

October 13 – December 7, 2005

A Little History of the NRBBA

By: Ernie O'Dell, City Treasurer
Past president NRBBA 1982-83

In order to shed a little light on some of the issues of the day, a little historical summary might be of interest to some who have not witnessed some of the events of the past.

The NRBBA was founded in 1979 by a group of businesspeople who were interested in improvements in north Redondo Beach, most notably Artesia and Aviation Boulevards, which had both fallen into a certain degree of disrepair at that time.

This same group almost simultaneously founded the North Redondo Beach Rotary Club in 1979, probably as a way of instilling pride in the area, and increased participation in the north end.

Artesia at that time was thought of by some as the ugly sister when compared to other areas of the city, especially when it came to attention to problems in the area. The Harbor and Pier and the Riviera Village were seemingly getting more attention at that time. There was quite a graffiti problem in the North end, and gangs made a larger presence then. The power poles that lined the boulevard were not yet under grounded, which caused for that visual blight.

The City applied for and received some federal grant funding for commercial rehab that continues to this day. These funds have paid for a number of frontage repairs and upgrades, awnings, paint etc. The Chamber of Commerce in concert with the City established a Graffiti Hot Line that the City now utilizes to eradicate graffiti as soon as possible after being reported.

At the time I joined the NRBBA you had to join the Chamber of Commerce and then if your business was in north Redondo Beach, you would automatically become a member of the NRBBA.

I joined the Chamber and started attending NRBBA meetings in 1981, in 1982 the NRBBA decided to do something to bring attention to the existence of the business group, and at the same time return something to the community from the business community. Therein was the birth of "Springfest". I was the first chairman of that fundraiser for the NRBBA in 1982. The NRBBA has held Springfest for 23 years now

The following year I was elected the President of NRBBA for the term 1982-83. The one burning issue at that time was under grounding the power lines. We continued to pursue that issue until its fruition in 1990.

After the utilities were under grounded, and a few successful “Springfests” the NRBBA had a few funds and opted to purchase the banner holders and banners for the street light standards that lined Artesia. For some time there were attractive NRBBA banners lining Artesia with a NRBBA logo emblazoned on them. I am not sure of who currently provides the banner hangers, but the NRBBA should be able to access them if they have a viable banner program.

Over the years many issues have come and gone, with one of the most important ones recently accomplished, the rededication of the boulevard from CalTrans to the City, and the repaving, repairs, upgrades and landscaping of Artesia Boulevard.

One of the complaints that recur from time to time is the lack of participation from the other business people. Having managed the Redondo Beach Chamber of Commerce for over 10 years from 1985 to 1995, I know first hand how hard it is to get high participation. There are always core groups that do all the work, and by in large the other 90 percent just don’t get involved. That’s not likely to change, and is the same everywhere. What can be done though is to constantly pursue new people. It’s much like the Rotary club, people are constantly coming and going and you have to constantly recruit new people from the business community. As an example, of the twenty or thirty people who used to show up in the ‘80s, Tom Fouts and I are the only ones still active.

What can we do now? Obviously we need to put some effort towards getting more interest in the organization by doing an outreach to the businesses. I think Phil made a good recommendation about sending a flyer each month announcing the meeting time, date, place and subject or subjects to be discussed at the meeting to all businesses in the impacted area. These efforts have been done in the past, and with some success, but it takes time, effort and some money to make any progress. We probably have the money, but it’s getting the consistent volunteer labor that is the problem.

Kathy had a good recommendation regarding having a printed agenda, and certain reports, like a treasurer’s report and perhaps minutes that could be sent to the businesses each month with the announcement of the following month’s agenda.. We used to elect a new President, Pres. Elect, Secretary and Treasurer every year. They don’t necessarily need to change, but some new people get more involved if they have the opportunity to participate in these officer positions.

When I joined the NRBBA they had their own dues of \$25.00 per year. Then later an agreement was struck with the Chamber of Commerce to collect the NRBBA’s dues with their annual billing. The dues then went to \$50.00 per year. The Chamber provided the same service to the RVA. This was later dropped due to the Chamber feeling that adding the other Associations dues to their billing was causing Chamber members to drop their membership.

While the NRBBA has contributed to a number of worthwhile community causes over the years, the focus should also be on improving participation from the business community on the NRBBA’s agenda. With regards to the funds available, the balance on hand should be reported on a regular basis, so as to make informed decisions on where the membership wants to apply their resources.

I have always felt that a business directory/map of Artesia would be a nice piece to send to all residents in north Redondo Beach. I envision that each block would show each business located on that block with address, name of owner/proprietor, and type of services offered, and a telephone number and most likely today, an email or website address. I would think that a foldout map that listed each block on a given fold would be a real useful tool for residents in the area. An annual update might enlist some advertisement revenues to offset the printing and distribution costs.

Surveys have been done in the past, but maybe its time for another one. Asking the residents and businesses what type of business they would shop at, or like to see located on the boulevard, and what other issues they may have, i.e., parking issues, decorative lighting, safety, feeling secure walking etc. Perhaps considering promoting seasonal events like; a Halloween night candy walk, and or a Holiday Boulevard Stroll. On these special occasions perhaps a decorated bus could provide a shuttle service along the boulevard, where residents could jump on and off at any block...

The City has been very supportive of the NRBBA over the years with usually one, two or even three council members attending on a regular basis, and other staff there at every meeting. I have only missed a few meetings in my 25 years of NRBBA participation. The city staff has provided a number of beneficial services over the years, including attempts to create common parking by recommending removal of some property line fences to create better access and more parking, surveys of parking assets, pedestrian issues, enhanced safety, commercial rehab and elimination of day workers, street vendors, gangs and graffiti, to name a few.

The NRBBA has been quite successful in the issues it has chosen to pursue over the years. Perhaps the next burning issue that would inure to the benefit of the organization and to the business community, as well as the residential community would be to help foster support for the North Branch Library. When the new library is completed it will be the pearl of Artesia Boulevard, and will instill a new pride in the architectural and cultural spirit of north Redondo Beach.

For any business association to be successful there needs to be funding available to do the outreach to get and maintain participation. The NRBBA should utilize its funds for that purpose, and if there is interest in doing bigger projects and or beautification or better seasonal lighting, perhaps the NRBBA should investigate establishing a Business Improvement District (BID). This is a task that takes dedication and a lot of work, but might be something the NRBBA might want to look into.

Ps. The Riviera Village Association (RVA) recently established a Business Improvement District (BID) with good success. Perhaps an invitation to the RVA and the City to make a presentation to the NRBBA on the benefits and or pitfalls of establishing a BID would be a worthwhile program.

At this past Tuesday's City Council meeting our Assistant City Manager described the intent of a BID was to help commercial districts compete with Malls, as Malls charge certain fees for maintenance, advertising, marketing etc. If the NRBBA is seeking more participation from the entire business community along the Artesia and Aviation corridors, this might bring renewed interest in the betterment of the North Redondo Beach business community.