



BENNETT VALLEY VOICE

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

This issue's message is less a report on what is happening than on what needs to happen. What's that? Involvement -- your involvement. The Bennett Valley Homeowners Association has become one of the most influential organizations of its kind in the County, enjoying a large measure of credibility with local decision makers as the voice of the people of the Valley. But this influence and credibility can continue only as long as the Association remains a viable forum for discussing the Valley's challenges and opportunities as they arise. It's important to remember that there is room for differences of opinion. Intelligent people with different backgrounds and perspectives are bound to disagree from time to time. These disagreements can be a source of strength, but only if we can deal with each other with mutual respect and work hard to resolve our differences constructively. What happens to an organization when its members allow themselves to become polarized and stop communicating? See for yourself at the Fire Protection District Board Meetings, the second Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m., at the Fire Station.

The next worst thing is apathy. The Homeowners Association needs your input: write letters; call a Board Member; attend Board Meetings (third Wednesday of each month, 7:30 p.m., at the Fire Station). Let us know what you're thinking. Otherwise how can we speak for you?

A specific need for hands-on involvement can be found in the Bennett Valley Design Review Committee, which was appointed by the Board of Supervisors after the 1978 Study to oversee and guide all new building in the Valley, especially to limit visibility when feasible. The original Committee appointments were made without a specific term of office, but a recent ruling by the Board of Supervisors has provided for new appointments to be made on a rotating basis for a specific term, on the recommendation of the Homeowners Assoc.

This will provide both a rest for burnt-out Committee members and an opportunity for the community to inject "fresh blood" and assure that the Committee's standards remain those of the community as a whole. Committee members Patrick Campbell and Ray Longman (to whom many thanks) are due to step down in March, so the Homeowners Association needs to talk to potential candidates soon, in order to pass its recommendations on to the Supervisors in time for them to make the new appointments. If you own property here, you already are involved with the Design Review Committee, so let's hear constructive recommendations now, rather than grumbling later.

To conclude we can only reiterate: it's your Valley, your Association. Get involved.

EXTEND SUMMERFIELD ROAD?

In the Fall of 1984, developer Dennis Hunter filed for a major subdivision of his property - the former Bruggemann Ranch - just outside the Santa Rosa City Limits, and adjacent to the park and golf course. This filing represents Hunter's second attempt to develop the property, the first having been a considerably more ambitious proposal which would have required City and County General Plan amendments and an extension of the city limits into rural Bennett Valley. Your Homeowners Association Board opposed that project, and it was rejected by the Santa Rosa City Council at the "pre-zoning" level. The current proposal, on the other hand, was drawn up in rough compliance to the Bennett Valley Specific Plan, and has received your Board's slightly qualified endorsement. So far, so good.

The issue at hand, and the reason for this article, was a point raised by Board elder statesman Bill Jacobs. Bill's point was that the County should require Hunter to dedicate an easement for the eventual extension of Summerfield Road to Bennett Valley Road, where it would emerge somewhere southeast of Pisenti's (near the old goat barn). Bill Jacobs was joined in this opinion by Sam Mitchell, but the majority of the Board was opposed to the prospect of an extension, and then-President Warren Watkins registered our opposition in his letter to the County in October, 1984.

At the November Board meeting Bill Jacobs again raised the issue of a Summerfield easement. The Board majority remained unmoved in its opposition to the extension, but agreed that its importance justified referring the question to the residents of Bennett Valley.

Bill's main premise is that Bennett Valley Road is unsafe because it is handling "40 times the traffic it handled 40 years ago"

when it was essentially the same road it is today. He claims that the relatively low residential densities allowed under the Bennett Valley Specific Plan are unrealistic, that development pressure will eventually place many more homes here than the current plan calls for, and that those people will need better roads and another way out of the Valley. He also points out that his proposal does not call for immediate construction of the extension, but merely for dedication of an easement to make the extension more economical to build if and when it is needed.

The Board majority, including this writer, is of the opinion that the Summerfield Road extension would primarily serve as a way into and through the Valley for commuter traffic. I think we can grant Bill's point that there is a great deal more traffic on Bennett Valley Road than it was designed for. The same is true of U.S. 101; the same is particularly true of Highway 12. The growth projected for Sonoma County represents for our purposes an infinite supply of traffic which will fill to overflowing any road of any design capacity. The question is whether we want small, overcrowded roads with 45 to 50 mile-per-hour traffic, or large, overcrowded roads with several times the volume of 70 mile-per-hour traffic. A look at the Highway 12 situation indicates that Bennett Valley is extremely lucky not to be designated as a major through corridor between Santa Rosa and the South County - and that the option to be so designated is not one we should seek to preserve. Ask someone who lives in, say, Kenwood.

Bill's point about growth above-and-beyond the levels projected by the Bennett Valley Plan sounds like a self-fulfilling prophesy; if we want more growth, we can have it by creating the infrastructure for it. The Summerfield extension would put more traffic here sooner, and worsen, rather than improve, the traffic in Bennett Valley. At least that's the opinion of the Board majority.

But we're not infallible and we need to know your opinion so we can pass it on to the Planning Commission and the Supervisors. Please take the time to fill out the opinion poll ballot on the last page and send it in to the Association, either along with your membership dues or separately.

David A. Steiner
President

"THE GUENZA'S"

Profile of an Early Bennett Valley Family

Phillip (Phil) Guenza, now 75 was one of nine children whose parents and grandparents came from Italy via New York in the late 1800's. Phil's father, John, came from northern Italy, his mother, Mary Bianci, came from the Lake Como area. As a result two dialects were spoken in the home.

In 1917, the Guenzas came to Bennett Valley and went into diversified farming as many families did then. They produced garden vegetables, fruit, grapes, chickens, various meats, and most of all milk.

Mr. Guenza recollected there to be two wineries, nine vineyards, ten various orchards producing prunes, apples and some cherries, four large chicken ranches, one broiler chicken ranch, and five sheep ranches when they came here. Winery names were the Sibbalds, Brangers, and Brovelli's. The sheep ranchers were Frank, Len and Pote Kurtz, the Jamisons, the Bezzini's and the Savory's. At this time there were also 12 Grade A dairies and 12 Grade B dairies here. The Guenzas started with Grade B milk then went to Grade A and eventually produced both. Their milk cows were Holstein, Guernsey and some Jerseys. They prided themselves on a clean well-run operation. For many years the milk and cream went to the Grace Bros. Creamery at 3rd and Wilson in Santa Rosa. Behind that was the Tomato Cannery, another crop grown in this area then. In later years the milk went to the Co-op in Petaluma.

On the ranch was an old lake bottom covering about 10 acres. It had been drained by the previous owners the Hansens, using a wooden box system. The Guenzas replaced the boxes with 12" tile digging down 14". It had to be cleaned once a year. This 10 acres provided a wonderful garden area irrigated by an artesian spring. One crop grown here was a variety of potato called "Late Red Rose" which came from Bodega where many potatoes were grown at that time. Joseph M. Talbot of the Press Democrat wrote them up as "potatoes you could stack like wood". They were long and narrow. Each year 45 seedling potatoes were held out for the next years planting. These 45 potatoes weighed a total of 115 lbs. They were sold to local restaurants and as produce, used by the family and what was left over ground and fed to the cows.

A trip to town, Santa Rosa, would be an all day event with a load of firewood and vegetables to sell. The children would play Boccie Ball (bowling ball) with friends in town and at home. On rare occasions they would wagon over to Boyes Hot Springs via Bennett Valley Road and Glen Ellen to go swimming.

School was a mile and a half walk to the old Strawberry School. Among some of their activities were plays put on for the parents. One particular play stands out for Phil Guenza and that one was "Robin Hood" acted out in Cooper's Redwood Grove, and there are pictures to prove it.

Family members pitched in to help with all the farm work. When canning time came the boys did the pitting and peeling. When the men were in the fields with the Hay the women would take over in the barn.

Neighbors helped neighbors with building, haying, picking, etc. The Guenza brothers helped convert a winery building on the old Whitaker Ranch into an Apple Dryer and

THE GUENZA'S Continued

at a later time converted it into a barn. In the 50's the brothers built homes on Batesole and on the Botasso property. Phil Guenza was one of the first five directors of the Bennett Valley Fire Department.

Montgomery Village was also remembered to being all prune and walnut orchards and between there and Summerfield Road were produce fields. 1925 brought the building of a few homes.

Wildflowers were also more abundant in the early 1900's such as wild violets, redwood lilies, wild strawberries, wild azaleas, paintbrush, and several varieties of trillium (a dark red one, variegated colored ones, and white).

Varieties of grapes the Guenza's grew on 15 acres were Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Alicante.

Memories of buying a pair of Levi's for \$1.00 and a silver and gold belt buckle for \$52.00 with money saved by picking fruit for 5 cents a box when Phil was 18 years old. The fruit was picked on the Letty ranch. A 200 lb. hog sold for \$4.00 and potatoes for 2 cents a lb.

The Guenza's gave up the dairy in the late 50's. Price and wage controls were lifted but milk prices stayed the same making it difficult for any dairyman to stay in business.

Phil Guenza says, "It was a good, rugged life - lots of hunting and fishing. Given so many chickens, so many cows, fruit trees and a garden' a family could do well as many did in those days."

MSF

OPINION POLL BALLOT - SUMMERFIELD EXTENSION

YES _____ As a condition of approval of his subdivision, Dennis Hunter should be required to dedicate an easement through his property for the eventual extension of Summerfield Road to Bennett Valley Road.

NO _____ Summerfield Road should not be extended; no dedication of easement should be required.

COMMENTS _____