

Dear Riviera Village Association:

In 1969 the Riviera Village Association was instrumental in the founding and the creation of what is now known as Riviera Village Community Park, located at the intersection of Catalina Avenue and Palos Verdes Drive. The year 2024 is the 55 year anniversary of the park dedication.

Our family remembers the development of the park, as our father, Joe Vilarino, was the President of The Riviera Village Association (RVA) during this timeframe. As President, our father spearheaded the volunteer recruitment of the RVA members, local service groups and residential citizens to contribute their time, or money, to make the park a reality. Once the RVA was organized and funds were raised, the cities of Redondo Beach and Torrance allocated their funding and resources to complete the development of the park, as the boundaries encompasses both government entities.

As RVA President, our father felt that developing a park, as a gateway into the business district, was an important first impression to draw new shoppers, but also to retain regular returning customers. The odd shaped undeveloped lot covered with weeds and trash was a visual eyesore and a change was needed. During the decade of the 1960's, there was the continuing economic threat to small local downtown business districts by the increasing development of large shopping centers, indoor malls and big "box stores". Riviera Village needed to create an atmosphere with a design to attract and retain customers in order to compete with this economic challenge. To bring attention to this important project to create a park as the business district gateway, our father and other volunteers, cleaned up the empty lot by hand pulling weeds and removing the trash. It was the kick-off campaign to get support behind this project.

Our father suggested that the theme of the park was to honor Clifford Reid, the Hollywood Riviera residential developer and founder, who had created a "French Riviera" atmosphere in his home designs with terra cotta roofs and olive trees in the landscaping. An olive tree was planted as the park centerpiece and the main focus supporting Reid's theme. Our father asked his son, Jeffery Vilarino, an art student at Aviation High School in Redondo Beach, to create and donate an olive tree logo design for the park. (The olive tree image also came to represent the business district for roughly fifty years and was recently recognized by the Redondo Beach Historical Society as Riviera Village's first original logo design with history plaques and documentation on display at their museum.)

Mall and shopping center designer Victor Gruen had been contacted by the RVA to advise on developing a plan for an outdoor mall atmosphere. The olive tree and park theme was carried throughout the shopping district to support the outdoor mall concept. Olive trees were planted along Catalina Avenue and other business district streets accompanied by redwood decks with benches for shopper "rest station" seating. Trash receptacles made of cement mixed with aggregate rock were placed throughout Riviera Village, matching the park sidewalks. The outdoor walking mall concept even included Pacific Coast Highway businesses, known as "Riviera Village On The Hwy", with olive trees planted as far north to Ave D. The end result was a successful unique downtown/highway shopping district laid out like an outdoor mall that could economically compete with large shopping centers and the big "box stores" that still exist today.

The original donors in 1969 who met a certain level of financial contribution to the park were once honored with twelve individual round circular plaques in the park sidewalk featuring their names. The round plaques are gone and missing and these generous former RVA businesses as financial contributors should be recognized within a new plaque at the park. The RVA's role in the original development of the park should not be forgotten, or erased, and this history should be recognized within this new plaque placed next to the original 1969 plaque.