Recently I was asked to speak to the Irvine Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of when they were founded. I was asked: Is the Irvine of 1999 what I envisioned in 1960. Preparing for that evening and thinking about that question caused me to reflect on the past 39 years. Following are some excerpts of my talk. Were I to give this talk to the Newport Beach Chamber the message would be the much the same but the examples understandably different. Were I to give the address to an audience that wanted to hear about the development of the Ranch and all its parts the message would take on a different emphasis but still remain much the same. I would add the importance of the interrelations between all of the communities and pieces that now reside on the Ranch.

Is the Irvine of 1999 what I envisioned in 1960?

Sept., 1960:
Land use: Asparagus, tomatoes, orange trees & cattle.
Frwys: I-5
Infrastructure: None. No water, sewers or local streets.
The Irvine company: A 93,000 acre agriculture company with no experience in real estate let alone community building.
Commitments: TIC: Build a new town.
UC: Build a new campus and open it in five years.

Jan. 1999:

City of Irvine:
- 130,000+ residents, thousands of businesses with over 180,000 jobs.
- 1,200 ac of greenbelts and parks, 41 athletic fields, 195 miles of bike trails, 9000 acres of open space and wilderness preserve which is part of the 37,000 acre Nature Reserve of Orange County (21,000 acres of which is being donated by The Irvine Company.)
- Won more community design awards than any other new town development in the U.S.
- In less than 10 short years, the Irvine Spectrum has emerged as the technology hub of Southern California and home to one of the most successful entertainment centers in the country.
- Rated as one of the safest cities of over 100,000 in the United States.
- Internationally, Irvine has been recognized as one of the most successful New Communities developed in this century.

Irvine Unified School District:
- In 1996-7 Ranked 1st in SAT scores and in percentage of seniors scoring at or above the national average among Orange County School Districts.
- Every middle school has been recognized as a California Distinguished School and/or National Blue Ribbon School.

UCI:
- 17,000 students.
First public university to be granted Nobel Prizes in two different fields in the same year.

The National Research Council recently ranked UCI in the top 30 of all universities nationwide, and eleventh among public universities.

The National Cancer Institute designated UCI as a “comprehensive cancer center” one of only three in California and the only one in Orange County.

One of only eight Cancer Genetics Research Centers so designated in the Country.

And just last year, U.S. News & World Report ranked UCI as the 9th best public university in the U.S.

Again the question: Is the Irvine of 1999 what I envisioned in Sept. of 1960?

Answer: Yes and No.

No, if only measured by the acres of greenbelts, miles of bike trails, number of businesses and jobs, number of students entering UCI, or even the number of Nobel Prizes and the school’s ranking. Those statistical measuring sticks are impressive but by themselves but don’t make a community.

Yes, if measured by the pride I hear from those who call Irvine their town and envy from those who can’t. That’s the vision I had. To help create a place where its residents, workers and students would be proud to say: I live in Irvine. I attend University of California, Irvine. My business is located in Irvine’s Spectrum.

We built the town’s textural fabric. You residents, business leaders and educators transformed that fabric into the community that we hoped you would.

So in the summer of 1960 a few of us transformed the old Irvine family home on Myford Road into a planning office and began the town planning process. Then visions of greatness were not something we were lacking. What we did lack were explicit plans or hands on experience in how to transform those visions into reality. First came the plans then the experience. Now we have 39 years of hands on experience in community building. Something few organizations in the world can claim.

How challenging was it?

• History is replete with failures.
• Most of the new communities that were launched in the early 60s failed.
• In the early 70s 13 Federally supported New Towns were started. Within two years, 12 went bankrupt.
• The fact is large-scale real estate development is horrendously risky. Huge up front cost for planning, infrastructure and land development sinks most efforts before the first building comes out of the ground.

What was TIC’s alternative?

Sell it piece by piece to the highest bidders.
Consequence: This historic and marvelous ranch would have disappeared into the molasses like sprawl that characterizes most metropolitan development.

**Why did The Irvine Company proceed into a venture for which it had no experience and was known to be so risky?**

It was the challenge of the agreement that had been struck between the University of California and the Company. The belief that if it would succeed anywhere it would be on this magnificent ranch located in a county that was bursting at it’s seams on our northern boundary.

We had an inspirational starter in Pereira’s report. His words were prophetic and challenging.

Irvine Ranch’s “principal advantage was the opportunity of creating a whole new city which would completely and effectively meet all the needs of the University. A stimulating and urban environment is in itself an important ingredient in the growth of a university.”

“The personnel of science-oriented firms ….. will be an important element in the community. Land is being set aside for these activities in order that the community may have a sound economic base and that the business firms and the University may benefit from their proximity in one another through mutual research facilities, joint studies, exchange of ideas, etc.. Famous scientists and highly-trained technicians will come to work in the laboratories and plants which are expected to locate in the vicinity of the University.”

As obvious as that prediction may sound to you today as Spectrum and southern California now rival the silicon valley as the home to our country’s growing information age technological economy in 1960 Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, was barely out of kindergarten. But for a planner contemplating visions of the future holds no boundaries. Were Pereira alive today he undoubtedly would say, I firmly believed that if The Irvine Company and University accepted my vision and did their jobs right it would come true. Our job was to “do the job right” and strive for his vision.

**The TIC/UC agreement:**

Two independent and ideologically different entities agreed to join together for the common good of both. One, a liberal public educational institution and the other, a conservative, fiercely independent rancher known for its dislike of governmental intrusions into what it considered its private property rights.

**Their agreement:**

Build a new University of California campus. Build a new community around it. And, the belief that by planning and working together, each would be the better for it. Each, however, would remain independent and true to there own respective challenge. But each would also draw on the energy and contributions of the other.
The actual agreement was at best a handshake and a promise. However, it has stood for 39 years and is even stronger today.

By 1963 both the University and TIC had transformed their respective visions into plans and were ready to go to work. We had a town to start building. They had two years to open their new university. By then we also recognized that what we were both setting out to create was more than the sticks and stones of the building trades.

We were giving birth to the embryos of complex living organisms. That’s what a city is. That’s what a university is. Places where individuals of different tastes, cultures, ambitions, experiences, biases, goals and attitudes come together and somehow become a community. A living community. A working community. A learning community. Our respective jobs were not to decide whom we wanted to live there and sort out the others. Nor could we if we wanted to. **Our job, vision if you like, was to create both a physical place and organizational structure that made it possible for a community to emerge.**

Our emphasis was on the word community. **The discipline was that nothing was to be built which didn’t have a role in and contribute to the community we were building. Our primary responsibility was to orchestrate the hundreds of independent projects by dozens of independent builders and organizations into a meaningful whole. And that whole was to become Irvine, a community.**

But building a community takes more than one company. The first resident moved into Irvine in 1965 and by 1971 there were 14,000 residents and hundreds of small businesses that called Irvine their home. So early in that year a group of residents started the process of converting Irvine from a child of the county into its own city. So in 1971 the citizens elected their first city council and assumed the responsibility of running their own city. One year later, the Irvine Unified School district was formed and it became another critical player in the growth and maturing of Irvine. And, as you know, in 1979 your Chamber was formed and took your place at Irvine’s table.

**This complex civic enterprise was soon governed and guided by a multiplicity of public, private and institutional organizations. All coming to the table seeking what’s best for Irvine. I used to refer to them as the table legs that supported the table: Irvine. Today, they are the multiplicity of social/political/religious/business groups, the legs, that gives Irvine the balance and variety that our complex society is composed of and makes Irvine the vital organism it has become.**

In retrospect, what do I attribute Irvine’s success to? Two things: Vision and Continuity.
39 years ago the idea, vision if you like, of building a model late twentieth century community and university was conceived. Conceived by a Company and a University born in the 19th century. They each had their own history. Set, as you would expect, in their own individual ways reflecting their respective cultures and missions. Each had, in their own way, experienced and survived the political and economic ebbs and flows that our country had gone through.

That institutional independence and history could easily have been a barrier to their joining together on a common vision. But instead it became one of their most important strengths. It, in my judgement, provided the confidence and stability that allowed the incredibly challenging vision of town and gown to grow to the reality we enjoy today.

The past 39 years have had their share of good and bad economic times. Campus turmoil comes and goes. The city has had its political skirmishes. The Irvine ownership and management have changed. But through it all the original vision built over years of planning in the early sixties remains as strong today as when first conceived. That’s what differentiates us all from any other similar town building endeavor I’m aware of in either this country or abroad. As the baton has been handed off from one management/owner to the next the adoption of the original vision has not only been respected but endorsed and materially enhanced.

UCI Chancellor Jack Peltason built on what founding Chancellor Dan Aldrige started and because of that UCI is what it is today. Don Bren has done the same. He has taken what we pioneers conceived and started and has taken it to a level that exceeds even our earliest fantasies.

In the twenty-eight years that Irvine has been an incorporated city it has had only two city managers. Bill Wollett was the founding manager with Paul Brady his assistant. When Bill retired Paul became manager. That municipal continuity provided critical stability during waves of political change.

The lesson:

Holding any community together in these times of microchips, e-mail and partisan political and ideological skirmishes is difficult enough. Without a common vision it’s impossible. And today’s vision is now more important than yesterday’s. It’s not something to only nostalgically reminisce about. It must reflect today’s realities. Be one that holds the community together.

And finally, to work it must be one we can all believe in. Work for. Our community table has many legs. More will be added as they seek a voice in their community. The job we all have is to make sure no one leg throws the table out of balance. Nor works to destroy the carefully crafted but complex organism we’ve all had a part in creating. That is what you as a chamber can contribute. That’s what we at the Irvine Company pledge.