

The Lakewood Story: History, Traditions, Values

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Published by the City of Lakewood as part of Lakewood's celebration of its fiftieth anniversary of incorporation.

1954-2004: Times change. Values don't.

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Kid City. The average block in the new city of Lakewood in 1959 could have had as many as a hundred young people under the age of eighteen. Wherever parents looked, they saw kids filled with restless energy. Lakewood’s civic traditions began with efforts to focus all this “kid power” into sports and recreation programs that would help families cope. As these “original kids” of Lakewood aged through childhood and into adolescence, their needs changed, as did the city’s recreation programs and park facilities.

“Pretty soon all the women for some reason or other got pregnant and my wife tells me that every woman in the neighborhood was pregnant and that’s what started the sports program. . . They have all these kids, what are you going to do with them?”

— JOHN RAE, ORIGINAL RESIDENT

The story about the first Lakewood Youth Sports baseball league sign-up day, which took place on a Saturday in May of 1957, has become Lakewood lore. Instead of the hundred boys expected, 1,500 flocked to Mayfair Park. Jackie Rynerson recalled the historic day: “So what they did is they decided to form teams, but where were they going to get the coaches? We were a city with a small staff. Those recreation leaders got on the phone and called dads and that became the beginning of the Lakewood recreational program. That led to a tradition of parents volunteering to help with their kids’ recreation. It also provided recreation for a lot of people, because a lot of men coached even after their kids were grown.”

That Saturday morning started the tradition of Lakewood Youth Sports, and

the city’s volunteer coaching program has continued to this day.

Lakewood’s recreation programs have expanded over the years to fit the new trends, needs, and lifestyles of Lakewood’s families and to provide recreation for everyone, including Lakewood’s growing senior population. But Lakewood still maintains its original concept of free or low-cost activities in which everyone can participate.

Lakewood resident Brigitte Richard described the important role of recreation in the community: “Lakewood parks and rec is what really helps keep the community very close. It just gets so many kids involved, it gets adults involved, our senior citizens—there’s something for everybody. I love the recreation department and the LYS, and I just couldn’t wait until my kids could participate. I’m so glad that nothing has changed, that the leagues and the formats are the same, it’s still free... You can’t beat it!”

Playgrounds and tot lots. In the early years, before the parks were developed and before the city’s recreation

department was established, recreation programs were run by the Lakewood Park, Recreation and Parkway District. While working towards the acquisition of the three park sites that Lakewood's developers had set aside, the Parkway District organized a supervised weekend recreation program at ten elementary school playgrounds.

Council Member Wayne Piercy, who worked as the park director of the Riley Elementary School playground, recalled: "We started off with these metal boxes—yellow boxes with wheels on them and we used to wheel them out on all of the



In 1956, Lakewood's most pressing need was for more parks, more recreation facilities, and more programs for youth.

elementary playgrounds on weekends. And we'd open the box and there were balls in there and other kinds of equipment and we organized them. And that started the real recreation program, because at that time we had only Mayfair Park."

With so many children under the age of five, one of the first projects of the Parkway District was the development of "tot lots," fenced neighborhood playgrounds for toddlers. The Parkway District worked with the Lakewood Water and Power Company to develop the company's eleven water well sites as playgrounds. In the early 1950s, a film

called *Investment in Young America* was made, chronicling the development of the tot lots and the strong community participation in the Tot Lot program. The program particularly addressed parents' worries about traffic safety by providing a safe place where the toddlers could play away from automobiles.

Dave Rodda, former Lakewood recreation director, discussed the program's significance, noting the important function it served for Lakewood's mothers: "It was moms getting together to provide a cooperative-type two-hour service so that they would watch their kids on the playground while the other moms could go shop or do whatever. It was the first level of childcare, before childcare was something that was in vogue." Under this cooperative childcare program, mothers worked one day per week supervising children, and in return, they could leave their child the other days.

The parents' cooperative approach has been so successful that the Lakewood Tot Lot program still offers safe, supervised play for new generations of Lakewood youth.

Our wilderness. When Lakewood's "original kids" (who were preteens in the early 1950s and who are the men and women of Lakewood today) moved with their family, Lakewood represented a suburban frontier that had remnants of its rural agricultural past still in evidence.

Original kid Dennis Lander, whose family moved to Lakewood in 1952, recalled that a favorite destination for the neighborhood kids was Bamboo Village, along the riverbed of the San Gabriel River, just a few blocks away: "Bamboo Village was where the maintenance yard is now on Shadeway and Turner Grove... [when we were young] it was very rural and the riverbed was still wild in there.

There was no cement and there was a lot of bamboo, so a lot of kids would go over there and build these bamboo forts. Every neighborhood kind of had their little fort over there.”

Bud McCain reminisced: “We used to play army in Hayter Apartments or hide-and-go-seek while they were being built. I can remember the stucco guys would bring in their sand to be delivered, and dump trucks would put it in big mounds, and we’d run off the roof of the apartments to the sand piles.” And the remains of the war provided toys for these young children of veterans: “I remember up at Long Beach Airport there by Douglas... after the war there were vacant fields that they loaded up with bombers and stuff from the war. As kids, we used to go over and play in the airplanes,” recounted McCain.

Sandra Jenkins Janich remembered a lot of horseback riding. “We would go over to Spiller’s Stables and we would go horseback riding up and down the flood control.” Anne Pechin Emigh recalled chasing jack rabbits and catching polliwogs in the area where the country club homes were later built: “We had our own little wilderness out there.”

Suzanne Henderson Shipp voiced the community spirit that many of Lakewood’s original kids felt, the excitement and pride of growing up in a new community: “I think because it was a new city, a new school—the school was only ten years old—and it was a new environment, you know it had that feeling of incorporation and growth... that’s what spurred me on to become who I am, because it was that new feeling. You know, here we are, we’re a brand-new city and we [beat] Wilson [a rival Long Beach high school] for the first time.”

Original kid Sandra Jenkins Janich summed up the sense that Lakewood’s original kids had of growing up with the

community and building traditions as they watched the trees grow: “We began our life in Lakewood and there were no trees—you know, little tiny stubby trees. I kept thinking how sad it was there was nothing growing, it was just so bare. . . I went to Jordan [High] the first year, then they opened Millikan High School, so we were asked to go there, and then when Lakewood [High] opened the following year, you had a choice as to whether you would like to change or not. It was two blocks from my home. I switched, so it was kind of hard that we didn’t have the traditions and things. You were always building traditions. Same thing with the dirt and the mud and no trees.”



Our park. Lakewood’s city administrator Howard L. Chambers, also an original kid, described park activities before the parks were fully developed: “When I was growing up, Mayfair Park was not anywhere near what it is right now—it was basically a large piece of land that was fairly undeveloped—it had the swimming pool, it had a ramshackle shack, it had one basketball court, I think one ball diamond. The ditch was unimproved and in rainy weather, there was always a trickle of water, and we used to go down there and catch tadpoles in the mason jars and bring them home. Occasionally some

Keeping kids active was an important Lakewood value in the 1950s. It still is.

of the braver guys—not me—would try to ride their bicycle down from one side through the bottom and up the other side. It was fairly steep, so many times they didn't make it."

Many original kids described the excitement that built up as the much-anticipated parks were developed. Anne Pechin Emigh recalled: "I went to Riley Elementary School, and Bolivar Park was built next door. I remember they'd have the pictures of what this park was going to look like and we were just so excited and then to see it built—it looked just like the pictures."



Lakewood parks offered after-school, weekend, and vacation programs in the 1950s. They still do.

The parks were where many original kids spent their childhood days. "The park was the main draw, I'd say, for all the kids," remembered Lander. "In our end of town, it was Del Valle Park. The neighborhood kids would hang out there all the time; there was hundreds and hundreds of 'em."

Mike Rae, a self-described "park rat," reminisced: "I spent most of my childhood on the Lakewood parks, Del Valle being the closest to my house, and that's where I learned all the games and how to compete, and it led to an athletic career." Rae grew up to star on Lakewood High's football, basketball, and baseball teams, and then

went on to play professional football for several years, notably as a member of the Oakland Raiders' Super Bowl champion team in 1977.

Robin Tweedy Nordee recalled: "After school, you could go to the park. There was always a park person there that would give you a ball to play basketball or there was a dance two or three times a week. Every park had after school [programs], so a lot of kids would go there and hang out for a couple of hours."

Organized programs. As Lakewood's youth grew from toddlers to children, the community recognized the need for organized recreational programs to keep the children occupied. Jackie Rynerson, a member of the park district's board of directors, helped to administer the first citywide recreation survey. Rynerson recalled: "It started out because we had lots of children here, so then what do you do with the children? . . . We sent a survey home through the schools to all the parents to find out what kind of recreational facilities they wanted for their children. We got something like a 79 to 80 percent return—just phenomenal!"

From the survey, distributed through the three local school districts to 10,000 homes, the Citizens Advisory Committee concluded that there was a "need for a diversified recreation program under professional supervision."

In 1957, the Lakewood Park, Recreation and Parkway District, recognizing its limited taxing powers, voluntarily dissolved. In its place, the city established its own Parks and Recreation Department and absorbed all of the District's employees. The park district's board of directors became the city's Park and Recreation Commission, with Rynerson as its first chair.

She explained the district's decision to

dissolve: “The fact was, the taxing ability of the Parkway District was limited. And we had new parks that had to be developed and so on. . . We dissolved ourselves because that was the only way it could occur.” The new Parks and Recreation Department began negotiations for the three park sites set aside by Lakewood’s developers and also began to expand the recreation programs, as requested by Lakewood’s young families.

Each neighborhood had a park nearby, so parks became the social centers for Lakewood youth. Park activities included games such as caroms, marbles, kites, and yo-yos, arts and crafts, and special contests. Special events included an annual Easter Egg Hunt and Halloween Carnival. The parks were staffed with recreation leaders and supervisors who kept the children busy with activities.

Lakewood Youth Sports. When 1,500 boys turned out for the first sign-up day for the Lakewood Youth Sports baseball league on that Saturday morning in May 1957, Lakewood’s tradition of volunteer-supported recreation formally began.

Dave Rodda noted: “The Youth Sports Program was in essence the cornerstone of what it was all about. The Youth Sports Program really kind of dictated where we went with all of our activities. It was the beginning of volunteer programs. It was really kind of the beginning of mass participation and organization.”

Lakewood’s three sports supervisors—Jack Huntsinger, Dave Mills, and Ted Dilly—met that Sunday and decided to try the volunteer coaching idea. Each took about 300 names and started calling the fathers asking them to coach. The success of the volunteer coaching program went far beyond their wildest dreams. As original resident John Rae remembered,

so many men wanted to be volunteer coaches, that sometimes you couldn’t even get a team. Council member Wayne Piercy explained the concept behind volunteer coaching: “They made the decision to stick with volunteer coaches because they knew we didn’t have enough paid personnel and we never could have afforded to serve the needs of the kids. Because there were so many kids there to play and just no way that our finances or our contract city concept could handle that, we were forced to use volunteer coaches, which as it turned out, once they got the momentum, it turned out to be a great decision.”

By 1960, the boys sports programs at



the city parks enrolled 5,000 youth, with 261 teams playing baseball, basketball, and flag football, and 500 parents serving as volunteer coaches. The volunteer coaching concept enabled the Parks and Recreation Department to offer the programs free or at a very low cost. The cornerstones of Lakewood Youth Sports were sportsmanship and participation—every child was given the chance to play in every game.

The volunteer coaching program grew along with Lakewood Youth Sports and became a popular activity for fathers—and some mothers. In 1957, Mary Denson

Lakewood Youth Sports began in 1957 when the city took over operation of the city’s parks.

became the first female volunteer coach. To recognize the volunteer coaches' contributions, the city established an annual sports awards banquet. The highest honor was the Mayor's Award, recognizing those who had volunteered for eighteen seasons. Many parents continued coaching after their kids were grown, a tradition that continues to enrich neighborhoods, parks, and the families of volunteer coaches.

The program continued to grow, so that Lakewood Youth Sports leagues used every playing field available, including all of Lakewood's parks, Hoover Junior High, Mayfair High, and Lakewood High, every night of the week and all day on Saturdays.



Sports for boys included football.

Statistics for Lakewood Youth Sports in 2003 confirmed the value of recreation in Lakewood:

- 4,700 athletic field bookings on twenty-four ball diamonds and adjoining football and soccer fields accommodated 249,000 participants from community organizations, private groups, and city recreation programs.
- 3,663 participants for the three sports seasons.
- 472 volunteer coaches contributed more than 24,000 volunteer hours.
- 375 teen programs conducted during 2003 and approximately 11,603 youth

participated in the variety of programs.

And these statistics are in addition to the 2.5 million people who visited city parks during 2003 and the hundreds of volunteers who gave 47,306 hours of time to a variety of recreation programs, including 2,500 free activities offered at city parks year round.

Original kid and Department of Recreation and Community Services staff member John Buck observes: "Drive through Lakewood any night of the week and it's just absolutely incredible the number of people under the lights out there."

Getting the whole family involved.

Lakewood's recreation programs provided recreation for every member of the family. Dave Rodda recalled: "When you would go to the parks, you would just see this incredible number of families and kids. The place to go in Lakewood was the parks. My early impressions are kids and families having a blast and using the facilities. It was a social center. There wasn't a lot of money, but there were parks and recreation. And everybody came to the parks and everybody participated in recreation."

Organized adult leagues began in the 1950s in response to the citywide recreational needs survey in which residents had called for "organized adult sports and activities." Men's leagues played softball and basketball, and in 1955, the Lakewood Recreation Department began offering "housewives' leagues" for softball, volleyball, volley tennis, and tennis.

Team names included the Del Valle Dish Dodgers and the Mighty Mothers. Not only did the women play ball, they also socialized after the games with coffee-and-doughnut get-togethers and potluck luncheons hosted by the home team. "We called them 'housewife sports,'"

said Rodda. Held in the morning and afternoon, these sports were extremely popular. “Every park probably had at least two or three teams,” he continued. “Mom would come down and play softball and the park directors would coach them and they would play volleyball and volley tennis, and they participated in tennis instruction and those kinds of things.”

Other recreational activities for Lakewood women included cake decorating (one of the most popular, with a long waiting list), housewives’ charm courses, and arts-and-craft classes. Adult programs also included square-dance instruction and ballroom dance.

For girls, popular activities at the parks included the girls’ clubs (with names such as the Bolivar Belles, San Martin Busy Bees, and Del Valle Debutantes), which participated in dances, games, excursions, crafts, and service-related or other philanthropic projects, as well as charm classes and cheerleading for the boys’ teams. Sports programs for girls were almost nonexistent in the early years, but Lakewood’s Parks and Recreation Department recognized the inequities and became one of the pioneers in offering girls’ sports programs in 1960.

Rodda remembered the lack of programming for girls in the 1950s: “Mainly, we didn’t have anything for the girls. For the boys, we had full-on three-sport seasons that just followed the traditional baseball, football, and basketball. For the girls, we would have girls softball and that would be during the summer, coached by Mom.” It was not until 1960 that the first girls’ softball league was formed. Following the tradition of boys’ sports, volunteer coaches were recruited from the women’s sports leagues, and every girl had the opportunity to play in every game.

Rodda described the evolution of the

girls’ sports program: “Probably the thing that sticks out the most in my mind is the equality of girls participating in athletics. We were so far ahead of everyone else. Because we sat down one day and said, hey look, we have this great Lakewood Youth Sports Program, everybody calls it the model sports program, but we don’t have the same thing for the girls. We’ve got a little bit, but not much. And so, we developed a complete program the same way. Whatever the guys got, the girls got. Maybe some of the sports were a little different, but the awards were the same,



everything was the same: same amount of money was spent, same amount of everything. And this was in 1973 or 1974—Title IX for women’s sports wasn’t even a blip. But we were providing these kinds of services.”

Lakewood emphasized activities that the whole family could enjoy together. Some of these activities included movie nights and “Family Day” at the park, featuring events for every member of the family. Landscape architect Garrett Eckbo of Community Facilities Planners, the firm commissioned to plan Lakewood’s parks,

Girls’ sports programs were pioneered by future recreation director Dave Rodda (back row).

recalled that the city specifically requested his firm to design “family parks.”

Lakewood recreation also began to offer programs for Lakewood’s burgeoning preteen and teen population. These activities included: charm classes for girls, dances at Mayfair Park on Friday nights, dance classes, and preteen clubs at the parks featuring activities such as local day trips, beach parties, dances, play days, and games. Beginning in 1954, the park district organized and supervised monthly teen dances.

These dances were financed by the city and held at the Faculty Shops Mall

younger. You could just walk out your door and there’s somebody to play with.”

A typical summertime day for a Lakewood original kid consisted of games in the street with the neighborhood kids (it was never difficult to get up a game, there were so many kids), expeditions to the more rural parts of Lakewood, such as “Bamboo Village” near the San Gabriel riverbed, where neighborhood gangs built forts, and games at the neighborhood parks. “You’d hit the riverbed, hit Bamboo Village, Del Valle [Park],” recalled Dennis Lander. Mike Rae said, “Usually, we planned our days playing unscheduled events with our peers. We were allowed a lot of freedom, a lot of creativity, and a lot of craziness and games.” Lander added that “the one rule in Lakewood was you had to be in the house when the streetlights went on,” remembering the chorus of parents’ voices yelling for their kids to come in that could be heard all the way down the block.

The original kids developed their own games and their own “community,” a sense of extended family in the neighborhood with other children as surrogate brothers and sisters and the adults of the neighborhood as surrogate parents.

Sandra Jenkins Janich remembered: “Everybody knew everyone’s children and mom and dad. You knew that you’d better behave because everybody on the block had the same standards that your family did.” Anne Pechin Emigh echoed: “The block was like a family, extended family.”

On many blocks there were up to a hundred children, all within a few years of each other in age. Dennis Lander noted that the neighborhood camaraderie between children was reinforced by the fact that they all went to school with each other for many years: “We were just starting school, most of us, and it was the same thirty kids that you started



Teens gathered at the Lakewood Youth Center for city-sponsored activities. Here, Tina Turner entertains an enthusiastic crowd.

at Lakewood Center and the Stephen Foster School and Mann-Wilson School cafeteriums. Because the Lakewood teenage population was still quite small in the mid-1950s, there were often more chaperones than participants at these dances.

On the block. These Lakewood kids grew up with their community. Anne Pechin Emigh described her neighborhood, typical of the early 1950s: “It was just instant kids everywhere. And there were probably five kids my age, and then there were a lot of kids older, and a whole bunch of kids a couple years

kindergarten with, you went all the way to junior high with those kids in the same class. And we all stuck together, we all stayed together the whole time.”

Linda Kay Gahan reminisced: “There were backyard barbecues and picnics and what they now call block parties. And what I remember most vividly is that in those days, in the 1950s, there were a lot of card parties where families would get together and the adults would play bridge or pinochle and the kids would go play their games.” Emigh recalled: “Summertime was fabulous. Everybody would come out after dinner. . . we’d have huge games, boys and girls, kick-the-can, hide-and-go-seek. There was one young married couple that even played with us. It was just really a fun thing.”

John Buck described his “idyllic” neighborhood: “The world kind of ended on my street. Every family had, it seemed like, three kids that were all around my age. You could go through each household on the street and there was a kid older than you, a kid your age, and a kid younger than you, so you always had somebody to play with. We were very sports-oriented in the neighborhood. There was a cul-de-sac with the diamond painted in red paint down the middle of the street with the perfect batter’s box, and if you hit it into Billy Parker’s backyard—’cause he had the mean dog—you were out ’cause you lost the ball for us.”

Margie Lehner Armstrong remembered three-legged relay races, barbecues, riding bikes, and playing baseball in the street. There was a lot of camaraderie among Lakewood’s original kids, recalled Armstrong. “I would have to say the block parties would probably be the thing that I remember the most that brought us together. Seeing everybody playing together—that was kind of neat. I remember my mother saying that the kids

all got along so well in the neighborhood, you know, there were hardly any fights.” Armstrong recalled that on the first day of school each year, the neighborhood kids, all wearing their brand-new school clothes and shoes, would gather in the street to have their photograph taken together by the next-door neighbor who owned a camera store.

Becoming Lakewood kids. When a new family moved in, particularly if they came from out of state, it was a big deal. “I remember a family across the street, the Hayes family, they came in from Boston,” shared Dennis Lander, “and they were the



first people that didn’t talk like we did, you know, with that Boston accent, and that was big, big news at the time.” But Lander recalled that regional origins were quickly forgotten, because all of the kids became “Lakewood kids.”

However, Lander and other original kids also recalled some prejudice and teasing of the kids who were “different,” particularly Jewish youth, who formed a significant part of the community. Lakewood was one of the first suburban developments in Los Angeles County that did not exclude Jewish homebuyers.

There also were Latino kids in Lakewood, though no one ever considered

Lakewood parks in the 1950s and 1960s were designed with age-appropriate facilities, like wading pools for young children.

them “Hispanic.” Prejudice against homebuyers of Mexican descent still persisted, however.

There were also differences in socioeconomic class, as Anne Pechin Emigh described, comparing her clothing to that of her best friend, who lived in the “country club” neighborhood near the Lakewood golf course: “Her mom was quite the shopper and she would make forays into Beverly Hills and buy things and she would have the latest Bobbie Brooks outfits. And I would go to Cal-Stores, which is sort of like [today’s] Target and save my money. And I just



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Park programs in 1957 also offered activities for parents.

knew we couldn’t afford that, it was great that she could have it. She looked fabulous, I looked fine. My mom sewed most of my clothes. There were a lot of things that I couldn’t do that I knew I couldn’t do and it just wasn’t a problem, because we didn’t have that much money.”

Growing up pretty quick. Many of Lakewood’s original kids recounted that they began dating at young ages, some as early as the fifth and sixth grades. When a boy and a girl “went steady,” the boy would give the girl a cross, a ring, or a St. Christopher medal to wear. Robin Tweedy

Nordee said: “We all went steady in the sixth grade. They’d give you a chain with a big ring on it.”

Preteen Lakewood kids hung out at the local burger stands. “I remember, in sixth grade, two of my girlfriends and I used to walk every day from Gompers over to the little hamburger place over at Dutch Village,” recounted Nordee. “And for ninety-nine cents—and we each had a dollar—we could each get a hamburger, a milkshake, and fries and have a penny left and then walk back and be back for school in time.”

There were also certain places—such as a hamburger stand called Lucky’s Jackpot on Ashworth Street near Bellflower Boulevard—where older kids who wore rolled-up blue jeans and t-shirts, smoked cigarettes, and listened to rock ‘n’ roll hung out and where younger kids recall that they were specifically forbidden to go. But that fact, of course, made those places seem even more appealing.

As for the way girls carried themselves in those early days, “the style or the fashion of the day was a lot of heavy makeup for women and that got passed on to their daughters, so they looked a lot older,” recalled Dennis Lander. “It was a lot of pressure, especially for the girls, to dress older, so they became pretty fashion-conscious early.”

The first group of teenagers.

When Lakewood’s original kids became teenagers, “those were pretty interesting years,” said Lander, “because we were the first group of teenagers to grow up in this town. A lot of that *American Graffiti*-type thing was definitely happening in Lakewood. Lots of cars, lots of after-the-football game dances, you know, that type of thing.”

Just as they had as children, Lakewood’s original teens also congregated

in groups. “Everybody belonged to a group. You were plugged into something,” recalled Robin Tweedy Nordee. “They had a lot of clubs in school. All kinds of different interest clubs—social clubs, school clubs, drama and art clubs. And everybody kind of hung around together and it became kind of a sorority/fraternity type of thing in high school.”

Many original kids also remembered organized fistfights between boys. Anne Pechin Emigh remembered watching a bloody fistfight at Hoover Junior High between two boys that ultimately resulted in the two boys being expelled from school. Bud McCain emphasized that these fights did not involve weapons, and he described the youth-regulated fight culture: “It was one-on-one—it wasn’t a gang fight. And usually, it was after school at the park or at the hangout, and two guys fought and usually if one started winning and getting ahead, two of the bigger guys jumped in and said, ‘Okay, you’ve proved your point, break it up, shake hands.’ And that was usually the way it went down.”

Lakewood’s original teens developed new interests, such as cruising in their cars and dancing to rock ’n’ roll, activities that worried their parents and the community. Although Lakewood’s rate of juvenile delinquency was virtually nonexistent, to adults, these activities seemed threatening. In Lander’s memory, there were very few “juvies,” and most teens he knew who had served jail time had done so for curfew violations. Lander remembered the time the entire Lakewood High School senior varsity football team had been arrested for curfew violation, as well as the frequent arrests of groups of teens who congregated at the drive-in hamburger stands, and that “alcohol was a major issue.” Emigh echoed: “On Friday nights, I remember that some boys had had too much to drink.”

Kid City

Teen spirit. When Lakewood’s teens got cars, “all hell broke loose in Lakewood then,” said Dennis Lander. “They weren’t ready for any of that. The parents weren’t ready, and the kids weren’t ready, and the police and the sheriffs, they had a tough time dealing with it.”

Popular destinations were the drive-in theaters, the beach, and snack bars. “We used to cruise Len’s, a place that sold hamburgers and stuff,” Anne Pechin Emigh recounted. “And you’d just drive through there to see who was there, go and order a hamburger, and just sit and talk to whoever happened to be there.” Many original teens recalled that Lakewood was



“too quiet” for teenagers and remembered driving to go anywhere outside of Lakewood.

Dave Rodda reminisced: “I was very involved in car clubs. I had a group of friends that were somewhat of the James Dean type. They were not in trouble, but they were always on the edge of... I would go to work in the evening umpiring and doing my thing. Then I would get done umpiring and there would be my buddies, and I would take off this recreation stuff and put on my leather jacket and get in my lowrider car and off we’d go down the street and hit all the drive-ins.”

Eager, young, optimistic, and confident, Lakewood’s new residents looked to a bright future in the 1950s.

Bud McCain described the teenage car culture: “One of Lakewood High School’s claims to fame was we were the only high school in the Long Beach School District that could cruise all the way around their school without hitting a main street. And back then, cruising was the main thing. My car was voted two years in a row the loudest car at Lakewood High School. I had twenty-eight-inch Mitchells on there with Bellflowers. We’d cruise the boulevard, starting at A&W Root Beer stand, and go down to the railroad tracks. You’d turn around at the lumberyard down there at the railroad tracks and then come back up the other

weeds and he’d keep right on going after you. Of course, he knew just about what everybody’s car was.”

The Lakewood Youth Center, popularly known as the Canteen, was another favorite hangout for Lakewood’s teens. “That place was a big social center then,” recalled Lander. Hundreds of kids would gather at the Canteen, especially on “Friday Nighters,” dances held after the Lakewood High football games.

Lakewood High football games were especially popular as the whole community rallied around its team. Anne Pechin Emigh described the school spirit and pep rallies: “We had a great football team with just tons of spirit. We had such school pride, and oh my gosh, we had pep rallies coming out our ears, you know, everybody was just really pumped, and it was fun.” Shipp echoed: “People were into [the football team] 100 percent and they couldn’t wait for Fridays to go to the pep rally, everybody wore red and white to school on Fridays, that was it, to support our team.”

High school girls competed in the annual Pan-American contests, one of the featured activities of the community’s Pan American Festival. Sandra Jenkins Janich described her star status in 1958: “I was treated like a queen. [My coronation] was just like you see in the movies. I got a robe with the fur collar and then the crown. Being Pan Am Queen and everybody knowing it, it really gave you a status.”

Emigh, who competed in the contest in the 1960s, recalled: “It was really fun—you dressed up and they would have a dance and there were dignitaries there and that was interesting to meet them and you felt special.” Mary Jo Wagner, the 1967 Pan American Hostess, reminisced: “Pan American itself is just the social event of the year, and the girls all look forward to getting in the contest.”



The Lakewood Youth Center was built with contributions from community organizations.

side. And you’d cruise that all night long. Friday and Saturday nights, boy, it was nonstop.”

Suzanne Henderson Shipp recalled that her mother took away her 1957 Thunderbird, a gift from her father, one month after she got it, because she drove it too fast. Bud McCain recounted that the Lakewood High juvenile officer tried to stop teens from drag racing: “I remember the juvenile officer drove one of those little Metropolitan cars. And he tried to catch us guys with our racecars and he’d chase us with that Metropolitan. That was so funny. And you’d just blow him in the

A “canteen” for teens. As Lakewood’s youth became teenagers, the community recognized the need for a separate recreational facility where teens could congregate under adult supervision. Community organizations embarked on a three-year fundraising campaign to build a teen youth center.

“There was a big community effort to build it,” recalled Wayne Piercy. The fundraising campaign was organized by the Lakewood Women’s Club and involved fifteen service organizations. Fundraisers—500 teens supervised by fifty-six adults—walked door to door soliciting donations, and several community organizations contributed to the project. When the Lakewood Youth Center (also known as “The Canteen”) was dedicated at Del Valle Park in 1958, it became “the place to go,” as many original teens recalled. The Canteen featured big-name performers, such as Ike and Tina Turner, the Righteous Brothers, and Round Robin.

The Canteen was governed by a teen board with adult advisors and an adult director. The Canteen also featured a Teen Forum program in which teen delegates from Lakewood traveled to discuss a variety of topics with teen delegates from other youth centers. As many original teens recalled, hundreds of kids would gather at the Canteen after school and every night of the week.

Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame.

From the beginning, Lakewood turned to youth sports as an outlet for the city’s teeming, preteen population. The city’s park leagues and the high school’s interscholastic sports programs turned out generations of young achievers, some of whom reached even higher levels of success in college and professional sports. Lakewood was producing young champions, but hardly anyone knew the

whole story. City parks and Lakewood schools existed in different worlds, one more sign of the fragmented nature of school organization in the city.

The gap needed to be filled. Young heroes of the playing field deserved more recognition, then Mayor Larry Van Nostran thought, as well as a permanent gallery that would recall their achievements. His intuition was that only the city could provide the kind of cross-jurisdictional setting for rival schools and coaches to come together to honor all the sports achievements in Lakewood each year. The Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame, established in 1981 during Van



Nostran’s mayoral term, took on the task of recognizing Lakewood’s young athletes regardless of which school they attended or what school district they played for.

The Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame needed a home, too, if these achievements were going to inspire a new generation of players. Mayor Van Nostran turned to original kid Ron Piazza, who recalled how Van Nostran discussed with him the idea of a permanent memorial for sports heroes in Lakewood: “It must have been in 1980 that Mayor Larry Van Nostran and I were sitting around at a table. We talked about how great the parks programs

Today’s teens are a big part of Lakewood’s planning for their recreation needs.

were in Lakewood and what great sports programs we had and the tremendous volunteer effort that we had then and still have today, and we thought, you know, there really needs to be a way to recognize all that. We discussed putting [the Hall of Fame] in city hall, but then very few people would be seeing it. So I said, 'Well, listen, I'll go ahead and rework one of my restaurants.' I chose the restaurant that at the time had the most people coming through it and Larry said that he'd work towards having the city sponsor a portion of it, and that's how it started."

Piazza described its success and the impact it has had on young athletes:



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Champion Olympic diver Pat McCormick, who had lived in Lakewood, dedicated McCormick Pool at Bolivar Park in 1958.

"I think it's one of the largest sports recognition programs for youth in the country today. Little did Larry and I know when we first talked about it back in 1980 that it would grow to this kind of a program. I've seen so many times where someone has brought their grandparents from out of state and they come in and they're beaming, and they say, 'Grandma, Grandpa, there's my name!'"

Van Nostran, as chairman of the Hall of Fame Board of Electors, joined Piazza in dedicating the Hall of Fame Gallery at the McDonald's restaurant on Woodruff Avenue at Del Amo Boulevard. In 2004,

Councilman Van Nostran continued to oversee the annual selection of honorees, whose ranks also include Scholar Athlete of the Year and Performers of the Year in more than a dozen individual and team sports.

Traditions continue. Lakewood's tradition of community recreation continues as one of the city's core values. Lakewood is one of the few communities in the nation that spends almost as much of its budget on recreation as on law enforcement. The Department of Recreation and Community Services is its largest city department. Even with budget cuts in recent years, Lakewood has not cut its recreation programs and has maintained its tradition of offering free or low-cost recreation programs, made possible in large part because of the volunteer coaching concept. Much remains the same—Lakewood Youth Sports, family activities, recreational activities for everyone, and an "everyone plays" philosophy. There have been some additions, such as programs for senior citizens and the disabled, to keep up with the changing needs of the community. And today, Lakewood residents can access the recreation program offerings online, using the city's popular eCatalog service.

Rodda also emphasized the continuity in Lakewood's recreation programs, noting how the traditions begun fifty years ago still form the foundation of Lakewood's recreation programs today: "It started with parks—neighborhood parks. Volunteerism was planted in the minds of everybody through the Lakewood Youth Sports Program. That's where it began. And really, from the Youth Sports Program, the free activities that we have on the parks, the special events—many of the things that we had back in 1957, 1958, we still do. We just do them at a different level.

The Lakewood Youth Sports program, which was free forty years ago, is still free, and we still run after-school programs. Our parks are still open with activities that kids can come to if they want, and they're free."

Rodda also saw the changing dynamic of Lakewood recreation traditions: "There has been a lot of generational attitudes. First-generation people moving in and second- or third-generation people coming back, because they had such a great time. Maybe moving into their mom and dad's house or maybe buying a house of their own. So, it's tradition: 'I remember when I was in this program, and I'm going to be in this program now, and my kids are going to be in this program.'" Original kid Dennis Lander explained that he came back to raise his children in Lakewood so they could go to the park and play sports, "the things that mean something." Rodda ventured: "I think that recreation has boosted the quality of life and has provided the opportunity for families to create a sense of values, a sense of togetherness."

Original kid Tom Lederer described how Lakewood's emphasis on recreation has helped build a strong community: "I think our community is what it is largely because recreation has always been a high priority from the city council on down to the residents." Many of today's city officials began their careers with the city as recreation supervisors and coaches in the early years. Lakewood's parks and recreation programs began as a way of occupying its many children and ended up building a community.

Department of Recreation and Community Services sees the future.

In the 1970s, the Parks and Recreation Department became the Department of Recreation and Community Services, reflecting its expanded functions of

providing recreation as well as social service programs. Since its beginnings, the Department of Recreation and Community Services has continually evolved to meet changing needs in the community—for example, offering more special-interest classes. Rodda explained: "As the needs were there, we provided it for them."

He discussed the department's work to develop more targeted programs for teenagers, noting "you couldn't really program for them as a whole anymore. They all had different likes and dislikes,



they were mobile, they had things going on." So, Rodda and his staff began offering job fairs, opportunities for teens to work as Youth Sports Program officials, résumé classes, community services in conjunction with the schools, computer classes, and beginning in the 1990s, "Totally Friday Nights," a supervised series of parties for middle school students at the Canteen. Other significant programs include enrichment classes for all ages and Monte

Park memories for older Lakewood residents include this friendly giant at Mae Boyar Park.

Verde Day Camp, which provides an outdoor camping experience and daycare for children of working parents during the summer. Continuing its tradition of offering activities for the whole family, in 1987, the “Summer Concerts in the Park” series began, bringing Lakewood families and friends together to picnic and listen to live music performances.

As Lakewood’s young families grew up, more young families moved in, but a significant number of the original residents decided to stay. To address the needs of Lakewood’s growing senior citizen population, Lakewood’s Department of Recreation and Community Services

and in 1981, the Weingart Senior Center, Lakewood’s first full-service senior center, was dedicated. The Burns and Weingart centers earned statewide awards for their excellence of design and operation in 1983. Both centers provide hot noontime meals, recreation classes and activities, social services, and events for seniors. To better meet the needs of the growing senior population, the Weingart Center was expanded in 1988 and renovated in 2001.

In 1976, the DASH program (Dependable Accessible Senior Handicapped transit) offering free transportation for elderly and disabled residents was begun. Lakewood also began specialized recreation programs for disabled youth in 1974.

Today, the Lakewood Youth Center (“the Canteen”), originally built for the community’s teenagers in the 1950s, is now a multipurpose center that offers the popular “Totally Friday Nights” series of young teen dance and party nights. It’s offered, at a nominal fee, to middle school age students (grades 6–8) who live in Lakewood or attend one of the Lakewood-area schools.

Lakewood took recreation to the Web as part of the city’s online infrastructure. Residents with Internet access can register for favorite classes online using the eCatalog service (www.lakewoodcity.org/ecatalog). The system allows users to register for classes twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and enrollment is immediate. The city also began publishing an e-magazine for residents who want to keep up on the latest recreation news. There’s even a city homepage for park sports league schedules. Registration packets, standings, and playoff schedules are also posted throughout the year.

In 2003, under the leadership of Director of Recreation and Community Services Director Joan Biegel, the city



Rynerson Park’s fitness circuit is a popular destination for runners and joggers.

began many new programs. Resident Brigitte Richard noted Lakewood’s many resources for seniors: “Lakewood takes care of even its senior citizens with the DASH transportation, the senior center, and the Meals on Wheels program—you just don’t find that in other cities.”

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the city and the Weingart Foundation developed community centers to provide social services for Lakewood’s residents and especially for senior citizens.

In 1976, the William Burns Community Service Center, the city’s first social services facility, was dedicated,

began offering the After-School Activity Zone as a free drop-in program for school-aged children and preteens.

A Closer Look: Pan American Festival. The Pan American Festival, Lakewood’s annual celebration of international friendship with the countries of Latin America, exemplifies Lakewood’s values of neighborliness and volunteerism. In 1945, two Lakewood Village neighbors and fellow Lakewood Lions Club members—Dr. Walter Montano, a former Bolivian consul, and Jesse Solter, a schoolteacher—shook hands over a backyard fence, pledging to begin a community program that would foster good relations with their Latin American “neighbors.”

In 1945, as a result of Montano’s, Solter’s, and the Lions Club’s negotiations with the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Pan American Park—the first recreation area honoring Pan-Americanism in the nation—was dedicated, and an olive tree was planted to symbolize peace and friendship between the United States and the members of the Organization of American States.

In 1946, the Pan American Festival Association was founded, and the Lakewood Lions Club invited the Latin American Consular Association to a picnic in Pan American Park to celebrate the first anniversary of the park’s dedication.

In 1948, the first Pan American Festival was held in Pan American Park (which was part of unincorporated Lakewood until it was annexed to Long Beach), and Mexico was the honored country. In 1949, the festival began the custom of honoring one of the countries in the Organization of American States, in alphabetical order, each year. In 1982, the festival began honoring all of the countries of Central and South America together

under the theme of Pan-American friendship.

The weeklong festivities kicked off with the El Comienzo luncheon (sponsored by the Greater Lakewood Chamber of Commerce), bringing together residents, business leaders, city officials, and the Latin American Consular Corps. The week’s events included the Pan American Hostess and Queen contest (in which the hostess was a Lakewood girl and the queen was from the honored country), and the Consular Banquet and Ball, sponsored by the Lions Club and honoring the Latin American consuls, held at the Lakewood Country Club.



The festival finale was the Saludos Amigos parade, with dignitaries from the honored country leading the parade of floats, dance groups, equestrians, and marching bands. In 1979, the festival highlight became a three-day Pan American Fiesta, which replaced the Saludos Amigos parade.

There were also many other activities. The Lakewood Rotary Club and the Lakewood Kiwanis Club sponsored Spanish and English speak-off contests for high school students. The annual Pan American Poetry Contest was sponsored by the Orpheus Chapter of the California

The founders of the Pan American Festival—Dr. Walter Montano (left) and Jess Solter—ride in the Pan American parade in 1956.

Federation of Chaparral Poets.

The flag-exchange ceremony, one of the festival's oldest traditions, was begun in 1947 by Inez Lehman, a ninth-grade social studies teacher at Bancroft Junior High School (known as Lakewood Junior High School until 1955).

In the early years, the flag exchange was held in Pan American Park, and the ninth-graders at Bancroft marched in a procession dressed in the colors of the flag they carried. The ninth-grade students also studied the honored country's history and culture in school.

The festival became a community-wide project with nearly every community

a Lakewood Jaycee's home during the Pan American Festival Week. Original kid Margie Lehner Armstrong recounted that it was a "special day for us—I think the closest I ever felt with a sense of community was at the Pan Am days."

The spirit of Pan-Americanism in Lakewood continues, as reflected by Lakewood's Pan American Room at city hall, featuring a mosaic of the flags of the twenty-one nations in the Organization of American States. When Lakewood dedicated its first three parks in 1957, they were named for the Latin American heroes Simon Bolivar, José del Valle, and José de San Martin.

Today, Lakewood's tradition of celebrating Pan-Americanism continues. The annual Pan American Festival still kicks off each May with the El Comienzo Luncheon, followed by the three-day fiesta at Mayfair Park. The festivities include amusement rides, music and entertainment, and food, craft, community and cultural booths.

The Pan American Festival is the nation's only community festival of Pan-Americanism outside of Washington, D.C.



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Lakewood's festival is the only celebration outside of Washington D.C. to honor pan-American friendship.

organization participating in the celebration, as the 1967 Pan American Hostess Mary Jo Wagner recounted: "Every organization had something going on. And that's what made it unique, I think, was all that participation." The Pan American Festival organization, a group of civic-minded volunteers representing the community's local service clubs and businesses, planned and coordinated the festival during the year ahead.

The Lakewood Jaycees started "Operation Friendship," an exchange program in which a Jaycee from the honored country and his wife stayed in

A Closer Look: The Lakewood libraries. In October 1937, Los Angeles County Librarian Helen E. Vogleson noted that discussions were taking place regarding the creation of a county library branch to serve the residents of a recently constructed housing community called Lakewood Village. Where there had once been only farmland was now a modest housing tract, replete with golf course and country club, developed by the Clark family and comprising approximately 150 families. Official library service to this unincorporated Lakewood community began in January 1938 with the opening of the Lakewood Village branch of the Los Angeles County Public Library.

The small storefront library, housed in a storeroom of 650 square feet and leased at 4152 Los Cerritos Diagonal (now Norse Way) for \$26 a month, contained 1,218 books upon opening. Jayne C. Hathcock was Lakewood's first librarian and she and the Lakewood Village branch served not only the residents of Lakewood Village but also the students who were now attending Long Beach Junior College (later Long Beach City College), which had opened its new campus at its present location of Clark Avenue and Carson Street in 1935.

Hathcock's tenure as librarian was short-lived, however, and she was replaced in 1939 by Minnie O'Toole, who was in turn succeeded by Thelma Bailey in 1943. By the time Nola Vredenburg was appointed librarian in 1944, six years after the opening of the branch, it was clear that the community was growing and that the library had outgrown its small space. An addition to the building at Los Cerritos Diagonal was constructed and a greatly expanded library reopened in its original location on May 10, 1945, just days after the unconditional surrender of Germany and the declaration of victory in Europe signaled the end of World War II.

It was the ensuing postwar environment of the late 1940s and early 1950s that would see the phenomenal expansion of Lakewood. With the realization of the model city of Ben Weingart, S. Mark Taper, and Louis Boyar, whose Lakewood Park Corporation had purchased Clark Bonner's 3,500 remaining acres of land from his widow, Lakewood would make national history. The scope and vision of the country's first postwar planned housing development would eventually become the model for other cities nationwide, and by 1951, the population of the still-unincorporated Lakewood was 65,000 and growing. The rent of the building housing the

library, still the Los Cerritos Diagonal storefront, had risen to \$140 a month and in 1952, when Mildred A. DeLay replaced Vredenburg as librarian, the Lakewood Village branch ranked as twenty-fifth in circulation of the county's libraries, beginning what would prove to be a consistently upward trend. By 1953, when Violet Bly succeeded DeLay, it was clear that in spite of expanded library hours and the addition of bookmobile service, the single Lakewood Village branch was no longer adequate to serve the residents of Lakewood. The small village of the late thirties had turned into the biggest subdivision in the United States.



A storm was brewing, however, and the years 1953 and 1954 would prove to be watershed ones, for both Lakewood and the library. The neighboring city of Long Beach had had its eye on Lakewood for some time and by August 1953, had begun the process of piecemeal annexations. Later the same year, Long Beach succeeded in annexing the portion of Lakewood that included the Lakewood Village Library, with the result that after December 31, 1953, the library would be absorbed into the Long Beach system and no longer a Lakewood branch of the Los Angeles County Library system.

Carnival rides light up the sky during the annual Pan American Fiesta.

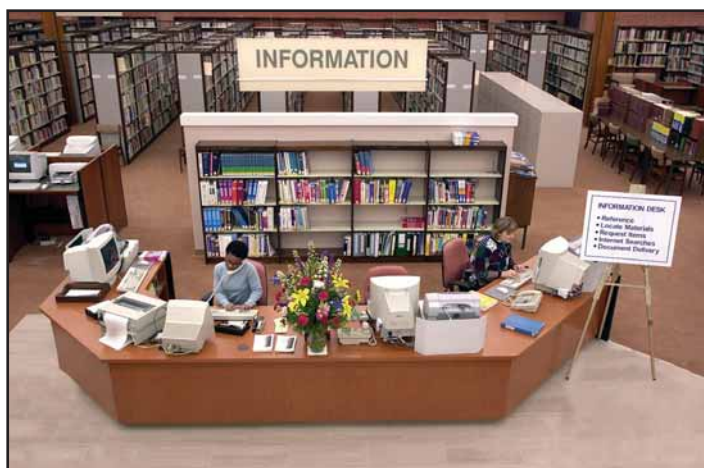
Lakewood residents were not passively resigned to the annexation, however, nor were they quietly accepting the further eighteen or so annexations in the works by February 1954. In fact, in May 1953, a group of concerned Lakewood citizens had formed the Lakewood Civic Council (LCC) to guide the fight against annexation by Long Beach. This group, which included Jacqueline Rynerson, lawyers Angelo M. Iacoboni and John S. Todd, and teacher George Nye, Jr. among others, successfully thwarted further annexation efforts and went on to develop a plan for the incorporation and future of Lakewood. On March 9, 1954, Lakewood

Los Angeles County provide library service to the new city, as they had before incorporation and before annexation of the Lakewood Village branch by Long Beach. Just as Lakewood's first city hall was in retail space rented from Lakewood Center, so was the new Lakewood branch of the Los Angeles County Library. Librarian Virginia Wertz supervised the opening of the 1,600-square-foot branch at 5048 Faculty Avenue on January 3, 1955, which would serve as the library until the planned city-county complex—which would include the library, sheriff's station, and health department office—could be completed.

Four years later, the Lakewood Civic Center complex was completed and the dedication took place on May 15, 1959.

The new library at 5100 Clark Avenue, with 6,400 square feet containing 20,000 books and space for 15,000 more, was the largest in the Los Angeles County system at the time. In charge of the new facility was Letha Gramer, who was succeeded by Tom Toomey in 1962, under whose tenure Lakewood's first children's librarian, Marian Solace, was appointed in 1963. Circulation for the first year of service of Lakewood's civic center library, was 123,454 but it more than doubled to 273,000 the following year, and in

1962, the branch ranked number one in circulation in the entire Los Angeles County Library system. By 1964, more than 300,000 books were being borrowed through the Lakewood library. Sadly, this was also the year that Angelo M. Iacoboni died suddenly, and in 1965, the Lakewood City Council voted to rename and rededicate the library in honor of Lakewood's first mayor. The May 8, 1965, rededication ceremony included Mrs. Gloria Iacoboni's unveiling of a bronze bust of her husband, Mayor Iacoboni. Designed by Alice Littig Sims, the bust resides in the library to this day.



Expansion and modernization of the Iacoboni Library involved the county, the city, and community volunteers.

residents voted in favor of incorporation by a 2,600 margin and Lakewood, with an estimated population of 71,000, achieved cityhood under the "Lakewood Plan." The first of its kind, the plan allowed Lakewood to retain local control of its government, including the setting of policies and budgets, while contracting with Los Angeles County for existing services and remaining in existing special districts, like the county library district.

Indeed, one of the resolutions passed by the members of the first city council, who met for the first time on April 16, 1954, was number 37, requesting that

The late 1960s and early 1970s would bring welcome additions. In the fall of 1968, City Clerk Jo Bennett spearheaded the development of what would become, in 1972, the Friends of the Lakewood Libraries group, whose efforts to support the libraries of Lakewood has been of immeasurable benefit over the years and continues to be so today. October 1968 also saw the appointment of Helen Amestoy as head librarian. Both the Friends group and Amestoy worked tirelessly to promote the library and by 1969, a mere ten years after the opening of what was then the-largest library in the Los Angeles County system, it was clear that the library was no longer adequate to meet the needs of the Lakewood community. In June 1969, the Board of Supervisors approved a proposal for a new structure on Clark Avenue to replace the existing Angelo M. Iacoboni Library, which had remained one of the busiest libraries in the county system, regularly circulating more than 300,000 books annually. The new building, which would boast 24,500 square feet and be designed by the architectural firm of Williamson, Morris and Paige, was constructed for the contract cost of \$658,400. Also in the works was the construction of the George Nye, Jr. Library, named for one of Lakewood's city founders and the mayor of Lakewood when he died in office in 1971.

The year 1973 proved to be a banner one for Lakewood libraries. In February, the George Nye, Jr. Library, with Linda Saferite in charge, opened to the public, and the following month saw the reopening of the Angelo M. Iacoboni Library in its new location south of city hall. With a combined total of more than 100,000 volumes for both libraries and the Iacoboni Library designated as both a federal depository library (1970) and a state depository library (1973), Lakewood's

libraries continued to adapt to the needs of the community. In 1978, the Iacoboni Library, with a circulation of 412,000, once again topped the other libraries in the Los Angeles County system. And in 1979, the year of Lakewood's twenty-fifth anniversary, the city's libraries were further strengthened when a generous grant from the Ben Weingart Foundation resulted in a new facility, the Weingart branch, designed to replace the storefront Bloomfield Library in the eastern portion of Lakewood.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Lakewood libraries continued to



reflect the changes in the community in particular and society in general. It was the 1980s, after all, that saw the rise of videotape and the personal computer, both of which had an effect on Lakewood's libraries. By 1991, the Iacoboni Library, now under the supervision of Donna Walters, contained 221,000 books, 250 CDs, 675 videocassettes, and Apple IIe computers for public use. In addition, the holdings of both the Nye and Iacoboni Libraries now included more foreign language materials than before, a reflection of the growing diversity of Lakewood's population.

New technology connects library patrons with the countywide library system.

Unfortunately, the early 1990s were lean times for libraries and 1992 saw the closure of the Weingart branch, the holdings absorbed into the Iacoboni and Nye library collections. The same year, however, also saw the renovation of the George H. Nye, Jr. Library, thanks to the efforts of the City of Lakewood, Los Angeles County, Fourth District Supervisor Dean Dana, and many other library supporters. In 1998, the Iacoboni Library celebrated the silver anniversary of its 4990 Clark Avenue location and held a reception honoring its twenty-five years of service to the public.

The turn of the century brought change once again with the renovation of the Iacoboni Library, a result of the combined efforts of Fourth District Supervisor Don Knabe, the City of Lakewood, and the County of Los Angeles Public Library. The Iacoboni Library reopened on February 12, 2001, and featured a redesigned interior, technology upgrades, and a Friends of the Lakewood Libraries bookstore. Today, the library continues to be one of the busiest in the county system, and the collection contains approximately 236,000 books, including titles in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Spanish; 18,000 audiovisual items, including 300 DVDs; federal and state publications; and periodical and electronic database subscriptions. The George Nye, Jr. branch, at 6600 Del Amo Boulevard and run by Community Library Manager Cathy Saldin, has a collection that totals 70,965 books, including items in Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese; 3,419 audio recordings; 2,600 video recordings; and periodical subscriptions. In addition, the Nye Library provides a Homework Center for children in grades 3–6.

In looking at the long history of the Lakewood libraries, we discover that we

are presented with a reflection of the city itself. Just as Lakewood grew from farmland to village to official city, so, too, did the library grow from one small storefront branch in 1938 to the bustling, active Lakewood libraries we know, use, and love today. With the changes over the decades and more than 79,000 people now living in Lakewood, it has been necessary for the libraries to evolve along with the community; that they have done so and continue to do so, lies at the heart of the Lakewood libraries' continued success in serving the informational, educational, and recreational needs of a highly literate and increasingly diverse community. JENNIFER JETER, ANGELO M. IACOBONI LIBRARY

Lakewood named California's Sportstown. Lakewood's fifty-year focus on youth and sports earned the city special recognition in mid-2004 from *Sports Illustrated* magazine. With the goal of selecting one city from each state that represented the nation's youth sports traditions, *Sports Illustrated* named Lakewood as California's "Sportstown."

The honor of being California's sole "Sportstown" reflected the enduring values of the city's park sports programs: volunteerism, neighborhood involvement, the commitment of the city's Recreation and Community Services Department, and the investment made by the city since 1957 in the expansion of parks and recreation programs.