

THE HISTORY OF HILARITA HOUSING

By Susan Cluff

Hilarita Housing was first built by the military as temporary housing for naval and civilian families working at the Naval Net Depot on Paradise Drive where the SFSU Romberg Center is now. In 1943, the 19 acre hillside property that had been part of the Hilarita Dairy Ranch purchased by W. Elliott Judge in 1935, underwent condemnation proceedings for a set price of \$9,800.

By then, the Net Depot naval base that manufactured and serviced huge nets to stop enemy torpedoes and submarines from entering San Francisco Bay employed 70 officers and 800 servicemen. A few hundred civilians also worked there as riggers, helpers, loaders and kitchen workers and were offered naval housing near the railroad depot at "reasonable rentals." In 1944, the Navy opened a Dry Dock Training Center near the Net Depot (now Paradise Park) with barracks and support buildings for another 3,000 men. One of those servicemen was Jim Reynolds who moved into a studio apartment at Hilarita with his wife Sybil in 1944. "It must have been 400 square feet, if that," said Jim in an oral history in 1994. "Rent was \$30 a month."

Like most wartime military buildings, the Hilarita barracks were constructed cheaply and quickly using plywood and asbestos cement for exterior walls, masonite for interior walls and ceilings, gypsum siding with no wood sheathing, little or no insulation and flat tar roofs. As a result, there were frequent problems with water leaks, rattling windows, warped walls, heating and plumbing. After WWII, Hilarita was turned into residential housing for veterans and returning servicemen, managed by the Marin County Housing Authority. In the early 50s, the Reed School District used a three acre parcel with

the administration building, tennis courts, playgrounds and two buildings adjacent to the Reed school site. With population on Tiburon Peninsula growing rapidly, the district held kindergarten classes there and used the playground until 1956.

In 1969, an interfaith housing group began working with local churches to replace some of the Hilarita barracks with new public housing for low and moderate income families. The Tiburon Ecumenical Association (TEA), lead by Edwin G. "Ned" Weed, drew up plans for construction and obtained monies from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In 1971, the Tiburon City Council approved their plans, but negotiations, lawsuits and funding issues delayed construction on the 102-unit complex for another four years.

In June 1974, the City of Tiburon named the street to the new housing project "Ned's Way" in honor of Ned Weed who had donated so much of his time and energy to the project, even mortgaged his own home for a bridge loan. "He is a remarkable person whose perseverance and ability was probably the one constant that overcame the odds against the Hilarita Project," said Tiburon Mayor Al Aramburu. The first 22 residents moved in April 1975 and in September, TEA held a housewarming party to welcome all new and returning residents to Hilarita.

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1. Hilarita Housing barracks in 1944. To the right is Hilarita Dairy, where Reed School was built in 1952. The driveway is now Ned's Way. The buildings on the left were rebuilt as public housing in 1974.
2. Reed School crossing in the mid-50s. Hilarita Housing buildings in the background were bought by the Town of Tiburon. The lower two buildings became the City Hall and Police station from 1978-1997.
3. A triumphant Ned Weed holds up the new street sign in June 1974.

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