

BELVEDERE'S SHOPPING CENTER: THE BOARDWALK

By Susan Cluff and Dave Gotz

The Boardwalk Shopping Center on Tiburon Boulevard was built by the Belvedere-Tiburon Development Co. formed by David W. Allen of the Belvedere Land Company in 1955, on land that was the Tiburon Lagoon only 30 years earlier. Belvedere architect John Lord King designed the open air shopping complex with a planked promenade, sunken patios and an "oasis of greenery" to evoke the wharf structure and weathered look of Tiburon's past. The design received an AIA award of highest honor in 1957.

Because it sits on fill, a unique foundation of concrete beams was designed to rest on concrete footings similar to the Pan Am hanger at San Francisco airport. Assuming further settlement might continue it included hydraulic jacks so that floors could later be leveled. Belvedere Land Company sought out local-serving businesses, looking to revitalize downtown and keep local dollars on the Tiburon peninsula.

Belvedere-Tiburon branch library opened in August 1955 in the western building which also housed Cove Nursery, adjacent to R & S service station which opened first in April 1955. The shopping center held its grand opening on February 2-4, 1956. Businesses included First National Bank, the Cove Players, Embee Supermarket, Standard 5-10-25 cent store, Corinthian Pharmacy, Sybell's Bib 'n Tucker, Taylor's Barbershop, Treasure Chest Gift & Camera and Wellman's Sports. The final business to open was Herbert's Sherbet Shoppe in April 1956 located in the courtyard (where Ming's is now), with a large outdoor seating area. That outdoor area was enclosed in the mid-1960's and has housed the Landmarks Archives since 1998.

Local groups staged art shows and Wednesday fashion shows at the Center to benefit local charities and hosted holiday sing-alongs. From 1956-1960, Westminster Presbyterian church held Sunday services over Herbert's Sherbet Shop while children attended Sunday school in two Northwestern Pacific railroad cars across Tiburon Blvd.

The City of Belvedere and the incorporation committee for Tiburon battled over the lucrative sales tax revenues since the then existing boundary line between Belvedere and unincorporated Marin cut diagonally through the shopping center. The solution was to make the junction of Tiburon Blvd. and Beach Rd. as the dividing line between the two jurisdictions. However the City of Belvedere rejected the idea at the last minute and Tiburon was incorporated in June 1964 with the existing boundary. (Rustic Bakery has depicted the line, which runs through their shop, on the wall behind the counter.)

In 2017, cousins Jim and Andrew Allen, co-presidents of the Belvedere Land Co., retired and turned over management of the 127-year-old company to Bayside Management in Sausalito. The Allen family retains ownership of the company, which has 137 residential units and 57 commercial units in Belvedere and Tiburon, including The Boardwalk.

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1. The western building in about 1956 with the Bel-Tib Library on the near end, the Cove in the middle and R & S beyond. Notice the barren hills in the distance and the fine cars in the lot.

2. The courtyard in about 1956. There were originally two sunken gardens, one where Rustic Bakery is now and one in the middle of the back seating area. On the far right is the open eating area, where the Landmarks Archives are now.

3. Looking in from the parking lot to the courtyard in 1966. The sunken garden is gone in the front; this area was built out to house Heart & Flowers in 1985 and expanded for Rustic in 2016. The open air eating area has been built in for retail use the back left corner.

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