

Vacation Center Celebrates 30 Years of Family Holidays

by Jon Bartel

It was 1969. Clark Kerr had only recently been forced to step down as UC president by California's new governor, Ronald Reagan. Breathtaking growth at UCSB had seen enrollment grow from 2,380 in 1958 to 12,220 in the fall of 1968. During this school year alone (1968-1969) five buildings opened: Ellison, Buchanan, Music II, San Rafael, and Biological Sciences II. Hundreds of new faculty members were hired to teach the rapidly growing student body. Student protests were underway, at UCSB and nationwide, over the Vietnam War, the military draft, and lack of minority enrollment, faculty, and minority studies courses. Students at UCSB seized North Hall, then the University Center. On April 11, a bomb at the new UCSB Faculty Club killed custodian Dover Sharp. A major oil spill in the Santa Barbara Channel shocked the city and the nation and helped to mobilize environmental activists. Student lifestyles had changed dramatically in just a few years--with clothing, hairstyles, and even mores undergoing major shifts that spoke of an alienation between undergraduates and the older generations. So, at a time when, more than ever, UCSB needed public support, a rift was growing between taxpayers and the university. Student behavior was perceived as irresponsible and even unacceptable. The university itself was under close scrutiny.

Into this breach stepped the UCSB Alumni Association with a brash proposal. Led by Executive Director Dale Lauderdale '61 and the Board of Directors under president Ed Morris '50, the Association conceived of a way to bring taxpayers together with current students on the campus to help dispel the developing negative stereotypes of UC undergraduates. Families and students would mingle at a vacation center that used university facilities. Stanford and UC Berkeley were already running successful summer camps in the Sierras. The Vacation Center at UCSB would offer something different--an on-campus experience with more amenities than you might find in a tent.

"We still do that today," notes FVC director Jean King '70. "We still provide a place where parents can have a vacation at the same time their kids are having one, where people young and old who would not otherwise have a positive experience on a UC campus have one, where alumni can reconnect with UCSB. The original model was excellent, and while we have refined it over the years, it remains the same."

For its first year, the Alumni (now Family) Vacation Center used the new Francisco Torres apartment building on the northwestern edge of Isla Vista, adjacent to the West Campus. But after one year, the present location, the new San Rafael Residence Hall facility, adjacent to Isla Vista, the Lagoon and the ocean, became the very workable Vacation Center home. With its own swimming pool and dining commons, it provided a self-contained on-campus camp.

And a program evolved, centered on child care and activities the whole family could enjoy. With the swimming pool available, there had to be a water carnival. At some point, vacationers and staff members took each other on in a softball game each week. It is alleged that, some 300 games later, the staff has never lost this game. Available tennis courts on campus made tennis instruction and competition a natural. A farewell show became part of the package--a chance to give high achieving vacationers their awards and an opportunity for the latent theatrical talent of the UCSB students on the staff to shine.

Many a popular Broadway show or movie has been adapted to a VC theme for this extravaganza (see separate listing). Older kids enjoyed campouts. Adults have watched Santa Barbara County develop as a wine center while taking Santa Ynez Valley wine tours. Families have enjoyed games at the family carnival and campfire singalongs at the beach.

The concept has proved to be popular. In 30 years, over 45,000 people from 12,000 families have attended. There are legions of families whose children have grown up at the VC. Last summer, for example, 14 percent of the attendees had attended 10 years or longer. Only 32 percent were there for their first visit. There are many instances of high school seniors choosing UCSB for their college because they became acquainted with the school as children at the Vacation Center.

"My first childhood memories of summer family vacations are from the FVC," writes Gregg P. Hartman '88, MD. "My childhood memories were one of the reasons I chose UCSB for my undergraduate education." (See Gregg Hartman's full letter in accompanying sidebar.)

UCSB has benefited from the Vacation Center's operation to the tune of over \$10 million in fees paid to Housing and Residential Services, Parking, Transportation, and Athletics, and Recreation. Operating the program on campus has meant that there have been summer jobs for over 1,200 students in the dining commons and housekeeping in addition to the 500 summer student jobs for VC counselors.

Now a Vacation Center 30th birthday celebration is being planned. FVC Director Jean King, one of the original staff members in 1969, is organizing a reunion of former staff members to take place at the FVC during this coming summer season. "We have a group of 500 UCSB alumni who are former staff members. It will be fun to get back in touch with as many of them as possible," she says. "We now have 30 years of traditions at this camp. Those staff members remember the farewell shows they were in. For a lot of us who were students here in the 1960s, the UCSB traditions that existed then--Spring Sing, the Galloping Gaucho Review, Homecoming--just aren't here anymore. The Vacation Center has created another set of UCSB traditions."

The dates for the Vacation Center Reunion are the weekend July 9-11. Terrie Guy Bugay '80, longtime staffer and former director, is reunion chairperson. Jack Fox M.A.'69, another former director, now alumni director at California State University, Chico, is chairing a committee of past directors to establish a Family Vacation Center scholarship. Reunion activities will include an alumni and 1999 staff party, picnic, dinner, and the regular weekend activities of the Vacation Center.

The Vacation Center: A Hartman Family Tradition

In a recent letter to the UCSB Alumni Association Board of Directors, Gregg P. Hartman '88 of Woodland Hills, California, recalls his long connection with the Family Vacation Center. He attended as a child in the 1970s. Last summer Hartman family members returned for his parents' 40th wedding anniversary.

I am writing this letter to make sure the alumni association realizes how influential the Family Vacation Center (FVC) has been in my family's life, and what an asset the FVC is to UCSB. Let me start by point out that I am a UCSB alumnus (class of 1988). When I was looking for a university, my memories of the UCSB campus from attending the FVC as a child were a definite factor.

My first childhood memories of summer family vacations are from the FVC. I remember making wax candles, tied-dyed shirts, cleaning tar off of my feet, singing the song "Come Saturday Morning," and, most importantly, wanting to return the following year. My family attended for a number of years when I was a child.

After a long period of time, we had the pleasure of returning to the FVC last summer with the next generation of the Hartman family, my children, nieces and nephews, as well as bringing my parents to celebrate their fortieth wedding anniversary. I took my son on a tour of the campus and showed him my dorm, where I ate, and where I studied. To see my children experience the same loving, enthusiastic camp that I remember from my childhood creates a feeling I can't describe. Every detail, from the high standards required of the staff, to the food, to the variety of activities, is taken into consideration. Also, a quality that I did not appreciate as a child, but definitely see as a parent, is the facility. San Rafael provides suites for family living, the children with ample space to play, and a confined enough area to provide safety. Now my children are the ones begging me to bring them back to the FVC next year. We do have every intention of returning for many years to come.

When I attended UCSB as a student, my memories of the FVC were always conjured up when I went near San Rafael. In fact, when I gave tours of the campus to potential students, I often mentioned the camp. My childhood memories were one of the reasons I chose UCSB for my undergraduate education. I will always cherish my memories of college, and feel very fortunate that my memories of UCSB will not only include my four years of undergraduate education, but will also include my childhood and adult experiences at the FVC.

Curtain Up, Light the Lights...

A sampling of Vacation Center Farewell Show titles
and the original shows they parodied

South Terrific (South Pacific)

A VC Line (A Chorus Line) 3

Tar (Grease)

Sleepless in Santa Barbara (Sleepless in Seattle)

Beachside Story (West Side Story)
Diaper Dancin' (Dirty Dancin')
Bike to the Future (Back to the Future)
The Wizard of Odd (The Wizard of Oz)
The Sound of Noise (The Sound of Music)
Screw Loose (Footloose)
Lame (Mame)
The Old Thrill (The Big Chill)