

point of view



polishing the stone:

Gifts and Celebrations for all of us...

by Bruce Giffin

Polishing the stone” is a phrase I use as a builder to mean the ongoing process of taking a place and continually improving it over time. By making it more livable, nurturing and energizing, bit by bit the “stone” attains a soft hand-rubbed gleam that makes you want to pick it up, handle it, admire it and be with it. Our coastal communities have long histories of polishing the stone.

When I was four years-old in 1959, I lived in Santa Monica with my mother and quite frequently my grandparents would come and pick me up to spend time with them on their ranch in Goleta. As we made our way up the coast highway, I always knew we were getting close when we’d drive by Santa, that roadside piece of vernacular construction adjacent to Carpinteria. Well, that jolly old Santa is gone, but during this holiday season of celebration and gift giving, here are the things I value about our communities from the Rincon to Gaviota and the gifts that I would give them.

For Carpinteria, I celebrate that a small agricultural town by the sea in southern California still exists. My gift is for Carpinteria to remain as it is, a functioning, vital and vibrant reminder of a California that once existed and now no longer does. My gift would include a realization that whatever development occurs there reflects the spirit of the town.

For Summerland, it’s a celebration of it’s character. Summerland is spunky and it reflects not only the elements of the ocean but the people who inhabit it. It’s a village with heart and soul, a sense of promise, mystery and creativity. My gift for Summerland would be to lower the freeway below grade to tie the town back to the sea.

And in Montecito, the incredible level of architecture, both built and landscaped, are causes for celebration. The sense of style, taste, sophistication and generally understated wealth all add to the ambiance of the community. My gift for Montecito would be taking the knowledge and energy of that community and growing it exponentially to make a difference in the rest of the world.

For Santa Barbara, I celebrate the work and efforts of so many who’ve have made and continue to make it a great place to be, people like Hugh Petersen who has lovingly polished the stone of La Arcada court over the last twenty-some years, adding fountains, landscaping and art—making it a place that people gravitate to because they enjoy being there. My gifts to the city includes ongoing encouragement to all those who have and who continue to keep creating those nooks and crannies that tell the story of creative lives. And that the resurgence of the lower Eastside and Westside neighborhoods continues along with the mingling of the many types of people at various income levels.

For the unincorporated areas of the county, I celebrate their semi-rural feeling. My gift for them would be to introduce some normalcy in the county planning process. That instead, of being told what cannot be built, the residents are encouraged to build in synchronicity with the land and neighborhood.

For Goleta, my ancestral home, I celebrate the new City. I salute those who worked to bring it forth. I recognize the tremendous amount of work and the labor of love and commitment it took to make that happen. My gifts for Goleta would be a strong sense of identity, and acknowledgement that it is a place of beauty. I would give it a location that is recognized as the heart and soul of the city of Goleta, a place for people to gather and go—and it would not be the Big Box Mall. My gifts would include the vision to resist further Orange-County-ization and the realization that government cannot mandate how to do this because what’s been done was under the full scrutiny of county planners. It includes the rejuvenation of Old Town and softening the appearance of the Calle Real shopping center district by downplaying the parking lots through more trees and landscaping.

For Isla Vista, I celebrate the University for its level of achievements and the stunning improvements in its physical plant that has taken place in the last 15 years. Recognizing that Isla Vista has been an incubator of no growth politics, it’s ironic that the University has been the biggest driver of growth on the South Coast for the last 40 years, bringing, as it does, 20,000 new students every four years, some of whom inevitably decide to stay. As gifts, I would give it greater inclusion into the community and remove the sense of it being an isolated bastion of students.

Gaviota, that incredible, peerless stretch of coastline, must be celebrated. It’s one of the few remaining areas that ties us to our imagined past of what California’s coast was once like. My gift for the Gaviota coast would be continual stewardship and not by a federal bureaucracy but by the local community. The Gaviota coast is a touchstone for us all of the timelessness of this incredible state. My hat is off to those participating in the land trusts and conservancies that are quietly working to buy the land and hold it in trust.

I celebrate the people who call this region home, who stake their claim here and make their lives, contributing, working, volunteering, teaching and creating. To you, I say thanks. Thanks for polishing the stone and adding something to making life better every day. Happy holidays!

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