

History of Business Development in East Palo Alto , California

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July 20, 1985, 09:45 to 10:15

Greetings Colleagues, officials, friends and residents of East Palo Alto. It is my pleasure to see you here today .

My instructions require that I speak to the importance of the area in past, present and future modes. (thus the importance of the people).

Before Joining the U. S.

The area before coming into the union 400 years ago this area was heavily inhabited by Indians . My daughter, who is an anthropologist said that this area was one of the most heavily populated prior to the formation of the United States. (she has done considerable digging in San Mateo County.)

In this very area the Castano Indian Nation carried on business, commerce and production. They were paving the way for us and silicon valley.

This area was part of The Spanish land grant called Rancho De Las Pulgas. A smaller section of the Rancho was called Rancho Ravenswood.

The Port at Cooley Landing provided considerable business: shipping , transportation point, feed and supply, and timber. The port facility thrived until the Southern Pacific connected San Francisco and San Jose By Rail. Before the Railway travelers came by water to Cooley Landing and went overland from Cooley landing to San Jose. The first big industry was transportation, followed by feed and building supplies This area thrived as the shipping and trade center of the S. F. Peninsula.

From 1910 until the 1930's there was a thriving poultry colony in the area that was to become East Palo Alto.

In 1925 with assistance from San Mateo County the area got the name " East Palo Alto" as a compromise between those who advocated Runnymede and those who advocated Ravenswood.

The year 1927 brought the first Bay crossing, the Dumbarton, a German fabricated draw bridge. The bridge again raised the hope of reviving this natural transportation center.

Just prior to and during the war years the population rose from about 900 to a population of about 8,000.

The growth brought new industry. It brought Flower growing and by 1948 Aircraft industry, more business, small manufacturing and more population.

In 1949 Menlo Park annexed Belle Haven. Menlo Park started a pattern that was to continue until East Palo Alto Became a City.

From the 1950's through the 1960's this area had large retail trade : liquor; Grocery; Safeway ,Littleman, All American and many smaller stores; shoe stores ; drug stores and a 5 and 10 cents store. There also was an East Palo Alto Grange ... There have been patterns of rise and decline over the years--the nation is in a pattern of decline but we at this peculiar time are on the rise.

The 60's was generally a period of decline in the businesses of this community. Many businesses moved to Menlo Park or to the Santa Clara Valley.

In 1968 we tried to stem the tide of economic decline in the area . The Urban Coalition and Counterparts got involved in some community development efforts. The Coalition established Minority Enterprise Small Business Investment Corporations (MESBICs) provided venture capital for about 41 business in this area. The Nairobi shopping center was a joint venture between the Coalition and Counterparts. Stores, Media, Clubs, furniture manufacturing, food service are a few examples of the new businesses.... Many of the Entrepreneurs were not trained to run their new businesses.

There were many support organizations formed to support the economic development of the community. The Chamber Boosters, Ushirika (economic development), Black Business Coalition, Nairobi Merchants Association, and numerous social programs that were businesses; those that survived became full pledged businesses. There were others Tulip L. Jones Women's' Club, the Girls Club and the Manhattan Play House .

The Chamber has been conducting a Business and residential Survey. We found interesting and alarming things. Many businesses did not wish to participate with the Survey to provide the City and the Chamber with information that would assist planning and economic development.

As we probably all know by now that there are a large number of service providers in the area. The National trend is toward service industries and high technology.-- High tech can also be used by service providers.

Nationally we have a sluggish economy--low production and leadership that knows more about making war than how to keep the U S in the circle of the producer nations rather than the circle of the consumer nations. War and defense industry has weakened the ability of US industry to produce. If Military technology could be applied to production industries , the U S would be leading the world in production. As it stands now the U S

depends upon the Pacific Basin Countries and Europe for items it once produced. Asia and Europe are producing the inventions of Stanford University.

I've said all this to say that the country needs our successful small businesses as does the City of East Palo Alto. Small business is the backbone of the employment market. These troubling times and paradoxes present a multiplicity of opportunities for those of us in business.

As a member of the Chamber of Commerce, I would recommend that the City give existing businesses first consideration in its economic development planning and development. These businesses have already passed the acid test and deserve any enhancement that the City can provide. Of course, some new business will serve to enhance existing businesses.

Here, in East Palo Alto, we are in a transition mode. Taking over various functions and operations from the County: police, planning, permits, public works, etc. Some of these transitions may cause trauma to local businesses. This conference provides an opportunity for the businesses, the policy makers, and the administrators to come face to face.

If you are having problems, then use this opportunity to let the city know if it is on your back and how it can get off.

The leadership of the community has publicly committed itself to business and business development, you, are it

We need you to join and support the chamber and the City in a way that doesn't compromise you and your business. This joining together to create makes us all whole and sane in an insane time.

Here in the 80's

We are at a location that lends itself to access and transportation to other centers and main centers of operations. The climate is a little cooler but still quite ideal.

We have generally good housing stock and some room for a small increase. We should not move to increased housing easily.

We have a population which has a wish list that includes the development of grocery, clothing, restaurants, entertainment, training businesses, etc.

We have Stanford University in the Back yard, Silicon Valley in the side yard and the S. F. Bay and future port/harbor in one of the other yards.

This is an area of great strategic importance and the key to future development and enhancement is in the hands of some very important people, all of us.