

The Bluffs

A Planned Community on the Irvine Ranch, Newport Beach, California

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•THE HISTORIC 88,000-acre Irvine Ranch was purchased by James Irvine in the 1860's. It was acquired in substantially its present form from portions of three contiguous Spanish land grants. The Irvine Ranch holds a unique position because of its size; it is five times the area of Manhattan Island, and includes 20 percent of Orange County, extending 22 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Riverside County line.

The need for housing in the postwar period generated great pressure on the Irvine Company for they owned the most desirable land. Developers clamored to buy and develop without delay. However, a policy of leasing was selected in lieu of selling, for this plan would retain control over the developer and encourage better land planning and buildings of a higher quality. Land planning as well as the houses must be approved in writing by the Irvine Company before commencing work.

The outstanding exception to the leasing plan was made when the Irvine Company donated 1,000 acres as a site for the University of California at Irvine (U.C.I.). The Regents of the University were enthusiastic over the offer to plan and develop a campus community of 10,000 acres surrounding the University site.

On June 20, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States, dedicated the site of this sixth university in the California system of universities. U.C.I. will open in September 1965 to 1,000 students and 104 faculty members. The student enrollment will reach 27,500 by 1990, and the town surrounding the University will have a population of 100,000. The site for the University and its integrated town is located in gently rolling hills above the north end of Newport Bay, previously used for grazing land.

My remarks will be related to the research and development of The Bluffs, a planned community on the Irvine Ranch, Newport Beach, Calif. However, before proceeding with that story, I believe that you will be interested in knowing what we learned through research about the advantages to be derived from creative planning.

We were determined to create a community which would offer better houses and environment. But examples for inspiration could be found only by surveying the existing developments. A period of 3 months was spent in analyzing condominiums and cooperative schemes, not only in Orange County, but from San Diego to Marin County north of San Francisco. I found that the majority of developments were planned for maximum density. Emphasis was in recreation areas with two, and occasionally three, swimming pools, hobby shops, card room, etc.

The few successful planned developments which I visited were built around a theme. New Horizons at Torrance, Calif., is planned around a 9-hole golf course. The living units were placed above the course so that the tenants of each building have the long view of this green planting. The same developer created a low-income community with one large open area, called Central Park. In this open space he grouped tennis courts, swimming pools, a Little League baseball diamond, a Pop Warner football field for grade school players, and hand ball courts. A two-story clubhouse was built for the adults, where there are card rooms, pool rooms, hobby shops, and a large social hall

with a completely equipped kitchen. Here again the attraction was pointed towards amusement and recreation. These ideas were acceptable but where was the environment? All the buildings were like big two-story apartments, placed on a grid pattern.

Obviously, the developments I studied were not the results of creative planning. But the money and time devoted to this research was well spent. The inspiration and theme for The Bluffs would be realized through the determination to create something of value.

The Bluffs is located on 345 acres leased from the Irvine Ranch. The site is high above the Back Bay, providing views towards the sea and the mountains. It would have been simple to design and develop a good residential subdivision on the land, but this temptation was discarded.

The developers of The Bluffs, the Holsteins, had previous experience in the development and management of a successful cooperative, The Sandpiper, located at Palm Desert, Calif. They were enthusiastic over the possibilities of a similar lane-use concept in Orange County. However, since The Sandpiper is a resort or vacation area, many changes would be required in planning permanent homes.

After a series of staff meetings the decision was made to create a winding park of 32 acres for the first phase of 160 acres. Obviously if we were to proceed in an intelligent manner, we had to form a team composed of a land planning expert, an architect with skill and imagination, and a landscape architect with experience in park design. The latter was needed because the park, being our theme, was to be most important.

Our challenge was to create better housing and environment by combining the peace and quiet of the private home with the benefits afforded through the condominium plan.

We needed affirmative answers to the following important questions before launching into a full-scale program:

1. Would the Irvine Company be agreeable to our request to remove the land from the market for a period of one year, the time needed for complete research and planning?
2. Would George M. Holstein and Sons agree to provide the funds necessary for this study?
3. Could a creative land-use plan be developed, which would be economically sound for the Irvine Company and also produce a return to Holstein commensurate with the risks created in pioneering an idealistic concept of land use.

While awaiting the replies to these vitally important questions, conferences were held with the Newport Beach Planning Commission. Variances for private roads, easements for utilities, lot sizes, and an acceptable formula covering percentage of open areas to those occupied by buildings were required. The officials in all departments of the city were enthusiastic over our concept of land use and worked with us in a most cooperative way.

After several conferences, affirmative replies to the three questions were received from the Irvine Company. Holstein then proceeded with interviews relative to the formation of the team of experts. The selection of the landscape architect presented the only real problem, since the firm had to understand and agree with our objective. Linesch and Reynolds were finally selected as they had designed the landscaping for Disneyland and had maintained the plantings since the original scheme was completed.

I will not bore you with the conflicts and problems which developed during the following 12 months. This was a trying period, with everyone crusading for his ideas. In the middle was the coordinator, which was my position.

From time to time I have mentioned the word theme. It is my sincere belief that creative land planning must have a theme. Ours is the park and greenbelts. There are five greenbelts, one blending with the 15 acres of public park, adjoining the site for a grade school. Occasionally the greenbelts intersect, creating a most dramatic view in four directions (Figs. 1-3).

The concept of these green areas is one of informal design, offering a wide variety of trees, rocks, fountains and, occasionally, a putting green. Every skill has been

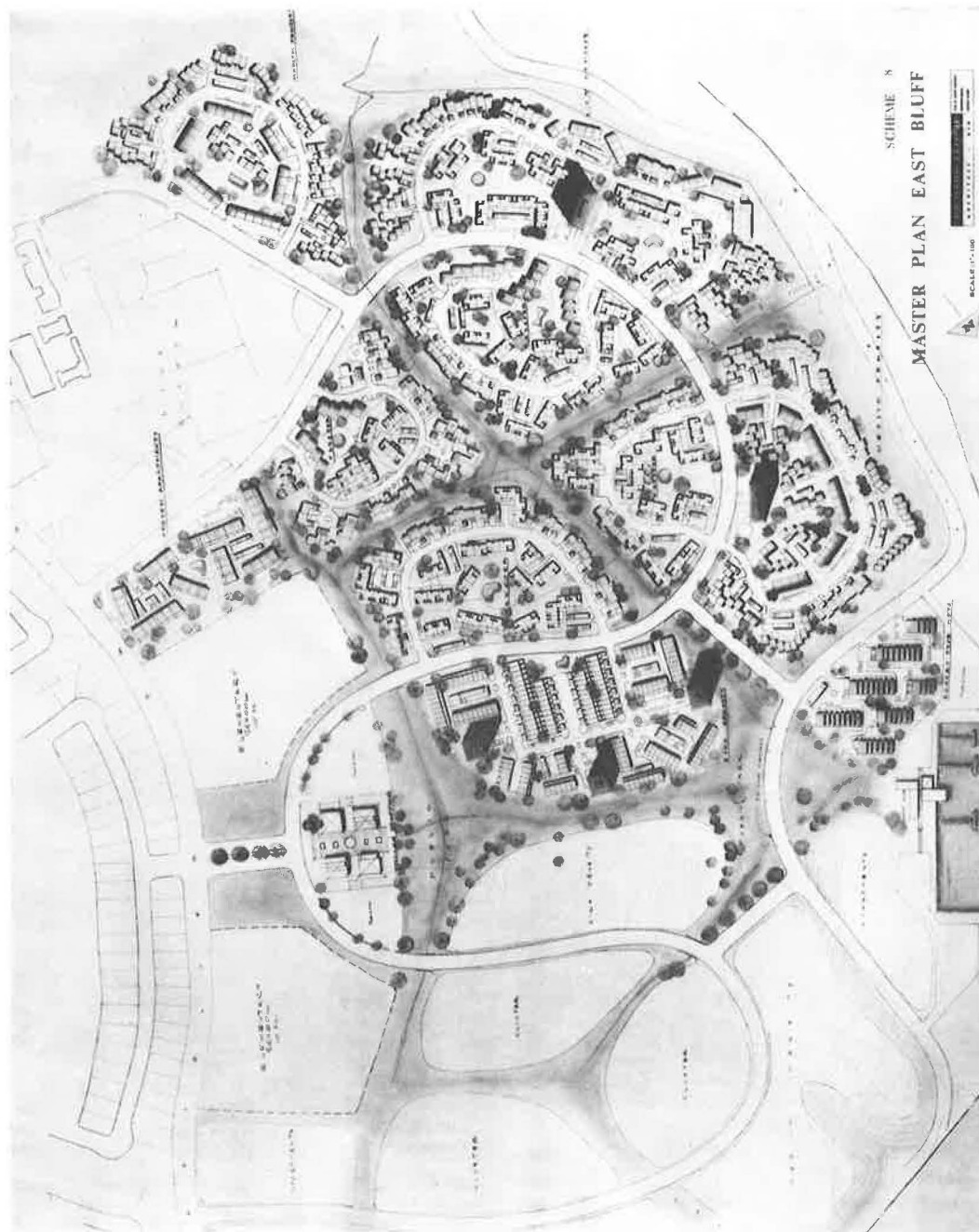


Figure 1. Original land plan.



Figure 2. Original land plan superimposed over area map (by plane).

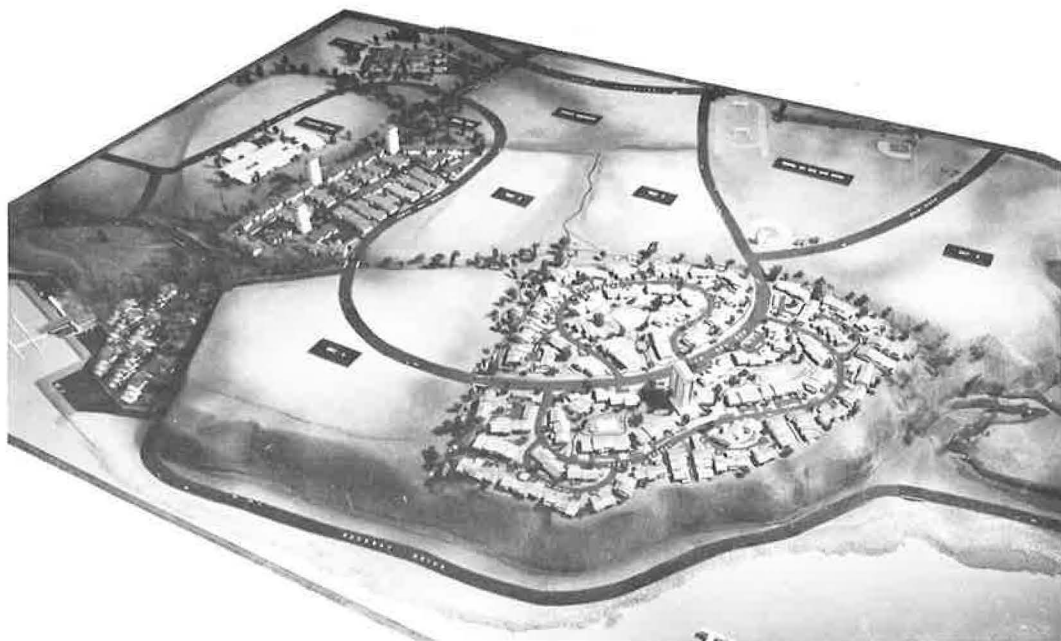


Figure 3. Model showing land-use concept.

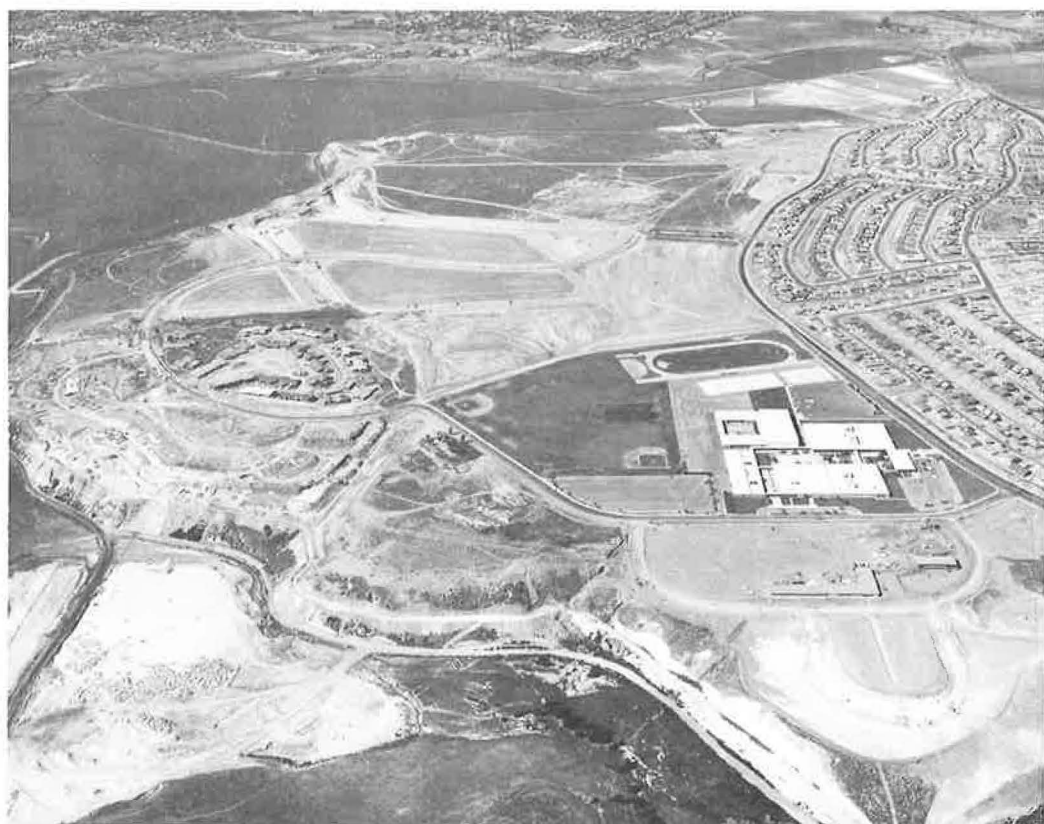


Figure 4. Aerial photo showing development of land plan.



Figure 5. Later aerial photo showing development of land plan.

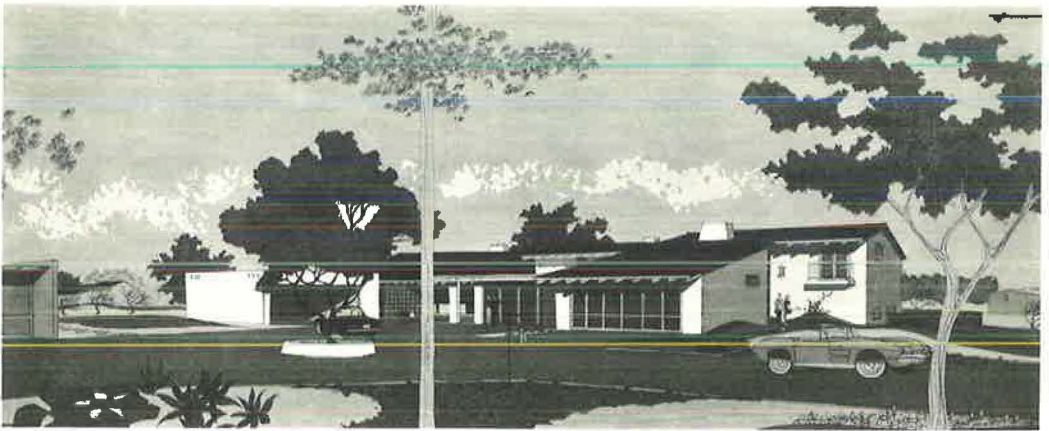


Figure 6. Home design.

used to introduce the ever-changing scene, rather than a formal plan. One and one-half million cubic yards of earth were excavated, moved, compacted and molded into a pattern of undulating form (Figs. 4 and 5).

The architect was faced with a challenge because of the winding greenbelts and their ever-changing contours. Many variations in buildings were designed (Figs. 6-8). Some

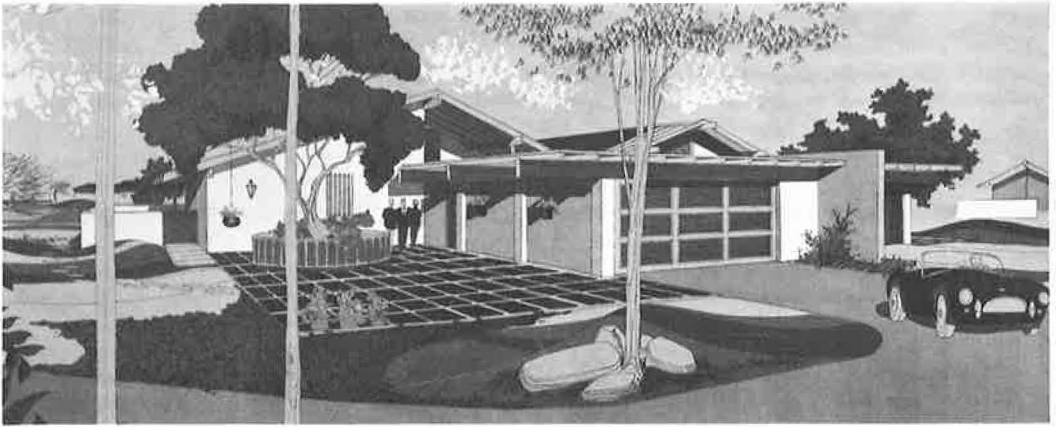


Figure 7. Home design.

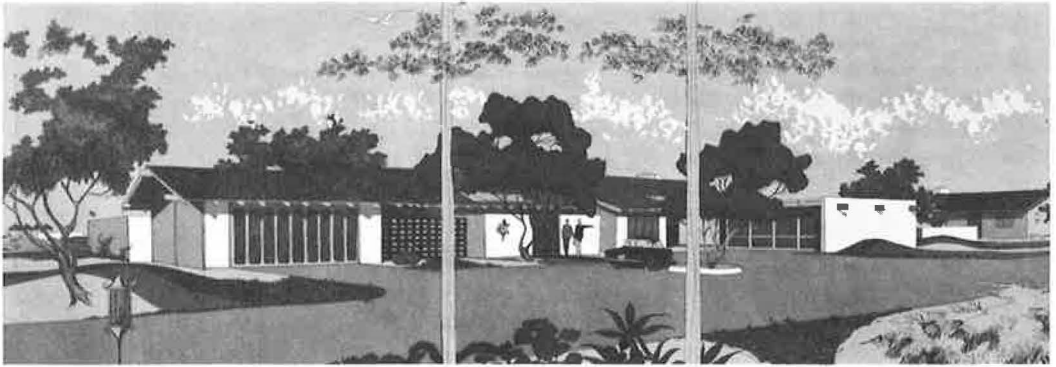


Figure 8. Home designs.



Figure 9.

were one-story types, fronting on winding streets, with living rooms oriented towards exceptionally large green gardens, having a swimming pool and a Ramada nestling into a high bank where other units of different types were sited (Fig. 9).

Where the private roads were below the greenbelts, the garages were placed at street level. Interesting and dramatic stairways were designed to provide access to the upper living area. Here again the living rooms were oriented to a greenbelt. In other cases the living rooms were placed over the garages when exceptional views were to be captured.

The architect was confronted with the most difficult problem in designing the buildings which would be built below the private streets. The combination of a two-story unit with the living room, dining room, kitchen, and the master suite on the street level, with three bedrooms and two baths on the lower level, together with two types of split-level schemes developed gracious and pleasing structures (Fig. 10).

There are ten different house plans. These house plans are combined in a most skillful manner to produce nineteen different buildings, all adjacent to a greenbelt where



Figure 10. View toward greenbelt from lower floor of a split-level plan.



Figure 11. View from greenbelt illustrating open spaces and types of building.



Figure 12. View of entry through garden atrium.

children can walk to grade or high school, the 15-acre park, and the neighborhood shopping center, without crossing a main street.

The architectural style selected for The Bluffs is Mediterranean in feeling. The use of shake or tile roofs, iron grills, and balconies reminiscent of Monterey, Calif., has created charm and interest (Figs. 11 and 12).

When our basic land-use pattern was completed, the architecture approved, and the buildings under way, we were faced with the question of whether the public would accept our ideas. On March 1st of this year the first nail was driven for the first house in The Bluffs. Since that date, 250 sales have been made. As of this date over 70 families have moved in and sales are still maintaining an average of two per day.

The first 100 buyers were interviewed regarding their decision to select a home in multiple units rather than in another private house. The replies indicated that 70 percent of the buyers were attracted by the greenbelt concept, where the units are staggered in each building, sited to provide the maximum view towards the Bay. The minimum distance between the buildings is 150 feet across the greenbelt. Twenty percent were enthusiastic over the paths in the greenbelts where their children could walk to grade or high school without crossing a main street. Also, these same paths lead to the neighborhood shopping area. Ten percent felt that the houses, the land use, and the overall feeling of peace and quiet attracted them to The Bluffs.

The Bluffs is not a new town. It is a new concept of land use which will provide three kinds of living for the people of Southern California. The first phase includes 571 units of cluster-type occupancy, having an average density factor of $4\frac{1}{2}$ living units per acre. These homes are sold with terms of 10 percent down, 30-year trust deeds, and a 75-year lease between the buyer and the Irvine Company. Two hundred rental

units are being constructed in one, two, and three-story buildings, surrounding garden areas with swimming pools. Here the density is 10 living units to the acre.

The third type of living unit (also rental) is to be in five 6-story tower apartments. Underground garages providing space for two cars per occupant will be included. A swimming pool and garden areas are to be built on the deck over the garages. Shops which are normally to be found on the ground floor of high-rise apartments will be omitted. Here, again, we are maintaining a residential character. These apartment buildings are to be placed on $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres of ground, thereby providing ample space between the tower and the nearest cluster building. The high-rise structures are scattered throughout the project, rather than as a concentration in one area. By so doing, we avoid a mass complex which would interfere with our exceptional views.

The concept of greenbelts is very acceptable to the public in our area, since the natural terrain is barren for 10 months of the year. The charm of our greenbelt is to be found in the ever-changing views afforded through the winding concept. Thousands of trees and shrubs have been planted, with many of the cedars and palms as high as 40 feet. The environment which we have created overcomes the sterile look of the subdivision, with its paved streets and its pattern of look-a-likes, even to the parkway trees.

Scattered throughout planted areas are putting greens for the golfer who may be strolling through the park during the warm summer evenings. In the planning of the cluster groups, we have avoided the use of a swimming pool and a "Ramada" for barbecuing in even cluster unit. This a community of homeowners, not a resort development.

Quiet areas of green lawn, 150 feet wide and 400 feet long, have been provided with shade trees, benches and occasionally a small fountain.

The promotion and advertising to announce the opening of our development was handled in a sophisticated way in keeping with the environment which we were creating. Our approach was made through the mails with heavy concentration on the residents of Orange County. There were 3,000 names on our list. Each week, for a period of five weeks, the prospects received a "teaser."

The first item was a 5-inch brass nail inserted through a 6-inch square piece of heavy cardboard, notifying the prospect that the first nail for the construction of The Bluffs had been driven on March 1, 1964. The second item was one glove. The message here was clear: when you live at The Bluffs there never will be a need for the matching glove, or any gloves. All exterior maintenance will be done for the owners, including exterior painting. The final message was a large colored poster, showing the location of The Bluffs. This poster included a large sea horse, our trademark to be used in all advertising.

Inquiries flooded our offices. When would information be available? What were the houses to include—how many bedrooms? What were the prices and terms?

No definite information was given. The caller was told that his name was to be added to the list of interested people. When answers were available he would be notified. After receiving over 400 inquiries, the planned newspaper advertising program was canceled.

Following the completion of seven model units, completely surrounded by fully landscaped areas, we decided that the time was right for people to inspect our product. Two cocktail-buffet parties were held in the gardens. Over 1,100 guests attended, including executives from the city and county offices.

Ten days after parties, we received our first sales report. There were 101 reservations. Our question was answered most emphatically! The public appreciated our attempt to create a better home and environment.

Our plans for the future include a series of membership clubs, including one for swimming and tennis and another for those who have interests in sailing. We will build a small boat harbor and a small yacht club.

A permanent office, management, and sales building is being constructed near the main entrance to The Bluffs. Management will operate the staff of gardeners, oversee the maintenance of private streets and attend to the needs or complaints of the buyers. Maid service and handymen will be available to all buyers on a hourly basis. Each buyer will pay the management \$62.50 per month to maintain all greenbelts, gardens,

and swimming pools, as well as to paint the exterior of all buildings when needed. Taxes on the open areas are also included in this monthly payment.

The firm of George M. Holstein and Sons deserves an accolade for its faith in creative planning and its ability to interest the Irvine Company in the value of research, as well as being able to provide good financing on leased land. The same interest will govern the planning and development of the remaining phases to provide 1,300 additional living units.

Through the devoted interest shown by all parties responsible for The Bluffs, we now can offer an opportunity for the homeowner to live in a better way, by investing in homes priced from \$22,500 to \$43,000, with adequate living areas varying from 1,500 to 2,100 square feet.

It is our sincere hope that other developers will examine our concept and become encouraged to research their land, and produce something a little better for people who wish to live according to their ideals.

Shamefully, I must admit that all of the owners living in The Bluffs will be moving by car. If we can be successful in convincing the people to walk to the shopping center, we will have helped in a small way toward removing a few cars from the streets. All transportation in Orange County is by car or bus, and probably always will be.