land and Farming Company, had always been willing to fight the good fight. They had won the year's award for best news coverage by a weekly or semi-weekly newspaper from the Los Angeles Press Club.

When they resigned, Scott said to the newspaper's staff, "It's difficult. We've been here a long time. It's sort of a shock having to go into the hot dog business or something right now."<sup>6</sup>

Scott would never have to sell hotdogs. He had lost a leg in the Mexican jungle, and gotten his first job on a newspaper by lying to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, saying he was a photographer. He served as a war correspondent and sailed a ferryboat across the Atlantic. When he challenged Art Evans to a noontime duel under the clock at Valley Federal Savings on San Fernando Road, Art did not show. He described the San Fernando Valley as, a "heaven on earth for winos, dog poisoners, child abusers, husband swappers, wife beaters, porno stars, bill jumpers, street racers, defrocked priests and street-corner bordellos." Of course he had published similar stories about local goings on, except perhaps for the defrocked priests and street-corner bordellos. In less than five weeks he was back on the street with *The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*.

Jill Klajic got the first Pride Week up and running. On the third Saturday in August we cleaned up East Newhall. Alfredo Vasquez of the county's Department of Social Services had had flyers distributed around the neighborhood, and people had put out tons of trash. More than a dozen old refrigerators, a number of sofas, washers, dryers, and one BMW motorcycle were taken to the landfill. The neighbors came out in force to clean up, and Jill Klajic, Linda Storli, Laurene Weste, Dennis Koontz and I enjoyed helping them.<sup>7</sup>

East Newhall really needed some attention, particularly to streets and sidewalks. It took years, using federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, to get this neighborhood the same kind of streets and sidewalks others enjoyed. Then people started putting money into their homes. The Council then took the process to the other side of San Fernando Road, to the neighborhood around Hart High School. Our hands on approach showed how smaller government can deal with deterioration.

Dan Palmer came on the agenda again when Gil Archuletta, his high-priced mouthpiece, came to argue that we had to move on the condemnations for Dockweiler Drive. However, while insisting they needed a decision immediately, he questioned whether Mayor McKeon and Mayor pro-tem Heidt should be allowed to vote on the issue, as they owned businesses in the city. I moved to postpone any vote until we had a decision by the California Fair Political Practices Commission. I wanted the whole council to be able to vote. I did not like Archuletta's approach, or his raising the question of the integrity of council members. Poor Dan Palmer had to wait some more.<sup>8</sup>

The condemnation proceedings came up again in October. Once again the subject of conflicts of interest was raised. Buck McKeon denied a conflict, saying, "The condos would bring a 1.6 percent population increase. Would that increase Howard and Phil's business \$10,000? I doubt it. No conflict."

Jan Heidt, who owned One for the Books on Lyons Avenue, said, "I'd be very surprised if it increased my business \$10,000 in a year." However, she left the chambers to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest.

I observed, “Makes me glad I’m a poor schoolteacher.”<sup>9</sup>

Early in September we passed our billboard ordinance, which established standards and required that any new billboard proposals come up for a conditional use permit hearing before the council. Larry Bloomfield, of our local radio station (then called KBET), was afraid he would not be able to advertise. I understood his concern. Many people do not read newspapers, but I could not see trashing our city with billboards. I was sorry that the council did not pick up on my idea to tax billboards to fund purchasing the existing ones so we could take them down over a period of years.<sup>10</sup>

I was delighted with the appearance of *The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*. As *The Signal* turned to being a daily I found its coverage of local affairs wanting. For years we were to suffer from constant turnover in staff at the same time the editors were overburdened and could not push for accurate reporting, although for the moment Sharon Hormell stayed with the daily. *The Citizen* had what we needed, insightful local reporting, Scott’s editorials to make people think, and Ruth’s “Mimi” column, to which I was a loyal contributor. They published my letter to the editor on Sept. 14. “When I saw the logo of the Citizen, I roared with laughter. Then I soberly thought, ‘Why didn’t the City of Santa Clarita think of it first?’” It was a phoenix rising from the ashes with the Latin motto *Illegitimi Non Carborundum*, meaning “Don’t let the bastards grind you down.”<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile I was glad I was not involved in an election campaign. Mike Antonovich was recorded in *The Citizen* as having raised \$1,727,195 in his bid for reelection, while Baxter Ward had raised \$39,134. My \$25 contribution to Baxter was large enough to get noticed in the press, and to get me a handwritten thank you note.<sup>12</sup>

Both candidates had talking points. Baxter Ward pointed to Antonovich’s approval of changes in the county general plan, which had been developed during Ward’s two terms in office. Mike Antonovich criticized Ward for not insisting that road fees be paid by developers as part of the general plan.<sup>13</sup>

However, Antonovich won the election handily, with 64% of the vote, although the Santa Clarita Valley gave a 52% nod to Baxter Ward. A large number of slow-growth candidates had forced Antonovich into a runoff, but campaign spending decided the one-on-one race.

The firm of Phillips Brandt Reddick of Irvine met with the council and our planning commission in November. Philip R. Schwartze was leading a team that explained the elements of the General Plan that should to be completed in eighteen months. The nine elements were land use, circulation, housing, open space and conservation, noise, parks and recreation, safety, community design and economic development/community revitalization. He was most concerned about economic development, community revitalization, a sphere of influence, hillside and ridgeline development, and circulation.

When William Masterson started talking about a sphere of influence, Jan Heidt complained, “That’s pie in the sky. We don’t have a sphere of influence. Let’s face the issues inside the city.”

Dennis Koontz countered, “We need to plan a sphere of influence. We want the valley to look like we want it to look.”

Commissioners Connie Worden and Jeanette Sharar were concerned that infrastructure be planned to support the city’s autonomy.

I had outlined the sphere as being the national forest to the north, the Hart District boundaries to the east, the ridgelines to the south, and Ventura County to the west. “If you want to have a sphere of influence, you will have to have an understanding with the developers against your borders. You will have to know the impact of what it might bring and take appropriate action. What you’ll want to do is structure the general plan, design a sphere of influence and develop an economic strategy to win these areas into the city.”

Mayor McKeon said, “We will be competitive. The developers will want to be part of it eventually.”

We agreed to focus energy on the city, but to plan the county territory as well. With 20% of the land in the city left to be developed, it was possible that as many as 50,000 more people could move into our existing limits.

A few of us defined a vision for the city. Buck McKeon wanted to preserve the ridgelines and develop a focal point on the site of the Saugus Rehab area. Jan Heidt wanted to concentrate on revenue, but McKeon interjected that planning and vision would provide the revenue. Connie Worden wanted special standards districts and lateral parks in the riverbed.

Heidt added that redevelopment should not displace people, and that we needed recycling, human services, child care, places for seniors and a cultural center. Most of the human services were the responsibility of the county, but it was beginning to become obvious that if we wanted them we would have to provide them.

I added that people who worked in the city should be able to live in it.<sup>14</sup>

November was the month we moved into the office building on Valencia Boulevard. It was like moving from a closet to a mansion. On a Saturday everyone who could simply picked up the contents of the storefront and moved them to our new offices.

Terri Maus, an intern from Fillmore, Ellie Kane, the General Services Manager, Cindy Cameron and Kyle Kollar were involved. Kyle had moved in a week before from the bank building across the street. Cindy was our receptionist, always cheerful outwardly, even on days some unthinking person dumped responsibility for the woes of the world on the first city employee he saw. We had hired Ellie away from College of the Canyons.

We also made a decision on a big issue. Late in July Tom Veloz, president of the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Club, had come to the council with a proposal for us to allow the club to lease some land in Newhall Park for twenty-five years for a clubhouse. The testimony had gone on for three hours. The people against the proposal raised one serious issue. Should we allow a private group to use city land on a long-term basis in the absence of any policy? The rest of the arguments neighborhood homeowners who feared outsiders com-

ing into their neighborhood. I did not buy that argument. Most of the kids would be attending Placerita Junior High, right across from the park, or Newhall Elementary or Hart High, both just a couple of blocks away.

The Boys and Girls Club was a great example of an organization which had really developed over the years. The club had once been a gleam in the eye of Larry Margolis and Herb Oberman, two members of the local staff of the county Department of Public Social Services. The club had grown into a number of programs throughout the valley, and its fund raising auction had become the biggest event of the nonprofit sector locally. Larry and Herb were terrific examples of caring public employees who wanted to solve problems while doing more than dealing with people on welfare. With Bob Ross providing direction it began to grow, and under Jim Ventress it was making great progress.

Mimi's column in *The Signal* had recorded a question by one opponent. "How many of you would vote for a 25-year *marriage*?"

Mayor McKeon retorted, "Let me introduce my lovely wife, Pat." Pat stood up to applause. Jo Anne Darcy agreed that long marriages were good. I commented that that very night was my twenty-sixth wedding anniversary. Betty Castleberry, our Woman of the Year, stood up and said it was her thirty-seventh. We asked staff to draw up a policy for adoption, and bring the issue back to the council.

Mike Daney, the leader of the opposition, kept the issue alive in the newspapers, and as I drove by Newhall Park I kept an eye out for crowding. As my own kids had attended Placerita Junior High, I had the opportunity to observe the activity at the park over a period of years. Park acreage was scarce in Santa Clarita, but this was not a park that had many visitors from outside the neighborhood. Valencia Glen and Valencia Meadows parks were close by.

Dennis Koontz, Buck McKeon and I formed the majority in passing a motion to direct staff to negotiate a lease. Buck had stated our position well. "If the Boys and Girls Club, on a voluntary basis, is willing to provide some of those services and all they are asking for is a small portion of our park, I'm willing to go along with that and I'm willing to thank them for it." Jan Heidt, a strong proponent of neighborhood rule, voted against it, and Jo Anne Darcy abstained, saying she thought it violated provisions of our policy.

After the vote we took a break, mingling with the crowd. Mike Lyons expressed his anger to Mayor McKeon and me that he had not been allowed to speak as a parks commissioner. Louis Brathwaite, a club board member and planning commissioner, had been allowed to speak, and I wanted to be fair. When we reconvened I moved for reconsideration, with Jan Heidt seconding my motion, as I was sure she would. I wanted to give all commissioners a chance to speak, but most had left, including Mike Lyons. On the revote, the count was four to one, with Jo Anne joining the majority.<sup>15</sup>

Bus benches were an easier problem. Private firms had been placing them at will, paying a small fee to the county, and then the city, for the advertising on the seat backs. Many were not even at bus stops, or on bus routes. The council

moved to grant a franchise that would decrease the number and provide some covered bus stops as well. I pleaded for attractive advertising.<sup>16</sup>

The following Saturday we had a team building session in a meeting room in Canyon Country. David Jones of Sentient Systems came in as a facilitator. This type of session must be held in public, but does not attract any public audience, which makes it a lot easier for council members to be frank with each other. Dr. Jones concentrated on helping us to understand each other's motives. Jo Anne Darcy, George Carvalho and I were typed as analyzers, while Dennis Koontz and Jan Heidt were labeled as emoters and Buck McKeon as a supporter.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after the county election one of our gadflies, John Simas, said he was circulating a recall petition against Supervisor Antonovich. Simas could not circulate a legal petition during the first or last six months of a term, and that cost Simas any credibility he might have ever had with me. While I had hoped Baxter Ward would win, Mike Antonovich was a decent man with whom it was worth working.

Pat Saletore surfaced as a mother who was willing to work for schools in our new developments. She had started as a proofreader for Jill Klajic, who could speak well, but whose ability to write and spell was, to put it mildly, weak. Klajic and SCOPE had lobbied a reduction of 1,000 units from the planned 4,200 residences in the Shapell-Monteverde development north of Plum Canyon Road in the county, but Saletore was not happy with the lack of a new school. She was hard working, and let Sacramento know how parents felt. The council had been learning how important citizen input could be.<sup>18</sup>

Bob Spierer of the Sheriff's Department, who as Captain of the Santa Clarita station doubled as our police chief, came to us with a request that we adopt a new curfew. The courts had said that the old curfew was unconstitutionally vague. Jo Anne Darcy characterized the curfew as being interpreted by local residents as a "Gestapo tactic."

Jan Heidt said that times had changed, and that teenagers were more mobile and responsible than twenty or thirty years before. When I moved to direct the city attorney to write a curfew law similar to the county's new ordinance, I got a second but lost the vote four to one. Buck McKeon was quoted in the paper as saying that he voted against the curfew because everyone else voted against it. "My vote didn't matter." All I could do was wonder what was going to happen when Santa Clarita was the only jurisdiction in the area without a curfew, and kids came to play in our city from miles around.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile the lack of public input was frustrating. One gentleman wrote to *The Signal* to complain about the growth in the city, referring to the Shapell-Monteverde project. I responded with a letter pointed out that the project was in the county, and that it had been reduced somewhat by the efforts of SCOPE, the Santa Clarita Civic Association and city staff, as well as the county and the developers. But the real purpose of my letter was in the last paragraph. "I want to express my appreciation to you for communicating your feelings. Few people take the time to write. Therefore, each letter is taken seriously."<sup>20</sup>

It was still necessary to do everything possible to educate the public. Public lack of knowledge of the city's boundaries plagued us. At one point I suggested that we post signs at the city limits in the style which had once prevailed in Berlin [*Sie verlassen jetzt den amerikanischen Sektor*], "You are now leaving the Santa Clarita sector," in German. Many people would not have been able to read the signs, but the storm of questions would have done a great deal to educate the public. City staff was not supportive, and I knew why. They would have to answer the questions, taking calls from some people who would be very angry about using a foreign language to make a point. I sympathized with them, but regretted not being able to post the signs. We would have gotten international publicity for our plight.

We celebrated the city's first birthday on December 15 with a program at city hall, in the unfinished west end of the third floor. That evening we had a Mayor's Ball in the Main Gallery at Cal Arts, which Carol Rock and her committee had decorated. Dan and Ellen Hon played Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

Scott Newhall complemented the city council in an unprecedented editorial which made me smile.

#### A Little Honey For Our Gang of Five

Any editorial paragrapher worth his pinch of salt suffers the pangs of hell when he is seized with an uncontrollable urge to sing like Mary Poppins and sweeten his comments with honey.

However, Christmas is just around our wet and soggy corner. Therefore, before the year has passed us by, we wish to remind the lazy Santa Clarita Valley voters that by some fluke, or perhaps just plain dumb luck, we have ended our first full year of independent cityhood with as honorable and conscientious a city council you can find anywhere in these United States of America.

This is not to say unequivocally that the new city of Santa Clarita has suddenly emerged from the bull pen of American municipalities as the undisputed Athens of the West. But in terms of the integrity quotient of our council members, this city is something of an all-American freak. We have an honest and reasonable city council.

For upwards of a half century this editor has associated with, fought with, insulted, excoriated, wheedled, threatened, and as a last resort even attempted to bribe, hundreds of men and women who have answered the call of the political wild and plunged into what is poetically described as public service.

Honest leadership is a rare and wondrous phenomenon in our typical self-governing communities. The urban American city is normally controlled by oldtime political party gangs, complete with ward heelers, big-spending lobbyists, slick public relations hucksters, and most common and important of all, the bagmen who know where to find the money and how to launder it. In other words, in Big Town, U.S.A. the buck stops at City Hall.



Scott went on to describe city government in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. He had run for mayor of San Francisco once, years after he began to spend much of his time in the Santa Clarita Valley. I was curious how the returns were coming in, and tuned in the powerful CBS radio outlet in The City that evening just as Scott was being asked how he felt about coming in fifth. Scott was a happy man. He claimed victory, saying, "I won!" When asked how he could say that, he made the point that he had made all the people listen to the issues he had raised, and the next mayor would have to deal with them. I knew he was right. He had come in fifth, but had won.

Here in the Santa Clarita Valley the civic climate is much, much better. We have been well served by our own Gang of Five – by Mayor Buck McKeon, Mayor-Designate Jan Heidt, Members Jo Anne Darcy, Carl Boyer and Dennis Koontz.

The start-up year of any enterprise – be it a bank, a gambling casino, a house of ill fame, or a Los Angeles County city – is a fearful challenge. Nevertheless in this initial twelvemonth period our Gang have discharged their responsibilities with dignity and, at times with a patience far beyond the call of duty.

They have sat upright in their uncomfortable chairs, late into the night, with eyes ostensibly open, courteously listening to one vainglorious petition after another from the public rabble....

As mentioned herein earlier, we apologize for our honeyed words and cloying compliments. But we the people of the Santa Clarita Valley have been fortunate in our startup municipal leadership.<sup>21</sup>

I felt that was very nice of Scott, even if it was a shocker. We were not following the pattern in those cities where the first council had been too controversial, dishonest, or just plain stupid.

<sup>1</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1988.

<sup>2</sup>*The Signal*, June 23, 1988, and *Daily News*, June 23, 1988.

<sup>3</sup>*The Signal*, June 26, 1988.

<sup>4</sup>*Daily News*, June 26, 1988.

<sup>5</sup>*The Signal*, June 5, 1988.

<sup>6</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 10, 1988.

<sup>7</sup>*The Signal*, August 21, 1988.

<sup>8</sup>*Daily News*, August 27, 1988.

<sup>9</sup>*The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Oct. 19, 1988.

<sup>10</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 9, 1988.

<sup>11</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 12, 1988, and *The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Sept. 14, 1988.

<sup>12</sup>*The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Oct. 30, 1988.

<sup>13</sup>*The Signal*, Nov. 6, 1988.

<sup>14</sup>*The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Nov. 9, 1988.

<sup>15</sup>*The Signal*, Nov. 11 and 13, 1988; *Daily News*, Nov. 11, 1988; *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 12, 1988, and *The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Nov. 13, 1988.

<sup>16</sup>*Daily News*, Nov. 14, 1988.

<sup>17</sup>*The Signal*, Nov. 15, 1988.

<sup>18</sup>*The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Nov. 20, 1988.

<sup>19</sup>*The Signal*, Dec. 10, 1988.

<sup>20</sup>*The Signal*, Dec. 15, 1988.

<sup>21</sup>*The Santa Clarita Valley Citizen*, Dec. 21, 1988.