

Realtors Play Big Role in City's Growth

By DON MARIO
On a bright day in May, 1939, in a small cubby-hole of an office, 11 real estate brokers which comprised the entire membership of the Torrance-Lomita Board of Realtors met to discuss plans for the observance of National Realtor Week.

This month, 25 years later, from May 24 to May 30 the same event—National Realtors Week—will be observed by the same board of Realtors by their present membership of approximately 1,200 persons.

The growth of a real estate board can well be the yardstick used to measure the growth of any city and the history of the population increase of Torrance during the intervening 25 years records one of the most spectacular growth patterns of any city in the United States. It more than justifies the foresight of the 11 members who, inspired by the leadership of Thomas Hill, a Lomita real estate broker, first organized the Torrance-Lomita Board of Realtors.

Edith Smith, one of the 11 charter members of the board and still active in board work, gave high praise to Hill for his tireless efforts in organizing the board.

al tie-ins could better establish a high standard of professional service in the community.

"Well I guess Mr. Hill must have been pretty persuasive because all of us, eleven in all, voted unanimously to apply to the National Association of Real Estate Boards and the California Real Estate Association for a charter.

"MANY PEOPLE wonder why we stress the importance of belonging to a board of realtors and why we place such emphasis on the word Realtor. Well, if a board of realtors is to justify their existence the public ought to know. Quite simply there is a vast difference between a realtor and just any real estate broker or salesman. A realtor is one who subscribes to a code of ethics and the golden rule.

"This code establishes for all realtors a level of business conduct even beyond that required by law and it encourages experience and technical competence of the highest order in real estate matters. Only members of a local board and NAREB may use the word REALTOR since it is a copyrighted title.

"IT WAS EARLY in 1939 that Tom Hill received a package and he called us all to his office for a meeting. With great ceremony we opened the package and extracted therefrom an official looking document with these names under the title charter members inscribed upon it: Thomas Hill, Mrs. M. O. Brown, George Freisenius, P. H. Rowland, Edith S. Smith, John W. Welte, W. C. Bradford, B. C. Buxton, L. J. Mumford, J. C. Smith, and Tom Waters. The Torrance Lomita Board of Realtors with Thomas Hill as president was now officially in business under the banner of the National Association of Real Estate Boards and the California Real Estate Association and the Golden Rule had now become official.

"HOWEVER THE affiliations to these parent organizations did not mean that we were free of our own local problems as a few of us had assumed. Our position was in ef-

fect somewhat like a city tied to state and federal control but with complete autonomy in relation to local matters.

"While NAREB and CREA stood as veritable Gibralters at our backs sharing with us their strength and prestige, acting as guide posts in the course we were to follow, offering advice and direction in all things administrative and above all governing our rules of conduct, we had to grow our own set of muscles and sinews. And we soon discovered that muscles and sinews are easily developed by facing up to and coming to grips with our organizational problems.

"Of course one of our first problems was that although we now had an organization we had no place to put it. That is we had no permanent headquarters. This resulted in meetings being held in homes, halls, offices or wherever we could hang our hats. In fact during my year as president we even met in what in those days was known as the Torrance Investment Company located at 1409 Sartori Street, Torrance.

"ANOTHER ONE of our problems was that even when we did have a meeting place there were times when there weren't enough members present to have a meeting. According to the by-laws of any organization only a quorum present can open a meeting. And very often when a vote was needed to pass some important piece of legislation we were forced to scout around the town until we could find enough members to open the meeting.

"In those formative years we were constantly plagued with problems. We never ran out of them. It seemed we were just substituting one problem for another... and yet in looking back I must say those were the good years."

IN OCTOBER of 1940, while still president of the Torrance Lomita Board of Realtors, Edith Smith attended the California Real Estate Association's 37th Annual Convention and was installed vice president of the 21st District an-

honor which has been accorded several Torrance board members since. The 21st District has jurisdiction over all boards in the area including the Torrance-Lomita Board.

In keeping pace with the growth of the community, the board's activities increased, and this tie-in with the parent CREA broadened its scope. As members of the Association, the board was entitled to a number of delegates to represent the board at all state conferences and conventions. These meetings were usually dedicated to the proposition that only through a rigid training program of education could the public be better served.

IN THE YEARS that followed Edith Smith's term many capable realtors took over the helm of the board. J. C. Smith was elected president in 1942 and served until 1945 followed by B. C. Buxton. During this time, although many more brokers and salesmen moved into the community, there was a reluctance on their part to join the board.

Progress, though inevitable, very often needs a catalyst to speed it on its course and it was not until W. E. Bowns served as president and the multiple listing service was organized in 1948 with Gerald Alter as its chairman did the membership take a sudden leap. The Multiple Listing Service was the catalyst that was needed.

GERALD ALTER who organ-

ized the Multiple Listing Service and acted as its first chairman had this to say about those early days:

"Obviously the reason for the sudden increase in membership was clearly due to our instituting a multiple listing service. The service provides a distribution center where all realtors who are members of the board can pool all the properties they have listed on a share the business basis. The service makes accessible to any realtor member the listing of all other realtor members thereby increasing the inventory of every realtor. In other words MLS provides the identical inventory of properties to all realtors subscribing to the service giving all realtors an equal chance to dispose of the property. The multiple listing service is not only a boon to realtors but also of great benefit to a buyer or seller of properties since this method of operation expedites the sale of the property.

"OF COURSE, in those days the Torrance-Lomita Board had no headquarters and since I was elected chairman of the service, the listings were all sent to the Alter Real Estate and were typed on a stencil by Margaret Alter and run on a mimeograph borrowed from the Long Beach Board of Realtors. The mailing of the listings was handled by other members of the committee. It was not until a year later that a part time secretary was hired to do this work."

In 1950, James H. Schmitt was elected president of the board followed by C. J. (Paddy) Ryan in 1951, under whose leadership another innovation was introduced into the board, known as Caravan. Paddy Ryan explained its purpose.

"Under the Caravan system the board charters a bus which carries realtors to certain designated areas to inspect properties which have been listed. Part of the success in selling is in "knowing the property," and this practice of caravaning property is quite old and has been proven remunerative for the alert salesman. The system is still very popular and still being used by our board."

DURING THE 1950's the board continued to operate without a headquarters and it is a tribute to such men as Howard J. Percy, Perry Connet, James L. Decker, Roy Shaw, Bob Haggard, Harry Bowke, Kenneth Miller, Lee Dawson, and Delbert Vaughn, who carried on the work of the board with vigor and purpose in spite of this handicap. Each succeeding president who carried the burden of leadership during those turbulent years instituted many changes reforms and innovations for the board's improvement and continually strived to raise the standards of the real estate profession.

With the responsibility of office increasing in direct proportion to its growth, many of the members of the board were called upon to participate

more actively in organizational affairs and appointed to serve on such committees as education, ethics, public affairs, legislative, realtor public relations, and many others.

BUT JUST AS the organizational work load increased so in direct proportion did the administrative work load increase. Finally when the paper work had become increasingly ponderous, files heavier, and records could no longer be stored in garages and carted from house to house, the board of directors voted to purchase a parcel of ground and erect a small office. When this job was completed in 1959, the board wisely hired a full time executive secretary who did much to relieve the work load imposed upon the president during his term of office.

IN THE MEANWHILE membership meetings were being held in various restaurants throughout the city of Torrance: The Palms, The International Pancake House, The Jump 'n' Jack and others.

Then one day the board of directors checked over its membership lists and counted nearly 700 members. Again the board was faced with a dilemma. They knew that the demands for accommodations would increase and so in 1961 under the leadership of President Delbert Vaughn, the Board of Directors voted to build an addition to the existing small office erected two

years before, and plans were drawn for a hall large enough to accommodate 500 persons and for parking facilities for several hundred cars.

Kenneth Peters who later became president of the board, was delegated to handle the chairmanship of the building committee. Under his direction the building was completed in one year and induction ceremonies were performed for the first time in November of that year with Jack Schmidt being installed as president.

TODAY THIS beautiful building houses offices, directors' meeting room, fully equipped kitchen, an office personnel of eight typists and file clerks under the supervision of Bonnie Ransom, assistant to the executive secretary, a kitchen crew managed by Mr. and Mrs. Bill McEwen, and Executive Secretary Bill Bruger, who supervises the whole operation.

"A far cry from those first days in 1939, twenty-five years ago," Edith Smith says to Dell Wright, the board's president.

Today, Edith Smith and other supervising charter members may well look with pride upon this monument to their dream with the conviction that in the years ahead there will be others as dedicated as themselves adhering to the concepts established by NAREB and CREA ever breathing new life into the organization and thus keeping the dream alive.



REALTOR DIRECTORS... Members of the board of directors of the Torrance-Lomita Board of Realtors shown here from left are Delbert Vaughn, Jack Waters, Al Bostwick, Alvin Grancell, Kenneth Peters, Bob Haggard, Geneva Meara, Bill McEwen, Frances Bernard, Fred Hanson, Don Shaw, and Dan Ingraham.

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The Torrance-Lomita Board's Multiple Listing Service Covers 50 Square Miles of Residential, Income, and Industrial Properties

- 1,000 MEMBERS
- SOLD \$65,000,000 IN PROPERTY IN 1963
- 3rd LARGEST IN SALES IN STATE OF CALIF.

REAL ESTATE GROWTH ANALYSIS IN THE SOUTH COAST AREA

- 6 of every 10 families own their own homes.
- The median income is \$6,956.
- Torrance is the 4th largest city in the entire county.
- Employment as of July '63 was at 290,000.
- Retail trade passed the one billion mark in 1963.
- There are 73 manufacturing establishments in the area.
- The total volume of building and construction in 1963 was \$250,000,000.
- The petroleum industry in the area accounted for 14% of California's total output.

TORRANCE-LOMITA BOARD of REALTORS

MEMBER CALIFORNIA REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION

the very mention of "50th" hits a soft spot with us...

Congratulations to the Torrance Herald

A newspaper nurtures the growth of its city... takes its temperature... times its pulse... heralds its happenings... prods its conscience... and the city and newspaper grow. In 50 years, the HERALD has grown from its first eight-page issue to the newspaper you see today... and Torrance from a 1914 village to the fourth largest city in Los Angeles County.

Now, what does the 50th mean to us? It just so happens that is the life span our engineers estimate for a gas air conditioning unit. Note we say estimate. We aren't sure. Frankly, modern gas air conditioning hasn't been around long enough yet to find out. But why shouldn't it last five decades. After all, there's nothing to wear out. No major moving parts, no friction, no wear or tear in the heating-cooling cycle. A blue flame keeps things going... heating in winter, cooling in summer... for perfect climate all year.

For a newspaper or a community, 50 years—however achievement-filled—only mark the beginning. And if they should mark the end of a gas air conditioning unit, that's still a pretty good record, don't you think.

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