

Sunset

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Headquarters the year around for activities of neighborhood groups, Sleepy Hollow Community Center is especially popular in summer because of its large swimming pool

Community action in the West . . .

Hare-brained . . . but it worked

The call for volunteers has gone out again in Sleepy Hollow, a peaceful, rural residential area between San Anselmo and Fairfax, California. The reason: new plans afoot at the Sleepy Hollow Community Center.

There's little doubt the volunteers will respond, grumbling cheerfully. Of all the skills possessed by the area's residents, one of the most highly developed is the ability to browbeat one another into working on "the center."

Like many other neighborhood ventures that have made life more pleasant in Western communities, the Sleepy Hollow center once seemed an impossible daydream. The committee of self-styled "seasoned and mature businessmen" that originally launched the project acknowledged that the scheme was hare-brained; it would cost too much money and require more time, effort, and interest than residents would be willing to give. The board of directors of Sleepy Hollow

Homes Association agreed.

Then they all tackled the job anyway. The result is a well built, constantly used recreation and service center that is still expanding. The clubhouse is now seven years old. The swimming pool has just completed its sixth summer of service. Every year, improvements have been made to the clubhouse and kitchen. In 1956 bathhouses were finished.

Now members are planning an athletic court for the remaining unused ground, and a structure to shelter the pool's pump and filter equipment. Then they want to complete the property's landscaping.

Sleepy Hollow folks haven't tried to do all these things overnight. They have taken their time; but they have kept up a sustained interest through the years that has been highly gratifying to the small group that first sparked the project.

THE COMMUNITY

In many ways the Hollow isn't much different from dozens of other clusters of homes tucked into the hilly countryside of Marin County. One thing that makes it distinctive is the lane that rambles through its length—Butterfield Road, guarded and shaded from one end of the Hollow to the other by tall, gracefully nodding poplars, closely planted three-quarters of a century ago.

Subdivided into generous home sites, the Hollow began to take on its present character soon after World War II. In 1946 the Sleepy Hollow Homes Association was formed. Its first objectives were ordinary and practical: street improvement, a sewer system, a uniform plan of house numbering and mail boxes.

The association accomplished these missions one by one, and by 1950 some of its officers were doing some less practical dreaming, looking ahead to the possibility of building a community clubhouse. And if the adults were to get a building, they declared, the youngsters ought to get a swimming pool.

THE CAMPAIGN

Once the proposal was accepted by the association's directors, the job of convincing the community began. From the outset the campaign was thoroughly planned, carefully organized, and energetically carried out. Districts were assigned to teams; the teams were schooled in all details of the proposal, and in the answers to anticipated questions and possible objections; they were armed with a handsome brochure illustrated with an artist's conception of the finished project.

When the whirlwind campaign came, the volunteer salesmen visited every home in the Hollow in one weekend. More than 90 per cent of the 135 families signed up to pay the membership fee of \$2 a month per family for five years. Many paid the

full amount immediately, and the financial support necessary to launch the project was assured.

The association bought a centrally located lot as the community center site. From that point on, the committee exploited everyone possible in every way possible for talents, materials, and labor. Members and their friends lent trucks and tools, "scrounged" materials, and scouted for more.

The men, labeling themselves "The Slaves," spent their weekends doing the engineering, shoveling, hammering, and sweating necessary to survey the lot, frame the redwood building, and excavate for the concrete pool. Most of the manpower necessary—professional, skilled, and unskilled—was available among the residents. The women prepared meals and refreshments and urged the workers on.

PRESSURE AND PRAISE

It was during the months of building and excavation that the association members became masters at needling, coercing, pushing, pulling, exhorting, and flattering in order to keep up the supply of volunteer labor. No one could plead forgetfulness; telephones rang and postcards were mailed. A weekly bulletin went out with a report of progress, requests for needed materials, and a running plea for new workers to try a hand, old workers to keep up their attendance. Those who showed up were named and praised. One edition even carried a congratulatory telegram (of questionable authenticity) signed, "President, United States."

Construction work started in the spring of 1951, and by the end of the summer, the clubhouse was usable for meetings and the pool hole had been dug out by hand. The next spring and early summer the pool was finished, with a contractor handling steel and gunite work. It was opened on July 4, 1952, and dedicated to the committeeman who had led the movement for a youth center pool but had died before it was completed.

A RUSTIC CLUBHOUSE

The pool is 35 by 75 feet, big enough for competitive meets. The rustic clubhouse's main room is 38 by 54 feet, with a ceiling of exposed beams and acoustical tile, a large stone fireplace, and a built-in public address system. Over the fireplace hangs a somber painting of Ichabod Crane pursued by the headless horseman; it was painted by a member of the Legend Club, the Sleepy Hollow women's organization.

The clubhouse also has a smaller utility room and a well equipped kitchen; cloak room and rest room facilities; and an awning-covered patio area. The pool deck has been widened and extended, bathhouses added, and a modern filter and automatic chlorinating system installed.

The center is used by almost every organization in Sleepy Hollow. It is home

base for adult clubs, children's organizations, Scouting and Camp Fire groups. It is the site of frequent dances, square dances, and card parties, luncheons, dinners, and barbecues. And all summer youngsters swim in the sparkling pool and play table tennis under the patio awnings. Only one increase has been made in membership fees since the project was started. Dues are now \$3 a month per family. A bank loan that helped to complete the pool in 1952 has been repaid. Current income pays life guards and maintenance personnel, and gradually builds a fund for further improvement to the property.

Committees of the board of directors supervise employees, control finances, and coordinate the use of facilities by the many affiliated groups.

During the four or five years of the association's greatest financial needs, the annual Sleepy Hollow Country Fair became one of the best attended events of Marin County and brought much needed funds into the association treasury. The fair has not been held the past two years; but many a Sleepy Hollow resident looks back fondly on the fun and excitement that rewarded the hard work, and occasionally there is talk of reviving the event. Anyway, if the community ever needs to raise money, it has the blueprint already prepared. Meanwhile the people of Sleepy Hollow are enjoying their community center while watching it grow, a little at a time.



"The Slaves," as volunteer workers dubbed themselves, provided most of the labor that went into construction of the center. Numerous father-and-son teams helped to build the clubhouse and hand-dig the swimming pool.