

Oral History Interview
with
Wendy Wetzel Harder

Date: Sunday, June 3, 2012
Interviewer: Robert David Breton
Location: Mission Viejo Library
Mission Viejo, California

This is a transcript of a video-recorded interview conducted by the Mission Viejo Library and funded by a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered by the California State Library. The initial, verbatim transcript of the interview was sent to the interviewee to give him or her an opportunity to check it for typographical errors, to correct any gross inaccuracies of recollection, and to make minor emendations. This is the edited version of the original transcript, but the original video recording of the interview has not been altered.

The reader should remember that this is a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The interview must be read with an awareness that different persons' memories about an event will often differ. The reader should take into account that the answers may include personal opinions from the unique perspective of the interviewee and that the responses offered are partial, deeply involved, and certainly irreplaceable.

A limited number of visual and audio data from this copyrighted collection of oral histories may be used for personal study, private scholarship or research, and scholastic teaching under the provisions of United States Code, Title 17, Section 107 (Section 107), which allows limited "fair use" of copyrighted materials. Such "fair use" is limited to not-for-profit, non-commercial, educational purposes and does **not** apply to large amounts or "substantial" portions in relation to the transcript as a whole, within the meaning of Section 107. Beyond "fair use," **no part of any transcript, video, or audio may be reproduced, disseminated, or quoted for publication without written permission from the City of Mission Viejo and the Mission Viejo Library.**

Wendy Wetzel Harder

June 3, 2012

Robert David Breton,
interviewer

BRETON: Today is June 3, 2012, and I, Robert David Breton, am interviewing Wendy Wetzel Harder, Vice President of Marketing and Corporate Communications of the Mission Viejo Company, at the studios of MVTV [Mission Viejo Television] inside the Mission Viejo Library as part of the Oral History Project.

Good morning, Wendy.

HARDER: Good morning.

BRETON: Where were you born and raised?

HARDER: I grew up in Fallbrook, California.

BRETON: Where did you go to college?

HARDER: I went two years to Palomar [College], and then I went to USC [University of Southern California] for my B.A. in communications and got my M.B.A. at Pepperdine [University].

BRETON: After you obtained those degrees, what was your first occupation?

HARDER: Actually, my first job right out of college was with Whitaker Corporation, and I did their employee newsletter for a year.

BRETON: And then?

HARDER: And then I came down to Orange County to work for the Community Development Council, which had all the Head Start programs and alcohol recovery programs in Orange County, and I worked for them for about a year. Then I saw an advertisement on their board, and

it said there was a three-month job at KOCE-TV doing a summer show called *Orange County Summer*, and I looked at the requirements and I had everything except I had never had my own television show, and I thought, “Well, I’ve never had my own television show, but I’ve been on television a lot talking about Head Start and the alcohol programs.” So I thought I’d give it a shot and I sent in my résumé and I got in for the interview.

I went in for the interview and they had a test. You had to do a seven-minute interview with someone, and then you had to do a thirty-second commercial. Well, I was just coming off about ten years of competitive speech doing seven-minute extemporaneous speeches, and so it was right down my alley. It wasn’t practical. You don’t need to do that for real television, but I could do seven minutes to the exact second, and I could certainly do a thirty-second commercial. So I got the job, and that wound up being a seven-year career in news and production at KOCE-TV till we all got laid off in 1979 with all the federal cutbacks, or maybe ’82, ’82.

Then I was looking for a job, and I didn’t want to move out of the area. My family was here down in San Diego and Temecula, and the nearest TV jobs were Seattle [Washington] and L.A. [Los Angeles], and I really didn’t want to live in a big city, so I started looking at the classifieds and I saw this small ad for taking care of the [Mission Viejo] Nadadores swim team publicity with Mission Viejo Company, and I thought, “I can do that. That’d be fun.” The Olympics were coming, right, and we had [Gregory E.] Greg Louganis and we had Wendy [L.] Williams and we had all these Gold Medal contenders, so I thought that would be really an interesting job.

So I went down to the Mission Viejo Library and found out all I could about Mission Viejo Company—they had some of the brochures and some of the fact sheets—and then I went into the interview. This was under the Corporate Communications Department, so [Gerard D.] Gerry

Ognibene was head of that at the time, and [Steven] Steve LaMar was my boss, who later went on to Irvine Company, and I sat down and we talked about doing it.

They were concerned that I was overqualified, and I knew they were concerned that I was overqualified, but I wanted to do it, so I just said, “I know it’s a salary difference, but that job’s gone, and I have to learn about the swim team, so I’m going to be doing some learning on the job, and I’ll guarantee I’ll be here at least two years to do this job, because it looks like it’s going to be fun.”

I got the job, and I learned all about swimming and diving, and I got to work with the coaches and setting up the interviews. There was a lot of press at the time because we were all headed into the big Los Angeles Olympics.

Then about six months later, the manager in that department left, and my boss, who was Steve LaMar, came to me and he said, “Well, would you like this job? It’s a manager position, and you’d be doing the speeches for [Philip J.] Phil Reilly, who’s the president of the company.”

I thought, “Well, you know, I’m a speech major. I’ve been writing speeches for over ten years.” This would be a logical job and be a lot of fun also. And the Olympics were over, so the attention wasn’t as much on that particular issue, so I said yes. Now, what Steve did not tell me is that no one had held that job for more than six months.

BRETON: Because?

HARDER: Because Phil Reilly was a very exacting individual. He’s an attorney. He was brilliant. He knew exactly what he wanted, and he didn’t have a lot of patience if things didn’t go the way he expected them to go. But I didn’t know that, and so I just said, “Give me all of his speeches for the last five years,” and I went through them all, and what I found out is that Phil

Reilly was a storyteller. He liked to tell his audience, but through a story with a point, and he was Irish by tradition, so he liked to throw in a little bit of blarney. [laughs]

BRETON: And Irish stew.

HARDER: And he dealt with a lot of very sophisticated New York businessmen, because Philip Morris [USA, Inc.] owned the company, and they let him run the company, but every year he had to go back and report and deal with all the numbers, and they were financial wizards. So he had to be sharp about all of his financial presentations, too, but he liked to cover it with a story and make it fun.

I can remember one time he likened himself—he'd go in with red suspenders under his New York suit, a little bit of folksy, but underneath he was very sharp, financially astute man. So once I knew that, once I'd seen his stories and knew he was a storyteller, then he was very easy to work for, because I knew his style, I could just find the stories, put them together, the points he wanted to make, and so we got on brilliantly and I never had any issues with it. If I hadn't known about those other issues—my boss didn't tell me that for another two years.

[laughs]

But because of that job, I learned about the history of Mission Viejo Company, I learned about all of the ways we were presenting ourselves in terms of what we were doing, how were strategically moving the company, because real estate's a cyclical business. Anyone can look at the sine chart and see the real estate wave up and down and up and down and going in ten- to fifteen-year cycles, and when you're doing a master-planned over a thirty-year cycle, you have to be able to weather those downs.

That's what Philip Morris did for Mission Viejo Company and the City of Mission Viejo. It had the financial security, so when the real estate market was down and people were trying to

get loans at 18 percent, Philip Morris could offer them at 13 percent, and so our people could get into their homes, and we could make the sales as a company, and everybody could survive the down [unclear]. Then when we hit the peaks, then everybody benefited from the profits from that real estate cycle, but without that steady stream of capital support, we might not have made it to the end of the thirty-year master plan, and we certainly wouldn't have Lake Mission Viejo.

Lake Mission Viejo was already here when I came, but I got to hear the stories about how they had originally tried to decide should it be a golf course or should it be a lake. They knew they wanted to build houses in a beautiful area around it, but the lake was more expensive, but the potential profits were more expensive. So, again, with Philip Morris' support to give us the financial underwriting to build that lake, they decided on the lake.

Then one of [Paul] Van Stevens' favorite stories—Van was a planner who came in under [James G.] Jim Toepfer, who was the city planner for Santa Ana [California] and did the original master plan for Mission Viejo—Van says he remembers when Jack [G.] Raub went to Sacramento [California], because this had been an agricultural preserve. They ran cattle on Mission Viejo Company land, and so they were agriculture preserved to have lower taxes. Now, to make that transition to bring in a lake, they had to actually go to the Agriculture Department [California Department of Food and Agriculture] and get them to sign off on it, and one of the big stumbling blocks they came across was the Agriculture Department didn't want that loss of protein on their books, because they kept track of the protein return throughout the State of California from their agricultural preserves.

So Jack Raub, who was a brilliant engineer, went out into the corridor, got out his pen, and started calculating, then thirty minutes later went back into the Agriculture Commission and proved to them that there would be more protein from the fish that would be in Lake Mission

Viejo than there would be from beef if they were grazing on a golf course. It was a totally impractical issue, but the brilliant engineer got it resolved and they got their permits and the lake began.

Of course, I think most people know about the story about the lake when they had it completely ready to fill and we were hit by one of the biggest droughts in the history of California. They had already purchased the water through the water district, and so they started to fill the lake, and the news cameras rolled and Northern California went bananas because here they were in a tremendous drought. Northern California didn't plan well for drought because they never had to, so they didn't have lots of reservoirs, and so they were not watering their lawns and watching every bit of water, and here they saw on the news the water's gushing into this artificial lake in Mission Viejo.

Well, it was politically incorrect. Practically it wasn't an issue, because the water was already there. It had already been paid for. We couldn't ship it back to Northern California. It was from the Colorado River. It wasn't from Northern California, but nevertheless, the politicians couldn't take that kind of dramatic outpour from Northern California, so they asked Mission Viejo Company if we'd please stop filling the lake, and Phil Reilly complied. It didn't make sense, but it was politically necessary, and so the lake was a few years behind schedule for actually getting started. So they started in '74 and probably finished about '78.

The resulting homes around that whole northern side of the lake where all that whole first phase, you can still find original homeowners there. There are people who've been there from the very beginning and lived through that drought, because they'd already bought their lot and waited for that lake to fill.

Now, I bought my house in 1988 on one of the last lots on the other side, San Marino, and we just benefited from everything, because we were the last premier lots. So Mission Viejo did that. What they'd do is they'd start a project, and the first homes would be your best economic investment, right, because they'd be the first price, and if it succeeded, if the project was strong by the time you got to the end, it would be the highest price. But by the time you got to the end, it would be the best lots too. They saved the best lots to the very end, and they did the same thing with the half of the lake. They built the first half of the lake, and then they just sat on the lots on the other side of the lake.

I bought my first house in '84, but I was there in '88 early when they finally put those lots on sale, and, again, it was a depression. It was a recession, and they had sold four lots on that whole last side of the lake, and they needed to move some lots because they needed to have the numbers for Philip Morris at the end of the year. They needed a minimum amount.

So Phil Reilly told Harvey Stearn to discount the lots so that they could move enough, so we could sell enough to get through. The draft press release came across my desk. Here I'm an employee, right. I'm looking at that and it says the lots are going to be reduced by 40 percent, so that meant that lots that had been in the high 200,000s were going to be in the high 100,000s, and all of a sudden that was possible.

So I went home and I talked to my husband, [Peter N.] Nick [Harder]. We'd been looking for a bigger house, and I said, "You know, we could just get the lot and build if we sold everything we own and ate beans for ten years. We could do this." And we decided to go for it. So we put \$50 down to hold the lot, and that is the best gift that Mission Viejo ever gave our family, because they held that lot for us for one year for \$50 while we sold Nick's condo, my condo, my mother sold her house that I had invested in. We got all our finances together so that

we could purchase that lot and build our home, and twenty-four years later we're still at that house.

BRETON: Wonderful.

HARDER: So one of the advantages of being an employee of Mission Viejo Company.

BRETON: Nick Harder worked for the [*Orange County*] *Register*, didn't he?

HARDER: He did. He was the home manager for the *Register* for over twenty years.

BRETON: Now, isn't it also true that when the lake was before the Water Resources Board, that Jack Raub was able to convince them and also other entities that it would take less water for a lake than to irrigate a golf course, that a golf course consumes more water?

HARDER: If you looked at enough years, right, if you look at a long period of time, if you had a stable lake with some minimal evaporation, and we had a spring that helped feed that lake, so we didn't have to buy all the water for the lake. So once it was filled with the spring water, it was mostly self-contained, so that was a strong argument also, that we wouldn't have to continually buy water from the district.

The other part that was very important to them was that this was a resource, so if there were a severe emergency and that we needed water, they put in a pump station so that that water could have been pumped out of the lake to help other areas and Mission during an emergency. I don't think that was ever used, but it was part of the presentation that it also preserved water.

A lot of people don't know that Lake Mission Viejo was a last-resource water user. The water district has to buy so much water, and it has to be more than they need because they don't want anyone to turn the tap on and not have water, so there's always a residual amount, depending how precise the calculations are, that's over and above what they need. So that water used to go—and probably still does—into Lake Mission Viejo for storage, so the lake got a

discounted rate on the water and the water district didn't have to put it down into the gullies and let it go out to the ocean. So it served a very good conservation source for the water district.

BRETON: Isn't it one of the few manmade lakes in the world where you can both swim and fish because of the quality of the water?

HARDER: Yes, and that's because of the \$1 million bypass system. Mission learned a lot from going up to Ventura, Westlake [Village], seeing some of the earlier lakes that had serious algae bloom issues, and they had those issues because the nitrates were being flooded into the lake from nearby homes and fertilizer. They learned that lesson, and when they built Mission, they did spend a million dollars. Now, today a million doesn't sound like that much, but when they were building in the seventies, that was a huge investment to divert runoff water that would have come into the lake, so that it went around and down into culverts and didn't come into that lake and didn't pollute it. So that's one of the reasons we were able to keep the clear water.

BRETON: Also another reason might be that it was so deep.

HARDER: Well, that does help. It's 70 feet deep in the center.

BRETON: Deeper than other developed lakes.

HARDER: Yes.

BRETON: Did you have experts or visitors from other parts of the world come to look at the lake and how it was constructed? Do you remember?

HARDER: We had visitors coming all the time for a variety of reasons. The whole master-planned community concept, it's not unique to the United States, but the success of Mission is fairly unique. To my knowledge, we are one of the first planned communities with a thirty-year plan to ever be completed 95 percent, according to the original master plan. There have been a lot of master-planned communities, but, you know, political structures changed and roads were

diverted and a lot of changes happened, and zoning change, but Mission pretty much stayed to the original master plan, and that made us unique, and people were really interested in how that was accomplished and all of the things that benefited from it, all the things we sort of take for granted, like the power lines being under the ground and the schools being next to parks. Those just seem logical things to us today, but they were new at the time. That was Jim Toepfer really thinking through neighborhood school, neighborhood parks, putting together so that the schools can use those facilities and vice versa.

And all of the ideas about the signage, Mission Viejo was the first community in the entire world with a Kentucky Fried Chicken with no bucket in the sky. That was one of Phil Reilly's favorite stories. He didn't want a big bucket going in the sky. He was trying to keep the street scheme beautiful, so there are very strict sign ordinances.

His story was that when Kentucky Fried Chicken came into them—this was on Chrisanta [Drive] and La Paz [Road], which is a very prime area, because the main entrance at the time was La Paz, and they said, "We need the bucket because we need to sell this much chicken in the first six months."

And Phil Reilly said, "If you build it without the bucket, I will guarantee you will have this much chicken in the first six months."

They agreed and they signed the contract, and then he says, "And I went out to every person I knew and I said, 'Go buy chicken, because we don't want that bucket in our sky,'" and they did, and it was a success without the bucket.

So that sort of set the standard for the community, and then as the other major entities came in, Mission could say to them, "KFC can make it without a bucket, and you can make it without the golden arches."

BRETON: And the gas stations can make it with a reverse-bay orientation, in other words, the gas stations with the back to the intersection.

HARDER: Let's have the pretty part to the intersection and let's put the beautiful Barcelona walls on every intersections, and, yes, that's in front of your gas station, okay. They're going to see the beautiful Barcelona wall, and then they're going to see there's a gas station behind it, but the landscaping and the lovely wall are going to be there first. That was a big issue when they first proposed that to some of the gas stations, but when you have a plan like that and when everybody's together in terms of showing what it can do and trying things, and when it works, then once you've got that first gas station successful and it works, then the next one is much easier.

Reilly was very proud of those walls, by the way. That brick color he had made for Mission Viejo. It didn't exist when they were starting. There were white ones and there were really dark brown ones, and he wanted this mild tan mission look, and they actually created that stone for him, and it's become a standard in the industry. The same thing with the Mission Bells for the streetlights, right. There were no Mission Bells in the catalog books. He had a company create the Mission Bells for him, but he did not patent it, and so it became a standard that you will see other places now, but it was created for us.

BRETON: So let's go back to the beginning. After you were recruited, obviously you have always done your homework. You went to the library and studied all about the company before the first interview and you read all you could about the Nadadores and you know how to do your homework. Did the company provide you any sort of orientation in those first days? Were you working for the Nadadores or for the company?

HARDER: I was working for the company. Nadadores was always part of the company until Mission set them free.

BRETON: Did you read the master plan on your own, or did the company give you its history and say, “Here, we’d like you to read up on all of this so that you can assume your higher duties,” when you became the Director of Corporate Communication?

HARDER: Mission Viejo Company, you have to remember, was a construction company. They were a master-planned community company, so there was all the planning folks. They had a complete engineering department. There were 1,100 people in the company when I started and 36 when I left, so it was a huge company at the time. They did not have a formal employee orientation. It wasn’t part of the culture. So when I came in, it was double-time it and learn what you need to learn. So I just sat down with the coaches and found out who the swimmers were, who were willing to give interviews, who preferred not to give interviews, which days and times were best to give interviews, and then we just took it from there.

BRETON: What was distinctive about the company as far as the environment, the atmosphere? You already mentioned that Phil Reilly was a tough taskmaster, but were those intense times? Was it relaxed? Was it fun? What was the general atmosphere at the company?

HARDER: I came in ’83. This was a tough time for real estate as a whole. It was still very slow. We were kind of at the bottom of that curve on a sine curve, but you could just start to see the peak going up. The Andalusias were on sale near Lake Mission Viejo, and that was a higher-end product because they had views of the lake, and they were starting to move pretty well for a higher-end product.

So you could just see that curve starting up again, so there was a lot of optimism, because one of the things about Mission Viejo Company is when people came, they stayed. At some of

the reunions you'd have people that were there twenty-nine, twenty-eight years of the thirty-year cycle, so it became like family because you knew people for long periods of time. We didn't have lot of people in and out, and it was kind of a corporate culture of excellence.

Phil Reilly took a lot of pride in what he was doing, and he expected his employees to take that same pride. He employed people like [Martin G.] Marty Russo, and one of Marty's jobs was to drive around the community, and if he saw something that didn't look right, to let him know or to fix it. Were there weeds growing somewhere? Was there a Mission Bell that was not straight? Anything out of sync with trying to have an attractive community for people to come to, he wanted to know about.

There was a phrase in Mission Viejo Company called "The Mission Way," and a lot of times the discussion would be, okay, here's the problem or here's the issue. These are the ways we could handle it. This one may be more expensive, but the result is going to be longer term, stronger. That's the Mission way, and it wasn't always the most cost-effective, and they weren't always right, but the heart was there and they really wanted it to be the best planned community in the world. You could see that with the employees.

I loved working for the company. In fact, when Nick and I, we needed to buy a home, because I lived in Westminster and he was in El Toro and I was moving to Mission. He said, "Well, you know, there's lots of nice homes in this area. Let's look at Lake Forest."

I said, "I'm working for Mission. If I'm selling a planned community, I need to be living in that planned community, because I need to be experiencing what it's like, and so you can look anywhere in Mission, but we're living in Mission Viejo." That was sort of the attitude, that this was the best planned community.

One of the things Mission did was to support the community, so it wasn't just building a community and planning a community; it was making it a community. So that's the Activities Committee that Marty Russo and [Arthur S.] Art Cook put together, was getting volunteers from the community and starting the events, right, starting the Fourth of July celebration, starting the St. Patrick's Day parade, starting all of the things that made it a community, that got people together and helped people feel community pride.

One of my favorite jobs was I got to be in charge of the giving, so if you were a nonprofit in Mission Viejo, a Little League, a baseball team, a local school, and you were in Mission and you came to Mission Viejo Company and asked, you probably got. If you were in Lake Forest, too bad, but if you were in Mission Viejo, Mission Viejo Company really—and a lot of that was Philip Morris dollars that was coming in to support the community projects.

BRETON: So there was a feeling of camaraderie within the company, a feeling, like you say, you describe it as a family, a great deal of interaction. It sounds like all the executives had access to Phil Reilly if they needed to approach him. The department heads may have had a little bit of a rivalry in a competitive spirit that was created, but generally they were working in a cooperative environment.

HARDER: It was a pretty good team.

BRETON: Did the company encourage innovation? It seems like everything the company was doing was thinking outside the box, that it welcomed creative new ideas.

HARDER: They were looking for what would be the best way, and remember, this is a construction company. These are engineers. These are planners, and sort of by their nature, they're the kind of people who like to try new things and they like to be in the forefront of their

industry, so whether it's the plumbing on the next house—but also, they didn't tolerate mistakes very well.

I remember another one of the Phil Reilly stories is he had a whole delivery of ovens that turned out to be substandard, and he tore them out of the houses. He would not sell a house with an oven that had that problem, and the company wouldn't take them back, so he had probably dozens of defective ovens. So someone at the company said, "Well, let's put them in the lake as fish houses," and that's what happened. You can still see them in the shallow parts of the lake if you take your boat along, and you'll see a flash of light or a piece of metal down there. They are fish houses in Lake Mission Viejo. Now, that was very creative. [laughs] They didn't go to the dump. They had a useful life. But it also shows that he wasn't going to try to put an oven that wasn't satisfactory into one of his houses.

BRETON: Well, their creativity also spilled over into the realm of water conservation, using drought-tolerant plants.

HARDER: And the recycled wastewater, one of the first planned communities to do that in our area, and again, a very expensive proposition, because you have to double-pipe, right, and you have to have the pipe for the freshwater and you have to have a double-pipe system for the wastewater, and then you have to mark it with purple, and then you have to deal with the salt issue, because when you use wastewater, you tend to get heavy salts. But for a long-term solution for a Southern California community, it made sense, and so they worked with the water district, both water districts both here in Mission and in Aliso Viejo, to double-pipe all of the slopes for the landscaping.

BRETON: Describe the connection that the company had with the ranch, Rancho Mission Viejo.

HARDER: Well, that was before my time, but the ranch was the original property owner. The story was that three guys, [Donald L.] Don Bren and Phil Reilly and Jim Toepfer, these guys were in their late twenties, probably, at the time, early thirties. Don Bren was a planner. Phil Reilly was an attorney with Rutan & Tucker [LLP]. Jim Toepfer was a city planner for Santa Ana, and Don Bren had the real estate expertise, and they got together with the O'Neill family and said, "If you put up the land, we'll put up the expertise and we'll split the profits. Let's take the first 10,000 acres and give this a shot, and we're going to do it differently, because Jim Toepfer's a planner, and we're going to plan it all from the very beginning, and we're going to know know exactly where the schools are and exactly where the commercial areas are, and we're going to put the parks next to the schools, and we're going to put everything underground, and this is going to be a wonderful planned community if we can do the whole plan right at the beginning."

So that started off with three guys with a vision, and I think they got through the master plan, they got it approved, and then I wasn't part of that, certainly, but it wound up with Bren selling out and the O'Neills continuing, and then the O'Neills selling out to Philip Morris. So Phil Reilly stayed through the whole time. Jim Toepfer stayed through the whole time. So two of the visionaries were with them from the very beginning all the way through, and I think that's why you saw that vision continue.

BRETON: The heritage and the legacy of the O'Neills and the Moisos was preserved or honored here in Mission Viejo through the architectural features.

HARDER: Well, certainly Jeronimo Road is Jerome O'Neill. Marguerite [Parkway] road is Marguerite [M.] O'Neill's name. There used to be an O'Neill Road before it became Olympiad Road for the Olympics. That wasn't personal. That was just the city wanting to honor the

Olympics. But certainly their heritage and the land and the whole concept of planning from the beginning, they were very much a part of being there and making that possible.

If you don't have one owner of land, of a large tract of land, you cannot do a master-planned community. You get a Lake Forest or an El Toro or an area that was piecemeal developed, and individual owners did their own thing and they did their best, but there's no cohesion in terms of the master plan. How many people have 10,000 acres that they can control to provide a space for a new planned community? This was a really unique opportunity, and the O'Neills had the vision to say, "We know our ranch is going to be developed eventually. Let's do it right. Let's do it right."

BRETON: Not only was it a single developer platform, but the single developer, Mission Viejo Company, was in it for the long haul. It didn't just start the master plan and then leave. The residents knew that they could count on the company to deliver on all of those amenities and to be there all the way to the end.

HARDER: And Mission Viejo Company was able to do that because they had the patient dollars of Philip Morris under them, where other companies went belly-up during the down cycles. So, yes, as you look at the history of planned communities in the United States, we're pretty unique.

BRETON: Didn't Philip Morris also assist with its deep pockets in ensuring that even during the recession, they continued to develop models or prepare paths so that when the cycle would start on the upswing, they were ready to go before other communities were ready to go with that?

HARDER: That was one of Phil Reilly's speeches to Philip Morris as to why they should continue to keep patient capital during the recession times, because that was his strategy. He'd show them the sine curve. He'd say, "Okay, we're here, but we're headed up. Here's where we are, and if we develop these five parcels now and have them all graded and padded," because

that's the most expensive part of developing. Your housing can go up in six months, but your grading and all of that work takes a long lead time. So let's spend our dollars during the recession getting all those sites ready, and then as it turns up, we can individually start the six-month building cycles.

The ideal situation for a builder is you pre-sell your house and then you build it, and he was able to do that because he had those paths already. He could pop up three model homes, show the people the model homes, and then in the good times hold a lottery—and there were long lines for the lotteries during the boom times—and pre-sell those homes. People would wait six months for them to be built, and so there was no downtime, there was no financial risk, but only because he was able to pre-prepare.

BRETON: Then when the company sold each home, how did it instill in the new homebuyer a sense of belonging, a sense that you were coming into a community that had a hometown feeling from the day one, from the day that you were at the Decorator Center or you were given your packet? How did that happen?

HARDER: That wasn't my expertise area, but it was handled different ways throughout the years. I know during the twentieth anniversary when we did the community cookbook [*20 Years of Good Taste: Mission Viejo's 20th Anniversary Community Cookbook*], we put a cookbook in a basket for every homeowner as they came in and they got their keys, and I've heard in earlier days there were fruit baskets, sometimes the calendars, and again, before my time, but there was a community newspaper that Mission Viejo Company produced, and they did that because there was no newspaper, local newspaper, from Mission for years, so they had the *Mission Viejo Reporter* that would talk about community events that are coming up, and they would leave copies of those in the new homes so that people would know the activities were coming.

Those were the billboard days. There would be huge billboards on the I-5 [Interstate 5]. You know, “It’s nice to have Mission Viejo around the house,” or, “The California Promise.” That was always my favorite. That was Harvey Stearn’s tagline, and his concept was, you know, you read about California, you read about the sunshine, you read about the lifestyle. That’s Mission. We’re the California Promise. So those things were repeated, and not in short cycles. They were in long cycles, so it’d be a ten-year campaign, not a two-year campaign, so that those became part of the community psyche, really. People would say, “I live in the California Promise.” They could relate to that.

BRETON: Were you ever asked to write for the *Mission Viejo Reporter*?

HARDER: No, it was over before I got there. By the time I got there in 1983, the *Saddleback Valley News* had debuted. It was an independent newspaper. This is a very good example of Mission’s attitude. If someone else could do it better, why would they do it? So they stopped the *Mission Viejo Reporter* because there was an independent paper that could be doing it, and so the releases and information was ongoing to the new *Saddleback Valley News*, and it was serving the same purpose and maybe even a better purpose, because it was an independent reporter and they could do a little more coverage on sports and other things that Mission would never have done.

BRETON: Were you ever asked to write some of the press releases for the company?

HARDER: I reviewed the press releases for the company. I did do some of them. I can remember one I got a prize for at the Press Club was about the world’s largest sundae, right.

That was one of the activities that was—

BRETON: The 500-foot banana split.

HARDER: Banana split.

BRETON: Or thousand-foot banana split.

HARDER: Those kinds of things you can have fun writing about, and so I did. So I'd do some of those kinds, but most of the press releases Mission put out were about houses, right. They were selling houses in the early years. In the early years they were doing most of the building, and so they were talking about the houses and the features, and my job was to review all those press releases and make sure what they said about Mission was correct, because they were writers in different agencies and they might not know, and quite often they didn't.

BRETON: So you weren't involved in government relations.

HARDER: No, that was not my specialty.

BRETON: Were you involved in making some of the arrangements for developing good relations with government agencies?

HARDER: I worked on a lot of the special events. So we would have events out at the ranch [Moulton Ranch] in Aliso Viejo where we would invite different government representatives just so it could be a relaxed mood to get to know each other. The ranch was the early Moulton barn, and it had a lot of atmosphere, the hay bales. We'd have country western bands and barbecues, and it was just a nice way to sit down with people and break the bread, so I worked a lot with the planning on some of those special events.

BRETON: You are a clogger.

HARDER: I was. [laughs]

BRETON: How were your talents utilized? Did you have any input on some of the music that was going to be used as background for the company films, the films that the company was producing, or any of the events, like you mention at the barn?

HARDER: If I was in charge of the event, I got to pick the band, and I did like to dance. I liked all kinds of dancing. I liked clogging and country western and square dancing and folk dancing, so depending on the event, we could theme it with the music that would go best with whatever it was we're doing, and I did some of the videos for the company, a lot of them for—like when Phil Reilly retired, we did a special video for Phil Reilly's retirement. So I had been with KOCE for a while, so I'd done videos, so I would put something historical together with music and videos and different interviews so they'd have some kind of special keepsake that you wouldn't have otherwise.

BRETON: Did you choose a *Bonanza* music for the—

HARDER: For the cowboys? I might have done that. [laughter] I know for [James G.] Jim Gilleran's video we took the fight scene out of the John Wayne movie, the Irish movie where they have Maureen O'Hara and John Wayne and there's a bar scene and they're all fighting, and we used that scene for Jim Gilleran's.

BRETON: Because it—

HARDER: It sort of exemplifies one of his approaches to life. [laughter]

BRETON: Knock-down, drag-out fights, huh?

HARDER: Well, Jim Gilleran was a wonderful Irishman. I mean, he could charm the socks off. The perfect person you want in the greeting line, right, at the front of the greeting line to welcome people. He just was such a people person and he loved welcoming and dealing with people, but he also liked—if he thought something was the way it should be, he would go to the ground fighting for it. He'd say, "This is what we should be doing. Let's go for it." He didn't always win, but when he did, it was the way he wanted it.

BRETON: We've heard in some of our other interviews about the reluctance that Phil Reilly had to allow the architectural motifs in the housing to change, to go from Mission to Cape Cod or from old Spanish to some other modern architecture.

HARDER: I was there at the time, and one of the reasons was we were running out of Spanish names. They had gone through the dictionary and used—I mean, this is a large community, and, yes, you've got ham and eggs on some street corners because the employees were playing around, but they were literally running out of names. San Marino where I lived, they went to the island of San Marino and used all the names from the island because the regular Spanish dictionary was gone. And also the market had changed. There were a lot of young families looking for smaller homes, affordable homes. This was the early eighties, and Cape Cod appealed to them. In fact, my first home I bought in Mission was one of the new Cape Cods, was one of the first Cape Cods in Evergreens.

BRETON: Evergreen, yes.

HARDER: I loved it. It was small. It was two-bedroom. It was the right size and the price was affordable. So it was a good market, but I can see that it was very difficult because you have a master-planned community, you have a theme. You don't like to change that, but times do change, and they were our names. [laughs]

BRETON: You mentioned the young families. It seems that Mission Viejo was always family-oriented.

HARDER: Very much so. That was one of the underlying themes for Mission, was to make it a place where families would feel safe, have lots of activities for the children, have excellent schools, because families build communities. When they first started Mission, it was a twenty-minute drive from anywhere. There was no grocery store. The first people that moved in were

going twenty minutes to San Juan [Capistrano] for the grocery store, so that first grocery store, the first post office, the first church, Mount of Olives [Lutheran Church]—they gave the land to Mount of Olives. They needed a church, and Mount of Olives is still going strong.

But those firsts, they really had to work hard to get those in for the community, the first mini market, the first shopping center, the grocery store, and really convince those people, because there was hardly anybody here. Why should I bring my grocery store to Mission Viejo? You're out in the middle of the sticks. But again, once they got them in, then the families could say, "There's a grocery store," and it built upon itself. So I was not here during those early years, but I can imagine how much effort went into getting those first people in here.

BRETON: You mentioned that the idea of joint use of schools and parks, which was quite novel, but also a brilliant idea to place the model home complex right next to the rec center, right there next to the Marguerite Rec Center [Marguerite Recreation Center], so that when the people are coming to the look at the model homes, they look down and see this wonderful amenity.

HARDER: That worked for that phase. [laughter]

BRETON: For the Madrids.

HARDER: For the first ones.

BRETON: How important were the rec centers to the success of the community?

HARDER: Recreation centers were a great marketing tool. Not everyone could afford a pool. Mission started as an affordable housing community. Those first homes were in the low 20,000s. In fact, people accused the company that this could be a ghetto, because low-income people would be moving in here and they wouldn't be taking care of it, and this was not going to be a good thing. Phil Reilly, I can remember him saying, "I knew that if people owned their own home, they would take pride in it, and if we have rules," the CC&Rs [Covenants, Conditions,

and Restrictions], right, some of the first CC&Rs in California that said you can't just leave an old clunker on the street or you can't change your oil outside—you can do it in your garage—or you can't paint your house purple. There were purple houses in Laguna Beach, and they're charming, but you can't paint your house purple because you need to be considerate of your neighbors. Overall, yes, some people say, okay, that makes for a bland community, but the majority of people took a look at it and said, "That makes for a clean community where I can know what's going to happen. I have certainty. I can look at the master plan and I can see my house is here and across the street there's going to be more houses or across the street there's going to be a school or across the street there's going to be a shopping center, but I know when I move in because I got a report."

That was something else Mission did. They gave all the homeowners a report that said what's going to be in your immediate vicinity. It was a double-edged sword. It meant Mission had to keep that promise, but it also meant the homeowner couldn't come back in ten years and say, "I never knew there was going to be a shopping center there," because you could dig out the report and say, "You were given a copy and you signed it."

BRETON: Now, let's list the many ways in which the company subsidized so many of the amenities that we have in this community. You mentioned the affordability of those rec centers. They subsidized those rec centers for years, didn't they, because certainly the fees or the dues to belong to the rec center didn't cover all the costs.

HARDER: Not even close. It was hugely subsidized. That was actually under my department at the very end. I had all the rec centers, and so I knew how much we subsidized them. But that was because they were considered an amenity and a marketing tool, so the company could justify that on the basis that anyone who moved into the community could take their kids swimming and

have swim lessons, and that's actually how the Nadadores started. It's so funny because I have read things where people said, "Oh, Mission did the Nadadores as a big marketing tool." Well, they didn't. They did the rec centers as a marketing tool, but the Nadadores was an employee who wanted his kids to swim and someone who coached part-time, and then they got some more kids interested and they hired Mark Schubert right out of college. He was not a big swim coach. He was not an Olympic swim coach. He was right out of college. Mark turned out to be an Olympic swim coach, and so that was very serendipitous. But what Mission did that made some of that possible was they looked at this little swim team and they said, "You know, guys, if any of you qualify for nationals, we'll pay for the trip."

Then all of a sudden what had been just sort of recreational, people starting thinking, "Maybe I *could* qualify for nationals," and they told their friends, "If we qualify for nationals, they'll pay for the trip."

And maybe the friend said, "Well, maybe I'll join your swim team."

So that grew, and then as the first kids did start to make nationals, it sort of built upon itself till it became probably the premier swim program in the entire world at one point. I do know during the 1984 Olympics—now, East Germany did not come, but during the 1984 Olympics, if Mission had been a country, we would have been sixth in the Gold Medal count. We weren't a country. We were a small—not even a city, right. We were an unincorporated community, but that was such a powerful program. And, yes, Mission paid for the coaches, so it was heavily subsidized in that sense. The kids also paid dues, but the coaches' salaries, they were Mission Viejo Company employees, and at that point, yes, it became something that helped publicize the community, but it certainly never started as a marketing attempt.

BRETON: Also, Mission Viejo Company owned the golf course, the Mission Viejo Country Club, until it became a private club.

HARDER: And the Casta del Sol Golf Course.

BRETON: They also subsidized that [Mission Viejo Family] Fun-Bus that would transport the kids around from one rec center to the other and the lake. Also the Mission Viejo Skateway. I don't know if that was still here when you [unclear]?

HARDER: It was. It closed while I was here. It didn't have enough business.

BRETON: And equestrian centers.

HARDER: That was before my time. But, yes, the whole idea was to create a community with lots of activities that would appeal to different ages, because they were marketing for the very young family, and they had Casta del Sol for the fifty-plus, so they were looking for things that would span all those different interest groups, and everyone has an interest in being in a safe community and a beautiful community. I have never regretted moving here. It was a great place to raise my family. I never really had to worry about my son when he was bicycling on the street. It was just designed for families.

BRETON: That was another unique feature, the bicycle lanes.

HARDER: And the cul-de-sacs, right. Most of Mission Viejo's streets are cul-de-sacs because they're safer. There's no through traffic going crazy past your house, so those were deliberate, very deliberate.

BRETON: Now, the company used all of these amenities for marketing, but also I'm sure they knew that eventually they could amortize some of those costs over the years, that the value of the land would rise and that they could eventually recoup some of those costs through the housing sales.

HARDER: If you're on a thirty-year plan, if you have patient capital, you can do that.

BRETON: That was the key.

[Begin File 2]

BRETON: Tell us a little bit, if you know, about the original presentation to the [South Orange County] Community College District for Saddleback College to purchase that property and move in.

HARDER: Well, that's another Phil Reilly story. The way he told it, the College District was looking at several sites. One was in what he would say "Ir-veen," and it was something that was important economically to the company. They were still in their early years. That was a major 200-acre piece of land, and they very much wanted a college in the community, again, as part of being a community. It was a plum.

So Phil Reilly did his homework, and that tells you a lot about the man. He found out that they wanted to start classes immediately. He found out about what kinds of buildings they needed, what kind of timeframe they had, how they wanted to structure things, and he really did his homework.

When the presentation time came, the other people presented first, and that was part of his strategy also. They had not picked up on the fact that the school district wanted to start classes the next day, basically. They just wanted to open within weeks if they could. So he had spent a lot of time figuring out how he could move portables onto the land, how they could use model homes that already existed to get that done so that they could get started early. Then he also had dealt with a lot of the other issues they had, but he had really focused on that as a primary issue, and as a result, Saddleback College is in Mission Viejo.

BRETON: Wonderful. Didn't he also find out that they wanted administrative offices as well as classrooms and was able to provide those for them to administer? How did the company encourage, foster community involvement?

HARDER: Well, probably the most obvious way was the Mission Viejo Activities Committee. They had a full-time staff member just to coordinate community activities and to help them get started, and that isn't necessarily an easy job when you're starting from scratch, because you have to recruit volunteers. You have to create events from scratch, the first Fourth of July picnic, the first St. Patrick's Day parade, and help your volunteers learn how to do that and help them elect officers and get started and become an organization that can continue to function once you leave.

That's one of the things Mission did very well, is they worked very hard to structure the community so that when they left—because any planned community, even if it's a thirty-year plan, your developer is eventually going to leave, and you want your community to be successful, so creating an Activities Committee and helping it get started is one thing. All of the different associations in community that take care of the landscaping was another huge endeavor. The medians were cared for. The landscaping was cared for and funded and it would go on regardless of whether Mission Viejo Company was there to hand-clip the gardening. So they really tried to structure the community so that it could be self-sufficient.

BRETON: The Lake Association as well.

HARDER: The Lake Association's a really good example. Mission Viejo Company controlled the lake, but early on they established a board with the association and they let them run it, and that's the key thing. They could have stepped in and covered every vote. They had the power to do that, and they didn't do it. They even let them make mistakes when the company thought

they were mistakes. They didn't overrule them because they wanted them to grow and learn and become a successful association, again, so that when they had to leave, they'd be able to continue.

BRETON: And through Marty, the support of the [Mission Viejo] Youth Athletic Coordinating Council as well.

HARDER: All of the sports, and Youth Athletic Field is a really good example of great planning, I think, because here this is a retention basin. The is a drainage basin, and to take that land which wasn't being used for anything except drainage and needed to be there for drainage and turn it into ball fields that served thousands of kids in the community, and, yes, when it rains, some of the fields get soggy. It's funny. I read about that in the paper, people complaining of this field's out for two weeks because it's so wet and it wasn't planned well, and I think it was planned well for 99 percent of the time, and it is going to get wet when we have severe rains because it is a drainage basin first and foremost. But the double youth of facilities for the betterment of the community, I think that's an extremely great example.

BRETON: Sure. What are your reflections, as an aside here, on the controversy regarding a planned community in which all the electrical wiring, the TV cables, everything is underground, but we have these huge power lines overhead transmitting the power to other communities?

HARDER: The story I always heard was that in the very early years of the community, Edison [Southern California Edison] needed to come through, and the company was desperate for funds. They were in the very early years and the houses weren't selling yet. They had to build the La Paz [Road] Bridge. They had millions of dollars' expenses and they didn't have millions coming in, and there was no patient capital at that time. Edison needed to come in, and they wanted it underground, but it would have been millions of dollars that they didn't have to put it

underground. To put the towers in was the money that saved that company, so that's why you have Edison towers. They tried to march it across the part of the community that was toward the end of the community so the impact on the community would be minimal and planned that as well as they could, but they just did not have the financial resources to get that underground.

BRETON: In what ways did volunteerism unite the community or has it energized and united our community?

HARDER: Certainly all of the people who volunteer on the Activities Committee, but also all of the sports teams, right. Mission Viejo, I've always thought, is the Little League capital of the world, right, AYSO [American Youth Soccer Organization] and Little League capital of the world. We probably have more sports fields per kid, per capita, than anywhere else in the country and we have more kids playing for the size of our city than anywhere else in the country, and it's because we have the facilities but it's also because we have the volunteer parents that step up to be the coaches and to run those programs, and that's a lot of time and energy. Again, that's part of creating community. All the Boy Scout troops and the Cub Scouts troops and the Girl Scout troops that are in this community, that's all volunteer parents making it happen. It's the PTAs [Parent-Teacher Associations] and all the schools doing all the extras for the field trips. That really is what makes a community special.

BRETON: It also helped, didn't it, that so many of the Mission Viejo Company employees lived here.

HARDER: I think it was a big deal. It was not a requirement. It's because the housing was affordable. You know, when Mission first started, the housing was some of the most inexpensive in the entire region, and so the early employees took advantage of that and bought, and then because they lived in the community, they kept an eye on it. So just like a Marty Russo

driving around and seeing problems and reporting them immediately, every eye that was a Mission Viejo Company was doing the same thing and bringing back, “Oh, you know, we’ve got some seepage over in this area we’d better take a look at,” or, “This traffic light isn’t working properly,” and they’d report it to the right department. So I think when people take a vested interest and when they live in a community, they care even more.

BRETON: Jim Toepfer told us about the importance of being sensitive to the citizens, to people, to listening, to receiving input from the people, that he would go to the little tiny market, the Thriftmart that you speak about, and come back two hours later and [Suzanne S.] Sue [Toepfer] would tell him, “Where have you been all this time?” He was there listening to the people. He said you could have the best master plan on paper in the world, but it doesn’t work if you don’t listen to what the people are saying and what they want. How important is that?

HARDER: Especially in the early years when you don’t have the complete master plan on the ground and you only have a piece of the master plan on the ground, then the people who come in and who are the pioneers are the ones who are going to make you a success or not a success. So the fact that a Jim Toepfer was willing to spend hours at the local Thriftmart to hear what people had to say, and they wanted a Kentucky Fried Chicken or they wanted a food place closer—

BRETON: Or a swim team or activities.

HARDER: Or a swim team or whatever it was. Then he could take that back and they could work on making it happen, because in any master plan you have everything planned out, but you don’t necessarily have everything prioritized, you know. This school has to come before this shopping center or vice versa, and you have some flexibility there, and that’s where getting the input from the community can really be helpful.

BRETON: How helpful were the major activities that were sponsored by the Activities Committee and subsidized by the company such as—do you have the particular memories about the Five Nights of Christmas or St. Patrick’s Day parade or the Fourth of July or Mission Viejo Days or any of those other events?

HARDER: Or Santa’s Arrival. Well, those are the events I took my little boy to. Those are his memories. I’m sure they’re memories for thousands of children. When Jonathan [Harder] was still a babe in arms, I dressed him in green and we were on the float for the St. Patrick’s Parade. He doesn’t remember that, but he’s seen the pictures. That’s part of his heritage, and those are things that people remember because they do them as a family. They all come out together. They sit with their neighbors. They enjoy the fireworks over the lake. They have things in common. They build relationships, and that’s really why those activities are important. It just brings people together. So many people in California don’t know who their neighbors are. You know, they’ve lived there for ten years and they couldn’t tell you who your neighbor is. That’s less true in this community.

BRETON: Were you ever involved in the float decorating or the Rose Parade [Tournament of Roses Parade]?

HARDER: The very last one, 1984, for the twentieth anniversary of the community. So it’d be 1986 was the twentieth anniversary of the planned community, and Phil Reilly said, “This is going to be our last float,” because every year the construction costs have gone up and up and up, and it’d reached the \$200,000 mark, and he felt that the return at that point for the community—you know, it was time to start phasing down. But he said, “The twentieth, that’s special. We’re going to be there for the twentieth.” So that year we worked with the float designers and went

through that whole process, and all the volunteers who helped to make it happen, and it became a kind of a culmination of the twentieth anniversary year.

BRETON: That was a special year for me. I was elected to the [Mission Viejo] Community Services District in 1986 when that was formed. How did the Mission Viejo Company view the MAC [Municipal Advisory Council] and later the Community Services District?

HARDER: I wasn't in government relations, but I knew they worked very hard to work with the Advisory Committee and the Community Services District, again, the philosophy being that you need to listen to your community, you need to hear what they have to say, and they saw the MAC as being a beginning of cityhood, a beginning of self-government, getting people knowledgeable about the community and knowledgeable about law so that the community could eventually mature. So that was part of the maturation process, and it was part of the review process, too, right, to take the plans to an advisory committee to get input. Whether they liked the input or not, they listened and made changes or came back and debated it some more depending upon what the issue was and how strongly they felt about it. But that's part of having the community involved and getting that whole thing organized, yes.

BRETON: A little bit later when there were ruminations about the possibility of a Saddleback City, then the company, which had always known that cityhood for Mission Viejo was predictable as the ultimate outcome of its planned community, took steps to encourage the Community Services District to propose cityhood. How did the Mission Viejo Company view cityhood?

HARDER: I was there for that part of it, history. Mission very much wanted to see the planned community kept as an entity, and the company felt that if it became part of a huge Saddleback City, that it wouldn't be in the best interest of Mission Viejo, that things would be diluted and

people wouldn't be as knowledgeable about what was needed in this planned community, so they really felt that the citizens should get a chance to vote on that. They didn't want to see it just happen without any control by the community, so we actually ran an ad campaign, and this was a little dicey, but here we are, Mission was the biggest company in town, and you don't want to be seen as telling people how to vote. I mean, voting is a right and a privilege, and everyone wants to decide for themselves. So the campaign was vote, vote yes, vote no, but read about it and vote, because the company felt if people did that, that they would support a City of Mission Viejo because there were so many strong arguments for keeping the city as one entity, and the associations were part of that. You know, Lake Mission Viejo Association is the planned community of Mission Viejo, and even though an incorporated Aegean Hills was added on to Mission, Lake Mission Viejo is still the planned community of Mission Viejo, so you have some haves and have-nots, and the bigger the city, the more haves and have-nots you would have had. So there were some interesting rationales and debates going on at that time, but Mission did support cityhood, but as a neutral participant.

BRETON: So did you interface on a regular basis with the Marketing Division?

HARDER: Actually, at one point I was the Marketing Division.

BRETON: Okay, so what was your marketing strategy? What was the strategy of the company when you were in charge?

HARDER: When I became VP of Marketing, we were a well-established company, so I didn't have to worry about creating an image for the community. The California Promise campaign was still going strong. The community was flourishing, and we were using a lot of outside builders. That whole emphasis had changed from a time when Mission built almost everything themselves. It's an interesting cycle. When they first opened, they had the Deane Homes, they

had outside builders, because they weren't big enough to do it themselves. Then there came a time when they were doing almost all of the building themselves, and then toward the end it was all selling projects for specific projects, but individual outside builders doing that. So I worked with all of those individual builders to do a master campaign, so we would have one full-page color ad that would show their different products and still push the community image. So that was really the emphasis I had, was trying to still keep us cohesive. Even though we had a whole lot of builders participating, we're still telling the Mission story, and the Mission story was always the same. This is a family community. This is the California Promise, a safe place for your kids, a great and beautiful community. Come and see it.

BRETON: Great. It seemed that in all of the early advertising Mission Viejo was described as the quintessential utopia, Camelot. This is a self-contained community that has a great mix, a blend of parks, schools, recreation, open space, education, church, and something for everybody. Did you continue along that same theme?

HARDER: That theme was well established, so, yes, we were a planned community. The advantages of a planned community are, again, you know it's going to happen in the future. If you buy here, you know what's going to be here. You know there's a beautiful lake. You get to be a member of the beautiful lake. Your kids can go swimming. You can do boating. It's eleven bucks a month. I mean, the prices were so reasonable for the amenities and to participate.

I know for the twentieth anniversary we started the concerts on the lake. That was Harvey Stearn's idea. He said, "Let's do something fun for the twentieth anniversary," and we came back with the concert idea. I think we started with three concerts that first summer, and now the Lake Association does maybe four or five each summer, but it's become a tradition. It's something everyone expects because that's always been done. Well, it has always been done

since 1986 when it was a twentieth anniversary celebration. So part of that marketing is just sharing what was happening in the community, because by that time, our community was so strong and so beautiful, you really just wanted people to come see it. Once you came and saw it, you're probably going to want to be here.

BRETON: Let me just read a list of areas for marketing, and you tell me if you were involved in those or if you had outside consultants: magazine, newspaper, radio, television.

HARDER: We did a lot of newspaper, mostly real estate sections, and again, mostly product-oriented for specific—launching Andalusia, launching different products for different builders. We did not do a lot of television in the eighties. There was some in the seventies. Television is very expensive, so you really have to have a boom time to cost that out, and when I came in the early eighties, it was still coming out of the recession, but it was not boom time. That isn't the time you want to spend those dollars there. We did not do radio in the eighties. They did do it in the seventies.

BRETON: Did you do any of those small ads that you see before the movie begins in the movie theater?

HARDER: No.

BRETON: None of those? I seem to think I remember that.

HARDER: You do things differently in the life of a community, so in the early days you have to be all over the place, you have to be on the big billboards, you have to be out there. As a maturing community, you've already been out there, people know the name, so you don't have to do the same kinds of strategies, yes.

BRETON: Sure, and like you say, the California Promise was the ultimate award-winning slogan that everyone knew, and, of course, the Nadadores, the Olympics, had put Mission Viejo on the map, the international scene. How do you measure the success of the master plan?

HARDER: I personally measure it by how long people live here. I talk to kids who were raised in Mission Viejo. They're kids to me now, right, but they grew up in Mission Viejo and they now have their own homes and are raising their own families in Mission Viejo. That's success, it really is, someplace that you grew up in and you still want to raise your family in.

BRETON: Why is local history important?

HARDER: I think it's important to know the roots of a community. I know people move in and they see the Mission Bells and they have no clue. It's a pretty thing, but they don't know that that's Mission Viejo and that if you cross the border from Mission into a surrounding community, they stop, and that you will see them. They maybe don't even notice the Barcelona walls, but they mark every entrance to the community, and once you're aware of those, then when you see them, you say, "Oh, yes, this is an entrance to Mission Viejo." Of course, when they were built, there was no community out there. People drove in and it was the first thing they saw, because there was no surrounding community, but now there are other cities next to us and other communities, and they still mark the boundaries of the community.

I think it's also a sense of appreciation. Thousands of people worked to make this community and to found it and to make it what it is, and the whole idea of just Jim Toepfer's long hours on the drawing board just trying to make it as good as he could make it so that people would have things close to them that they needed, there'd be a grocery store down the street and there'd be a school and a park, they don't just happen, and I think it's nice to appreciate the people that made them happen.

BRETON: How can you describe how your life has been affected by your work with the company?

HARDER: Mission was a great experience for me. It opened up the whole world of real estate, which I had never been involved with, but it also opened up the whole world of planned community and the whole idea of building a city from scratch, and that's pretty unique. Mission Viejo was City Hall because we didn't have City Hall, so if there were bees in the backyard, they called us. The employees were so glad when the city incorporated because all of a sudden we could send those calls to somebody else. [laughter] But being City Hall also made you sort of the heart of the community, so you really heard about all the issues in the community and were part of that community. Of course, for me personally, I'm living on the lake today because of the company, so it's been a tremendous positive influence, and I raised my family in the community, and my son's graduating from Mission Viejo High School and will be going to Saddleback College, which is there because of Mission Viejo Company, so a lot of personal impact on my family.

BRETON: What lessons have you learned from this entire process, from your experiences?

HARDER: Probably the biggest lesson is the quality issue. I've always believe in only working for companies that you truly believe in the product, that you can really proud that you're part of that company or part of that product, and it was very easy to be proud of Mission Viejo and the family and all the things that the company was putting together. I love to sing the way that the management team really did care about how the curbs looked or even the little things like the low-profile fire plugs. You know, they spent a lot of time and money not to have the big red fire plugs, but the little low fire plugs that would be less intrusive, and people that take that kind of

time and effort care about the results, so I liked being part of that kind of a philosophy and that kind of a family feeling.

BRETON: When the phone rang and it was a TV news reporter and had a question about something that'd happened in Mission Viejo or something that it was about, did you get that phone call? Did you have to field those?

HARDER: I did. One of my favorite ones was from a San Diego station, and they'd been driving down the 5 and they'd been seeing the California Promise billboards. They came in and they said, "We're going to do a story about if the California Promise is real."

I said, "Fine, let's go to Lake Mission Viejo, and why don't you interview anyone you see on the beach?" So, of course, anyone lying on the beach in Lake Mission Viejo is perfectly happy. [laughs] It's a beautiful place. They're having a great time. So it was a five-star puff piece for six minutes on San Diego television. You know, and I said, "Also, just do men on the street, on the sidewalk," because I knew that man on the street and the sidewalk, someone's walking around Lake Mission Viejo, it's the same thing, right. It's a beautiful day. They're having a good time. It's a lovely community. Every single person they interviewed said, "Yes, this is the California Promise."

BRETON: They could receive the same response if they went to any one of the rec centers or any one of the ball fields or this library.

Did you travel back to New York with Phil Reilly? Did you assist him in any of his presentations or Jim Gilleran's presentations?

HARDER: Yes, I was in charge of the Philip Morris presentation physical part, so in those days that was slideshows. It's pre-PowerPoint, and we very carefully made each and every slide. It had the Mission logo with the royal blue and the different graphs that came out. So I worked on

the presentation itself, on the wording of the presentation, with both Phil Reilly and Jim Gilleran, and very creative. Like Philip Morris, of course, made Jell-O, right. They had Kraft at the time, so we were doing a presentation about some of the new construction techniques for safety in earthquakes and the slide came up of a Jell-O house, which sort of illustrated the way a stick-built house can sway with the earthquake, but it was handcrafted for the Philip Morris Board.

BRETON: When dignitaries visited Mission Viejo, were you involved in hosting them?

HARDER: I did a lot of tours, and one of the things I would do is I would take the Mission Viejo Company boat, which is still on the lake, privately owned now, but we had a large pontoon boat, and we would take the guests on a tour of the lake, and then we would all have lunch at Tortilla Flats, and we'd have the Mariposa chicken [Chicken Mariposa], preordered so that it all came out flash fast. Then we would go around and see the rest of the community, but we always started them on the lake because first impressions are very important, and you'll never forget the lake.

BRETON: And you would take them around the community in the company van or a bus?

HARDER: We usually rented, yes, depending on how big the group was.

BRETON: Were you here for the International New Towns [Association] conference?

HARDER: I was.

BRETON: What award did Mission Viejo receive? Do you remember?

HARDER: Mission Viejo was honored as the International New Town for that year. It was primarily a European organization. It had "International" in its title, but it was primarily focused on Europe, so this was one of the first times a United States planned community had been honored, and we hosted their conference. So people came from all over the world who were interested in planned communities, and the whole group toured Mission Viejo as part of that

conference, and we hosted a party at the ranch in Aliso Viejo, so the western theme, which was very new for them. A Hungarian who's never seen a western theme has a different reaction to it than someone who's grown up in California. We even made luggage tags with the INTA logo on them, so everyone got the luggage tags as their souvenir.

But it was important to the company because it was the first time there had been international recognition of the planned community work, and I think the company valued that because that whole philosophy of pre-planning and not letting things happen hodgepodge was so important to the comfort of residents who were moving into areas, and again, pretty unique for California to have that 10,000 acres to be able to start and work. Many of the European planned communities were working with 300 acres, yes, so they were quite different.

BRETON: Well, Mission Viejo had the right place, the right people, right time. Now, this conference took place partly at the college, didn't it? Didn't Jim Gilleran give a speech at the McKinney Theatre at the college [Saddleback College] to all of the attendees?

HARDER: Yes, and we also gave McKinney Theatre the gift of new curtains for that event as a thank you.

BRETON: Which are expensive. Those curtains are expensive.

Can you say to the new city that the California Promise was fulfilled by the company, and now the city should maintain and preserve and enhance the facilities and the amenities that they have inherited from the community, from the company?

HARDER: The city has worked very hard, I think, to do that. The median upkeep in our community, it has changed from grass, which was pretty expensive to upkeep and mow, to more drought-tolerant plants. I think the city has made some wise decisions in doing some of those changes. I was sorry to see St. Patrick's Parade die, but Fourth of July is still going strong, and

certainly the sports programs are as strong as ever, if not stronger. So I think the heritage has continued, and I think most of the City Council members who are residents have the same care about the community, because they live here, so I don't see that changing.

BRETON: Have you experienced the [Mission Viejo] Readers' Festival? Have you attended the Readers' Festival in September or the Arts ALIVE in April or the Symphony in the city [Target Symphony in the Cities] in July, any of those cultural events that the city's sponsoring? I know you've been busy [unclear].

HARDER: I read about them. I'm full-time at Soka University [of America], and we're doing our own events all the time, so most of my weekends are in Aliso now, but I've certainly read about the success of those events. Those are great to see new traditions starting.

BRETON: What about this library here? Do you think that's important for the community that we have this facility?

HARDER: There is a book at the front of the library that has the Harder family name on it, because we were here at the dedication, and it was that important for our community to have this library here. Our former library was so tiny and no parking, and it's been tremendous accomplishment of the city. My family has used it for years and will continue to use it for years. It's a wonderful facility.

BRETON: That's good to know. To conclude, what are your thoughts on—two-part question, your thoughts on why the Mission Viejo Company took such great pains to document all that it was doing over the years with photos and keeping all the press releases and keeping all of the slides and the *Mission Viejo Reporters* and all the reports, and then the importance for the city to maintain and preserve these documents and archive them so that future generations can study the Mission Viejo story.

HARDER: Well, any company is going to keep good records. It's just smart, especially if you want to document the growth of any project. Well, here we had a thirty-year project, so from the very beginning, yes, the slides were inventoried by year, by date, by activity, and just kept in file drawers. I had most of those in my office, and we went back and used them, because if we were doing the twentieth anniversary event, we'd want to show a picture from the tenth or the first one that ever happened. So those were useful in press releases, those were useful in promotion, and it is part of our history.

So one of the last things I did before I left Mission Viejo Company was I went with Judy Deeter to the warehouse, and we had to clean out the warehouses. Mission was leaving, and we just went through file box after file box after file box and preserved the things we thought that the community would need for its history, and that included almost all of the slides, certainly all of the *Mission Viejo Reporters*, anything that pertained to the development or how things began, because we wanted to share that. It is a very interesting story, and we wanted the people who came to the community to have access to that.

BRETON: We appreciate that and we appreciate your taking the time for this interview.

HARDER: You're welcome.

BRETON: Thank you.

[End of interview]

Index

- Bren, Donald L., 18
- Breton, Robert David, 35

- Cook, Arthur S., 16

- Deane Homes, 36
- Deeter, Judy, 45

- Gilleran, James G., 23, 41, 42, 43

- Harder, Jonathan, 34, 40
- Harder, Peter N., 9, 10, 15
- Harder, Wendy Wetzell
 - education, 3
 - employment history, 3, 4
 - hired by Mission Viejo Company, 5

- Kentucky Fried Chicken
 - relationship with Mission Viejo Company, 12

- LaMar, Steven, 5
- Louganis, Gregory E., 4

- Mission Viejo Company
 - and O'Neill family, 18
 - community relations, 16, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30
 - corporate climate, 14, 15, 16, 17
 - landscaping, 13, 28, 30, 31
 - master plan, 18, 24, 25, 31, 36
 - Mission Viejo Activities Committee, 16, 30, 32, 34
 - Mission Viejo Youth Athletic Coordinating Council, 31
 - Municipal Advisory Council, 35
 - pricing structure, 9, 25, 32
 - relationship with government and community agencies, 22
 - relationship with Moiso family, 18
 - relationship with Moulton Ranch [Aliso Viejo], 22
 - relationship with Mount of Olives Lutheran Church, 25
 - relationship with O'Neill family, 18, 19
 - relationship with Rancho Mission Viejo, 17, 18, 43
 - research activities, 11
 - sales and marketing, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43
 - subsidizing recreation centers, 26
 - water reclamation, 17
- Mission Viejo, California
 - 20 Years of Good Taste, Mission Viejo's 20th Anniversary Community Cookbook*, 20
 - and 1984 Olympics, 27
 - architecture, 24
 - awards and recognition, 42
 - Casta del Sol, 28

cityhood, 35
community events, 16, 30, 32, 34, 37, 43
community identity, 16, 20, 21, 24, 30, 32, 37
community pride, 30
Lake Mission Viejo, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17, 30, 41
Lake Mission Viejo Association, 36
master plan, 7, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 26, 33, 39
Mission Bells, 13, 39
Mission Viejo Country Club, 28
Mission Viejo Family Fun-Bus, 28
Mission Viejo Lake Association, 30, 37
Mission Viejo Library, 44
Mission Viejo Nadadores, 4, 5, 14, 27, 39
Mission Viejo Reporter, 20, 21
Mission Viejo Skateway, 28
ordinances, 12, 13, 25
parks and recreation, 25
relationship with Southern California Edison, 31
reputation of, 11, 15
Saddleback College, 29, 43
Saddleback Valley News, 21
Tournament of Roses Parade, 34
volunteerism, 32
Mount of Olives Lutheran Church, 25

Ognibene, Gerard D., 5
O'Neill, Jerome, 18
O'Neill, Marguerite M., 18

Philip Morris USA, Inc., 6, 7, 9, 16, 18, 19, 41, 42

Raub, Jack G., 7, 10
Reilly, Philip J., 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 29, 34, 41, 42
Russo, Martin G., 15, 16, 31, 32

Schubert, Mark, 27
South Orange County Community College District, 29
Southern California Edison, 31, 32
Stearn, Harvey, 9, 21, 37
Stevens, Paul Van, 7

Toepfer, James G., 7, 12, 18, 33, 39
Toepfer, Suzanne S., 33

Williams, Wendy L., 4