

Many Speak for Valley; Whose Voice Is Heard?

Civic Groups, Homeowners Have an Effect, but Councilmen Say They Do a Better Job

BY LARRY PETT

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Is the Valley, with a third of the city's population and a multitude of voices speaking in its behalf, a virtual tower of Babel or do the various chambers of commerce, homeowner associations and other groups serve as effective conduits for its problems and concerns?

The Valley's councilmen say they express their constituents' best interest. The same claim is made by spokesmen for numerous groups (27 chambers, 20 homeowner associations).

Interviews with residents active in community affairs and elected officials indicate a conglomerate effort in tackling the problems of the Valley's million-plus residents.

And it becomes apparent there is no direct channel to City Hall. Every resident or group acts as its own lobbying agency in expressing views on what problems need rectification and how to remedy them.

One example of who is speaking for whom, or not, was glaring during the recent turmoil at Valley State College. Claiming to speak for the "silent majority," 37 organizations and service clubs issued a statement supporting the administration's handling of the disturbances.

Another View in Conflict

That was countered by another group, church leaders, members of community action groups and others concerned with minority problems, which stated that the college situation was a matter in which noncampus community groups should get involved.

Another recent issue involving broad segments of the community was resolved last summer when the state Public Utilities Commission

their members live in the community in which they do business.

"In the Valley" she said, "as commercial areas creep into what used to be suburban neighborhoods, property owners and commercial interests will clash more and more."

While the homeowner associations are not broad based enough to represent the entire Valley, they do band together on matters of common interest, Mrs. Lavery says.

Harold Kasten, president of the Valley Property Owners Federation, also looks on the chambers as "representing the business life of the community," adding, "in numbers we probably represent a greater cross section than the chambers."

However, Kasten is aware of other groups' activities. "Without them



James Sanderson Larry Calemine

the Valley would be a lost cause," he says. One concern, in Kasten's estimation, is the interpretation of what progress is.

"We are in favor of progress—maintaining our way of life in the Valley," he declared. "The chambers want more business. We're trying to stimulate interest and motivate the people to become involved in the community."

To past federation president James Sanderson the organization which he says represents a broad spectrum of the people is only as good as its attentiveness to the people's desires and its ability to translate them.

"We listen to their wishes, wants, desires," he said. "How well we listen is our effectiveness. How competent or capable we are in articulating those points of view determines the federation's validity. The federation tries to understand what the problem is and what are the bounds of reasonableness."

And once the reasonableness has been determined, "we'll fight tooth and nail," he added, referring to such issues as the Van Nuys Airport jet battle in which the federation was prominently involved.

Another Side

Sanderson also sees another side to representation in the Valley.

"One is the responsiveness of the elected representative," he asserted. "How well does he listen and represent the community? Is he doing an effective job of listening to the entire community and not just a segment?"

If the "vested interests win all the battles, this is what triggers the chambers of commerce, the

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Harold Kasten

Mrs. Lavery

rejected an application by a commercial airline for jet flights from Van Nuys Airport.

The commission's ruling came only after numerous homeowner groups banded together in a loose federation called the Save Our Valley Assn. The association was at loggerheads with supporters of jet service, such as the West Van Nuys Chamber of Commerce and the Valley Industrial Association, which said scheduled flights would be a boon to the Valley's commercial development.

Mrs. Enmet Lavery Jr., of Encino, active in community affairs and in the fight against jets, believes the chambers speak for the business community and "very seldom do

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homeowners groups and others to find larger political groups . . . to neutralize this," Sanderson added.

He is opposed to any organization becoming a vested interest—"the perennial 'I'm against anything,'" Sanderson added.

He believes citizens should become more active and participatory in their community's affairs and "the chambers should be encouraged to find out what the people in the community are interested in . . . so the chamber becomes a vital part of the community."

'Get Involved, But How?'

Albert Zoraster, past president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the West Valley, and long active in the Streets and Highways Committee, also expresses concern over the citizens' lack of involvement, saying:

"One of the greatest problems we may face is how do we involve a larger segment of the community in community life? How do you tap their intelligence and ability?"

He does not believe any one organization can speak for the entire Valley, but says chambers can be an effective voice if they properly investigate the issues so they can speak with authority.

"Homeowner groups generally are formed as an emotional reaction to issues," Zoraster believes. "Frequently they don't look upon the content on a broad basis . . . but they have the right to exist."

"No group has a monopoly on intelligence, concern or ability."

"Every group has to make an adequate study on whatever problem it is working on."

At-Large Council?

For better representation, Zoraster says consideration might be given to councilmen being elected for the Valley-at-large rather than by districts or perhaps having more districts "utilizing the borough system approach."

He adds he favors the mayor's advisory groups and meetings at City Hall with chamber presidents.

"No longer can we have people downtown say they know all the answers," Zoraster said.

At a recent Associated Chambers of Commerce meeting, Larry Calimine, president, said his organization represents a half-million West Valley citizens.

He has recommended that the chamber's board of directors go to Sacramento so the legislators will know the chamber presidents and "to tell them we're really concerned" with the area's problems.

Calimine says the "businessmen operating daily in a free enterprise system are in regular contact with people in their area and are probably more aware of what the people are thinking about in their community. He's on the firing line . . . he knows what's happening."

Among the Valley's pri-

mary issues Calimine says is ". . . a community of more than a million people with no identity. The Music Center is downtown and we have to go quite a distance to see the Dodgers play."

"We should look forward to when we may need more cultural facilities, more services such as rapid transit and more municipal facilities."

He also said the recently organized Round Table Council, which consists of chambers of commerce at present but later hopes to include other Valley organizations, "will provide truly Valleywide representation."

Juvenile Specialists

Another organization concerned with Valley problems, primarily those dealing with juveniles, are the Coordinating Councils. Mrs. Vera Pryor, president of the area association of Coordinating Councils, says "each council is concerned with different things, but they all work on narcotics problems, educational and otherwise."

Serving on the councils are representatives from such organizations as the PTA, Kiwanis, Lions and other service clubs, churches, YMCAs, school and the County Community Services Department.

The area council works with the executive board of the Los Angeles Federation of Coordinating Councils.

"My thinking is that we have to work where the logical need is, currently a detention facility for girls, then keep the federation apprised of our findings," Mrs. Pryor said.

Councilmen's Views

Valley councilmen say that they listen to all the voices in their districts and represent those which express the community's best interests.

However, Councilmen Louis Nowell and Ernani Bernardi, indicate organizations such as the chambers, don't receive any more consideration than do individuals.

Nowell says, "Any group is organized for a purpose—to get the attention of their legislators—and I want to hear them. The most effective way is to contact me personally."

"No one represents all the community. The chambers represent the business community, though they may have the consideration of the people in such matters as

zoning, and the same is the situation with homeowners. Each represents specific groups."

Bernardi says, "I believe there are a lot of spokesmen in the Valley. All have their proper place and to a large degree they are limited in the area they purport to speak for."

Welcome All

"I welcome communications and suggestions from all, and it's up to me to evaluate and determine what is in the best interest of the total community I represent."

Bernardi indicates his preference for the voice of the individual. "I appreciate hearing from organized groups but the people who impress me the most are the individuals who take the time on their own to present the problems in the community. After all, I'm their spokesman. The organizations must be kept in their proper context."

Councilman Robert Wilkinson says "most organizations are doing an excellent job in representing their communities. They represent a sphere of interest within an area they represent."

Getting 'the Input'

Referring to property owner groups and the chambers, Wilkinson said, "I take all into consideration. No one represents all the families. I represent them after having the input from all the people."

Councilman James Potter Jr. believes "the only people who represent the people are their elected officials."

The various organizations, he says, "are vocal groups representing basic interests of the Valley. They make the people and public officials aware of things. They are necessary, do a lot of good, and keep the pot boiling."

Councilman Thomas D. Shepard believes that the individual's voice of concern is as effective as an organization's.

'Lone Voice Is Heard'

"There is strength in numbers, but a lone voice in behalf of a just cause reaches receptive ears in the City Council," he said.

A spokesman for Councilman Marvin Braude, whose district was recently changed to include parts of Encino and Tarzana, said "we try to listen to everybody . . . and it is up to the elected officials to weigh their views."

He added that it is the officials' responsibility to balance the views, use their best judgment and do what is the greatest good for the greatest number."