

History Corner # 8: West Side's story isn't all so new.

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"Here, they were supposed to build that six-lane highway." Fred van Berkel points from his truck as he heads down Montañó Road through Taylor Ranch. Out the window, you see what the neighborhood association envisioned instead of a giant road: an arroyo, power lines, bike trails -a thin slice of open space through the acres of houses.

It's even more than that, though. It's a slice through time to the mid-'70s, when this was all open space, and the West Side of today was just a crazy idea. Van Berkel remembers. In 1977, he and his wife, Ceil, bought a house in one of the first sections of Taylor Ranch. They sold that house and moved a few blocks away when he built them a new one. After a decade or so, they moved overseas.

Then, they came back to the old neighbourhood.

"It feels like a little town," Cell van Berkel says.

It's easy to see the West Side as nothing but dust, bulldozers and overnight construction. Seen through the van Berkels' eyes, it's something different -a place shaped by the slow, hard work of a community; the results sometimes hidden by time.

Fred van Berkel can remember petitioning to get a streetlight at Montañó and Coors Boulevard. "Not a traffic light, a streetlight," he says.

He can show you the original developer's office near the corner of Taylor Ranch Road and Montañó. It's now the West Side YMCA. He can show you the lot with the fabulous view at the corner of Dellyne Road and Valle Vista Drive that couldn't be given away in the '70s.

More than that, he can show you a community's victories. Here's the first park, Montañó West, a neighbourhood playground the Taylor Ranch Neighborhood Association pushed for and a board member designed.

Here's Mariposa Basin Park, first proposed as a commercial softball field. Now it's a place for the whole community - and home of the annual Easter egg hunt. Here's the library. Here are schools. Here's the community center that finally opened in October.

"People think Taylor Ranch is new, and they think 'A community center?' But it's been 25 years," van Berkel says.

Twenty-five years ago this week, the Taylor Ranch Neighborhood Association was incorporated. It will celebrate that anniversary June 4 with a community party at Mariposa Basin Park.

Through the years, it has been a "rational" association, van Berkel says, willing to compromise, not wedded to one issue. That might be how it survives its defeats -and there have been some of those, too.

The van Berkels live in Saddle Ridge. Behind their house sits the old West Side Equestrian Center. For three years, since the lease expired, the neighborhood fought to keep the fields from being becoming more houses. They lost.

But just on the other side of the center, there's an arroyo, power lines, bike trails - a slice of open space through acres of houses.

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