

**February 19, 2004**

**Westchester-Playa del Rey Neighbor Council election drew more interest than upcoming March 2nd vote**

by David Asper Johnson, The Argonaut

That great local sage over at Villa Marina, Terry Conner, has a marvelous line that he trots out when local events seem to get so outrageous as to be impossible to endure:

"There is no hope — we are all doomed."

I never get the words right but the thought is there somewhere.

Terry's delightful one-liner comes into play everytime we hear about still another loony thing being done by one or another of our new local Neighborhood Councils.

We must confess we are not a fan of the Neighborhood Council process — at least not until it works its way through the toddler stage and offers a little bit more maturity than we've seen displayed so far by the players.

Nothing we've observed in the last three decades has created more animosity and mean spitting among neighbors who used to be great friends than the current City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Council system.

The growing pains in getting the local Neighborhood Councils up and running have been downright discouraging.

Why would anybody want to go through this process?

Venice has always been a community of diversity and there has been a long parade of community groups that have come and gone through the years.

The Venice Town Council and the Venice Action Committee come to mind.

Each rose and fell, depending upon the crisis of the moment.

We could hardly expect the Venice Neighborhood Council — which has decided to call itself the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council — to be any more organized or more civil than the neighborhood groups that preceeded it.

The folks who set up the Venice Neighborhood Council have already basically bailed out, letting the current group thrash about to consider what surely must be the longest meeting agendas we've seen in some time.

These folks have a lot on their plate, and now they've added a \$4,000-plus reception and dinner to the mix.

We're not sure that when the city fathers and mothers set up the Neighborhood Council concept and decided that the city ought to help fund the process, they really thought that a Neighborhood Council would take all but a pittance of its first \$5,000 city check and blow it on a big dinner and reception bash.

And we worry about the state of the budget at the city, county and state levels?

Around Venice a couple of smaller Neighborhood Councils are struggling to get off the ground.

In the Del Rey area, one of the first big issues was the image of the Del Rey community.

"Nobody gives us our due," early Neighborhood Council organizers whined, suggesting that the biggest offender was The Argonaut, which apparently doesn't say enough about the Del Rey area.

Perhaps that was why we were a bit surprised to see one of the group's earliest press releases touting that their meeting would be held in "Los Angeles 90066."

So much for promoting their own local community.

What Del Rey needs is a local Shirley Pfeil, who went around town demanding — not asking, but demanding — that everyone in Westchester use "Westchester 90045" on everything that was written. And folks did and do.

Now the spotlight has shifted to the Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa del Rey, whose leaders also attack The Argonaut at every opportunity, even lamenting that we at times call their group the Westchester-Playa del Rey Neighborhood Council instead of the much more proper Neighborhood Council of Westchester-Playa del Rey. Sorry, but our response: "yawn."

One thing we will never encourage in The Argonaut is that dreadful use of NCWP. Ugh. We have more respect for the group than that.

Although, we must confess that after last week's fiasco when Playa Vista drove in busfuls of Playa Vista workers with the promise of free booze and food to vote in the Neighborhood Council election, our respect for the folks who run that Neighborhood Council went down about as fast as leftover foam on one of those free beers.

The enormous egos who run the Neighborhood Council of Westchester-Playa del Rey are — alas — fearful of giving up a drop of their presumed power, lest someone else in the community get to share in Neighborhood Council decisions.

After a good night's sleep and another reminder from Terry Conner that "we are all doomed," we realized that the nonsense in the recent Westchester/Playa del Rey neighbor election really wasn't that important in the great scheme of things.

No laws were broken, the folks who want to "run" the council — and almost everything else in town — assured us.

Last year, when Playa Vista also pulled off this dubious stunt of bussing in its employees to ensure that Playa Vista supporters would continue to run the Neighborhood Council, the Playa Vista president, Steve Soboroff, reveled in what he had achieved and told us, with great glee, "It's the American way."

Well, maybe it is, but it also corrupts the concept of why City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils were formed in the first place.

Our review of the Playa Vista busing effort: "Not Playa Vista's finest hour — nor, thankfully, representative of Playa Vista's overall civil contribution to the local community."

Hopefully, somebody over at Playa Vista is embarrassed about all this. We certainly are.

On the other hand, we won't lose much sleep over this latest vote grab.

As for those who are disappointed with this bussing effort, we suggest next year they run their own transportation program to the Neighborhood Council polls.

Surely the opponents can round up a parade of SUVs, drive them over to Alla Road near Home Depot and load them up with dayworkers — glad for a diversion that includes free booze and food.

Over time, the side that rounds up the greatest number of dayworkers wins.

As Mr. Soboroff would say, "It's the American way."

AND NOW, ON TO THAT

REAL ELECTION — Wish we could get the locals as excited about the upcoming Tuesday, March 2nd, election as they have demonstrated in our local Neighborhood Council elections.

If you think the Grass Roots Venice gang blew its budget on a big one-time dinner and reception, wait until you start reading about all the bond issues on the Tuesday, March 2nd, ballot.

We've written elsewhere in this issue about the four propositions. We especially like the concept that promoters of Prop. 55, the school bond have.

If their bond doesn't pass this time, they've already lined it up for the fall ballot. Whoopee.

Guess they figure that they'll keep doing it until they get it right — a concept some of the "not too loyal opposition" on our Neighborhood Councils might want to try.

Keep trying until you get your group in or the other side just gets tired of all the huffin' and puffin.'