



The Ross Retort

by Lisa Ross

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Home Wreckers on the County Board of Supervisors

Feels like home to me, returning to the editorial pages of the newspaper that launched my political writing career a decade ago.

Since those early days, the reach of that little Carmel Valley paper, all grown up now, extended wider and farther out to an increasingly coherent family of communities connected by roads, trails and wildlife corridors, stretching from Los Penasquitos Canyon and Lagoon to the outer limits of Rancho Santa Fe.

Compared to those wild and woolly pioneer times, when environmentalists and community planners manned the barricades almost daily to protect coveted open space like the San Dieguito River Valley, Carmel Mountain or Los Penasquitos Lagoon, lately all has been quiet on the western home front—a hideous condition for journalists.

And so, when the County Board of Supervisors committed the political crime of the decade by kidnapping a highly valued member of our coastal supervisorial district family and sending a country cousin back in exchange, I reacted like a vulture hovering over carnage—it looked and smelled bad, but such a tasty morsel for a columnist.

Using a redistricting scheme right of the pages of *All the Kings Men*, Board Chair Bill Horn took the opportunity afforded elected officials once every ten years by the US Constitution to create himself a new fiefdom of campaign contributors by redistricting toney Rancho Santa Fe, Fairbanks Ranch and most of the future San Dieguito River Valley Park out of Supervisor Pam Slater's 3rd District and moving in the orchards and working class sprawl of Escondido.

This absurdly drawn district, looking like two flaccid Flori-duh's sewn together at the tip, will endure until the next census ten years from now. By then, the rural enclaves of Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove, snatched from the protective hands of Pam Slater and into the clutches of Chairman Horn, could be filled with industrial campuses and water slide parks.

But, the best laid plans of mice and men often go south, and this one is no exception. San Diego citizen rights attorney Mike Aguirre says that he

will file a lawsuit on behalf of several underrepresented groups, based on violations of the Brown Act and the Voting Rights Act, to prevent implementation of the re-districting plan.

Aguirre believes that four members of the Board of Supervisors colluded behind closed doors, in violation of the Brown Act, to carve out districts that favored retaining the all-white, Republican incumbents, which also violates the Voting Rights Act.

Although a stretch, it may be possible that the Hispanic population of Escondido has less chance of electing a Latino to the Board of Supervisors in their new "coastal" district than they would have had Escondido remained in the same SR78 Corridor district with Vista and Oceanside. But, Aguirre finds the egregious Voting Rights Act violation south of I-8 where communities of interest were split to form Supervisor Greg Cox's newly drawn District 1.

In any event, an injunction preventing the new districting plan from going into effect until resolved by the courts, which could drag on past the time candidates must file for the next election, would surely muck up the works, forcing Mr. Horn to stand for re-election among rejected Escondido voters who might punch out their chads with gusto.

But, conventional political wisdom says that voters don't care about such goings on—most don't even know what or who the Board of Supervisors is or are, let alone worry about where district lines fall. Money is honey in politics, and Bill Horn has plenty.

Even the response from environmentalists and community planners, who should be screaming wildly after spending so much effort planning an integrated habitat and trail system between and within the communities surrounding the San Dieguito River Valley Park, has been tepid at best.

Which explains why a Gang of Four Supervisors figured they could get away with ignoring their own appointed redistricting committee's recommendations to do in the outcast fifth, Pam Slater. We'll see.

Perhaps a little house cleaning could clear the smoke out of the backroom at the County, but only the courts can put the home of the San Dieguito River Valley back together.