



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

www.lisaross.com

OF DAVIDS, GOLIATHS AND HELICOPTERS

From the looks of their email over past week, the Good Neighbors of the Seawolf Good Neighbor Marine Aircraft Alliance might be changing their name to "Tee'd Off Neighbors" or "New Friends" of a commercial airport at Miramar Airbase.

If the Marine Corps is seeking support for moving their air base out of San Diego, they could not do a better job. Clearly, answering the complaints of residents whose homes are systematically buzzed by F-18's and helicopters has become part of some procedural manual that reads denial.

And, if anyone out there doubts the ability of a few well-heeled and artful David's to take on and win battles against Goliath's, they should review some recent history. Enraged residents around these parts have done pretty well.

In 1994, a group of developers spent \$2.1 million to ram a 12,000-acre development east of Carmel Valley through the voters without showing them completed plans. Two groups, each raising little more than \$10,000, defeated the colossal campaign, one with a skillful on the ground grass roots effort and the other by launching a devastating last minute targeted TV commercial suggesting that if two bitter enemies like Peter Navarro and Susan Golding were both against something, it must be bad.

Two years ago, the 22nd Agricultural District Board floated a plan to build an entertainment megaplex and shopping mall on their dirt lot adjacent to the San Dieguito River Valley. A handful of Del Mar residents circulated a citywide petition that gathered 13,000 signatures. The point was made, and the plan went back to the drawing table.

A plan to allow a lighted golf driving range next to the polo fields, also in the San Dieguito River Valley, was defeated after residents overlooking the River Valley successfully sued San Diego over an incomplete environmental impact study. After a four-year battle, the idea finally died at the hands of the mayor and four City Councilmembers, even with strenuous support from then City Councilman Harry Mathis.

The list is long, including successful efforts to keep Big Box retail out of Carmel Valley. In fact, the larger the Goliath, the bigger and more lumbering the target. Who would have thought that the small town residents of Manassus, Virginia could have beaten back a Disney theme park adjacent to the Civil War battlefield? They did.

And so, as irritation gives way to rage, many Del Mar Terrace, Sorrento Hills and Del Mar Mesa homeowners are feeling that even the specter of a 24-hour commercial airport, light years away, is preferable to the ear splitting and continuous assault over their homes right now. If organized, the group could become formidable players in the regional airport siting game.

As suggested by the first email message that began the latest cyber sortie, during the next several months there is a window of opportunity for the city to gain control over Miramar Airbase. A bipartisan coalition of ten Senators lead by John McCain will introduce legislation this year to close 197 bases by 2003. A focused petition effort could inject Miramar into the discussion.

An organized petition effort takes money and time, two commodities locals have used to great effect when motivated. And, in joining forces with the folks who want to build a 24-hour commercial airport on the base, a new group of organized and fire-breathing homeowners would breath political life into a moribund movement that previously has faced vociferous objections from environmental groups and the University City, La Jolla and I-15 communities.

The Marine Corps could save everyone from the excruciating battles that are sure to accompany any organized effort to eject them from the city by simply staying on course and flying at reasonable altitudes and during reasonable hours, something that has so far proved too difficult to achieve, but a feat the Navy accomplished very well during their welcomed stay in San Diego.