

Looking back on the Chamber's 50 years...

# Border Wars

## Leave Us Alone, Rancho Mirage Tells Palm Desert

By CHUCK KRAMEE  
RANCHO MIRAGE — The release of a Palm Desert incorporation study map which includes part of Rancho Mirage has resulted in a "don't tread

upon my warning" — a committee of citizens here.  
The map was published last week in an area newspaper. It was created by the Palm Desert Development Study Group. The map shows Rancho Mir-

age's eastern boundary line at the intersection of the Clancy Lane to the north is located as "Rancho Mirage?" while the southern portion of Clancy Lane is listed as "Palm Desert?"

Rancho Mirage's chamber directors emphatically assert that such areas are part of Rancho Mirage.  
As a result of the map's publication a special chamber board of directors meeting was

held this week. Directors immediately authorized a letter to be sent to the development group requesting Rancho Mirage's self-proclaimed eastern boundary line and illustrating

their unhappiness over the boundary used on the map.  
The letter read in part: "The board of directors is unanimously against the proposed map and has found no representation in the affected area sup-

porting the proposition as outlined in the map."  
Sidney Greenleaf, postmaster of Rancho Mirage and a member of the chamber, suggests that the results of the study (See RANCHO, Page 11)

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**"LEAVE US ALONE, RANCHO MIRAGE TELLS PALM DESERT,"** screamed the headline on the July 22, 1965 *Desert Sun* newspaper.

Wondering what this was all about, I delved into the Chamber's archives to know the story. I learned about people and events that happened then that define who and what Rancho Mirage is today. Many years before Rancho Mirage was incorporated, the Chamber of Commerce people were among the big movers and shakers of Rancho Mirage, and they fiercely protected what it considered the boundary with Palm Desert.

In 1965, Chamber President and local Postmaster Sid Greenleaf protected our eastern border with the tenacity of a pit bull terrier. Here's how it all came about.

In the early 1950's a couple named Jack and Helen Dengler came to the area and bought a ramshackle old ranch, (once a school for asthmatic children), to which they cleaned up, added cottages, a swimming pool, and horse stables. The dude ranch was dubbed, *The White Sun Guest Ranch*. (The area where it stood is now the White Sun Estates housing development.)

Jack Dengler's business, the Student International Travel Association (SITA), was based in New York City. The company was formed to provide reasonably priced tours to exotic destinations for students. SITA became the first tour operator to offer package tours, including Round-the-World tours with Pan Am, and also was the first tour operator to offer escorted trips to Africa. Dengler disliked being away from his wife and children, who were running the guest ranch, so he built a couple more buildings at the ranch and moved SITA headquarters to Rancho Mirage.

Dengler's SITA organization posted so much mail that the federal government soon announced plans to build a new post office in Rancho Mirage.

Sid Greenleaf, appointed as postmaster here in 1951, saw his postal receipts climb from \$5,000 to over \$80,000 annually. Sid Greenleaf was an old-fashioned, community-minded man when he arrived in Rancho Mirage in 1951. He and his wife bought a home near the post office and became closely involved in community events. Greenleaf's sense of civic duty led him to be involved with the Rancho Mirage Chamber of Commerce since its charter in 1955.

Greenleaf's term as President of the Chamber in 1965 was a banner year for Rancho Mirage.

\*The Chamber and residents wrested control of the Property Owner's Association from original developer Ron Button. Controlling the Association allowed residents to make zoning changes and enforce deed restrictions on certain types of building.

\*The Chamber made a determined pitch to Palm Springs Unified, for a school of its own in the very near future, and sanctioned a \$4.4 million school bond that year.

\*The Chamber had named Lucille Ball as Honorary Mayor, and had named their very first "Miss Rancho Mirage" to compete in the Queen Scheherazade contest at the National Date Festival.

\*New housing developments high in the Magnesia Falls Cove were being constructed, and postal receipts hit \$80,000 that year, up 23.1% from 1964.

\*The Chamber was working to make improvements to the business district and chamber secretary Helen Dengler led the most active Desert Beautiful committee with her frequent "pick up, paint up and plant!" drives.

A cityhood feasibility study was released by the Palm Desert Development Study Group with a map showing Rancho Mirage's eastern boundary as Rio del Sol (the current Bob Hope Drive), putting the Clancy Lane neighborhood in Palm Desert.

Greenleaf called an emergency Chamber meeting, and the Board unanimously opposed the proposed Palm Desert map and made it public policy that Rancho Mirage would remain autonomous and would oppose any mention of a combined incorporation of communities.

Greenleaf, with 14 years as postmaster of Rancho Mirage, insisted that Rancho Mirage's boundaries should be based on federal postal service maps, which showed Rancho Mirage extending to Monterey Avenue on the east and Avenue 44 (now Fred Waring Drive) where it intersects with Highway 111 on the south.

With this in mind he met with the county supervisor and an official of the California Department of Public Works Highway Division to move the recently placed "Palm Desert" sign on Highway 111 back 100 feet into Palm Desert. The *Desert Sun* declared victory for Rancho Mirage in the Border War with Palm Desert.

The victory ended up being short-lived when in the following year, a shopping center developer with property on both sides of the border wanted his development all in Palm Desert.

The decision was ultimately given to the Riverside County Planning Commission, who ignored the Chamber's pleas and Greenleaf's federal postal zone delivery maps. The demarcation of the two communities was made by this body, and Rancho Mirage's gain along Highway 111 from the previous year was gone by 1966.