

Redwood City Tribune

Redwood City and San Carlos

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Redwood Shores, still growing, has caught nation's eye

By Mario Dianda
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Twenty-five years ago, it was just a flat, muddy tract of slough-filled land across from San Carlos and Belmont on the other side of the Bayshore Freeway.

Today, the posh Hotel Sofitel, the prestigious Shores Center business development, 2,400 residential dwellings, a comprehensive network of parks and a meandering 76-acre lagoon have sprung from the mudflats.

This is Redwood Shores, the Peninsula's youngest community.

And despite its geographic proximity to San Carlos and Belmont, the booming community actually falls within Redwood City's boundaries.

Although Redwood Shores has developed quickly over the past decade, its biggest growing spurt still lies ahead.

By the end of the century, its population is projected to triple to about 18,000.

Back in the early 1960s, so-called "new towns" were touted as the wave of the fu-

ture, but Redwood Shores is one of the few such communities that actually thrived.

This Saturday, 15 years will have passed since Redwood Shores Inc. bought the 1,485-acre Redwood Shores area, then known as the Redwood Peninsula.

Redwood Shores Inc. is a division of the New York-based Mobil Corp.

"It's taken much longer for us to proceed with various parts of this project," said company president Don Warren.

"We were overly optimistic, unrealisti-

cally optimistic," he acknowledged.

But at long last, Warren added, "the community has arrived. It has now become what we set out to do."

One of the major reasons that Redwood Shores succeeded where other new towns failed was Mobil's "financial staying power," Warren said.

"Mobil was very patient in expecting a return of its investment," he said, adding that 1986 marked the first year the cor-

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Looking to the future

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poration actually turned a profit from the development.

Warren said Redwood City's support of the project also contributed to its success.

"If there had been a particular environment in Redwood City that was anti-growth or slow-growth or highly, environmentally militant, this project could not have happened," he said.

Finally, Warren said, "We set very high standards for ourselves and the community, and we have stuck by them through thick and thin."

Yvette Haworth, president of the Redwood City-San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce and Warren's assistant, said the community, in addition to winning various architectural awards, also has drawn national attention.

"We are getting a lot of inquiries from people in a lot of areas around the country because they know this is one of the successful projects," she said.

One of the community's early residents, Bob Slusser, is board president of the Redwood Shores Homeowners' Association.

Slusser said he moved to Redwood Shores in 1972 because "it was one of the few places on the Peninsula at that time that young people planning families could afford to live in."

When his family sought a larger house years later, Slusser said, he looked throughout the Peninsula "but couldn't find the same amenities anywhere else."

What makes Redwood Shores so attractive, he said, is its location.

"To generally anywhere in the Bay Area, you're almost dead center here," Slusser said.

The community's open spaces, parks and "self-developed social structure" also are precious amenities, he said.

With the exception of a fire station, "what the community needs more than anything else is a community facility," Slusser noted.

"Outside of the hotel (Sofitel), if you wanted to hold any large community activity, where would you go?" he asked.

Slusser said that a growing number of community residents also are concerned about "the type of growth" that will be occurring in coming years.

He said many residents believe that a recently completed subdivision of three-story apartment buildings has increased traffic dramatically.

Because the general plan calls for substantially more "high-density units" in the near future such

as apartments, townhouses and condominiums, "the potential of having stop lights at every corner does not sit well," he said.

Warren said he is not surprised that some Redwood Shores residents would prefer a reduction in residential density, but added that a majority of people responding to a recent survey indicated "they want the community to continue basically the way it has been going."

As a privately financed community, Redwood Shores depends on a balance of developments calculated to generate enough money to pay for parks, waterways and other amenities that residents value, Warren said.

"It's a very fine-tuned balance," he stressed.

Without such a balance, Warren noted, Redwood Shores "essentially would be a tract subdivision like anywhere else in Silicon Valley."

Warren said Redwood Shores' previous owner, Leslie Properties Inc., had visions of turning the area into a "large new town," and had asked San Carlos and Belmont to annex it. Both cities rejected the proposal.

When its turn to be courted came, Redwood City accepted Leslie's request and annexed the property.

In 1964, the city created a general improvement district to raise taxes to pay off bonds issued for public improvements.

Four years later, the City Council approved the final map for a subdivision proposing 156 houses and 38 townhouses, and in July 1969 the first family moved into Redwood Shores.

But later that year, federal authorities suspended home loan guarantees pending an evaluation of Redwood Shores' vulnerability to earthquakes.

Studies subsequently showed that Redwood Shores is no more quake-prone than are other Peninsula cities, but by then Leslie had lost \$2.5 million during the 13 months that mortgage insurance was suspended.

As a result, Leslie announced that it would talk with prospective buyers. On Feb. 29, 1973, Redwood Shores Inc. (then Mobil Oil Estates Ltd.) bought the land, on which 527 houses had been built.

Warren said the process of preparing environmental impact reports and other legal transactions took far longer than anticipated, stalling construction until the fall of 1975.

The Shores Center, a corporate office headquarters, contains about 1.8 million square feet of space. When completed, the center may have 3.5 million square feet.

On the residential front, meanwhile, an additional 450 residential units are planned for construction this year.