

COMMENTARY

The War of the Laguna

by Frank Robertson



Some of us weren't sure what to make of it the other day when Bill Haigwood was quoted as saying "I don't think Indians had golf courses in the Laguna."

I guess not, but then what? Nor did they have sport utility wagons with big wide tires or little plastic swizzle sticks to stir their cocktails. I also doubt they had a decent chardonnay for less than \$10.

Maybe worst of all, they didn't have the good sense to keep whitey the hell out of the New World.

And now we're here. In our suburban homes and two-car garages, With our mutual funds, leisure time, and spiked white shoes. Ready for a round of golf.

I guess the big question is, how do we keep the middle class out of the Laguna?

I do not play golf. Nor am I a Native American. I do own a canoe.

Someday I hope to launch it in the Laguna and see how far I can paddle away from modern civilization. As far as I can tell, I will be rowing past cows munching fodder irrigated with wastewater produced by civilization's sewage plant.

When Haigwood, the president of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, said Indians didn't have golf courses he was explaining

why an 18-hole golf course would be out of whack with current efforts to restore what's left of the Laguna to its former natural state: a refuge for wildlife, a haven for environmentally-sensitive indigenous people who would never think of defiling nature by covering it with sod.

But what about those gambling casinos? I probably shouldn't even bring it up, but as long as we're talking about what is (or isn't) appropriate activity in the Laguna, could we talk about Morris Street?

"I don't think Indians had golf courses in the Laguna." I guess it's true, but then what? Nor did they have sport utility wagons or Dacron polyester ...

Why is a golf course not OK, but Morris Street is OK? Why was the development of a large and often empty concrete building called the Teen Center, on Morris Street at the edge of the Laguna, cause for a major community celebration, while a golf course or a skateboard park are vilified as evil uses? Isn't this getting just a little crazy?

So let's review: Environmentalists went ballistic over the city of Santa Rosa's proposed Laguna golf course. And now some enviros as well as members of the Sebastopol City Council say the town's skateboarders are equally out-of-bounds to think of putting a skateboard park next to the Morris Street Teen Center. Because a skateboard park would, like a golf course, violate the community goals of restoring and preserving the Laguna's natural state.

"The only plans for the Laguna that deserve consideration are those premised on a reverence for it as an irreplaceable natural resource," the always-articulate Laguna preservationist Helen Shane wrote last week. "It is the job of all of us to make sure that the Laguna is not viewed as empty space, to be filled with inappropriate development."

Oh? So where were all these reverent people when the Teen Center came along? Or for that matter, the rest of Sebastopol's industrial eastern edge?

Have you visited Morris Street lately? How about a pleasant nature walk past machine shops, factories, and a zillion cement trucks? Keep going and you arrive at a business park with a view of warehouses, greasy dirt, and a traffic jam on Highway 12.

Morris Street seems to have been zoned "PU," for Planned Ugliness. But listening to the Laguna huggers, you'd think it's Wild Kingdom, the Okefenokee Swamp or the Serengeti Plain. Let kids skateboard down there? Don't be absurd. You wanna ruin the ecology?

The Laguna preservationists vowed to sue the city of Santa Rosa to stop the golf course. I'm sure they meant business. I mean, that's what I'd do.

But I'm curious why our eternally vigilant greenies have never sued anybody over Morris Street.

Maybe that's where the Indians went wrong. They didn't have golf courses, and they didn't have lawyers.

(Frank Robertson is a Sonoma West Times & News staff writer)

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