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"The Squire" Publisher Found

By Cathy Tyson



John Mustard Photo provided

"Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated," jokes John Mustard via phone from his current home in Hampshire, Illinois.

As reported in August of this year, "The Squire" newspaper that Mustard published from 1968 - 1973 was very similar to the Lamorinda Weekly, reporting on local events in Lafayette, Orinda and Moraga.

A request was made in the story, "Blast from the Past: The Squire" for input about the paper. Although a few residents commented, and despite a thorough search, Publisher John Mustard could not be located. Just last week, out of the blue this reporter got a phone call from Illinois, from none other than John Mustard.

Now retired, he recalled starting the paper back in 1968 with \$500 and a vision, but unfortunately no business plan. The independent newspaper originally began in Moraga, according to Mustard; his two main advertisers, grocery stores in Moraga, encouraged him to branch out to Lafayette.

The first edition of the newly expanded paper was born the week of the election - when Lafayette first incorporated. "The entire five years - we careened from one financial crisis to another," said Mustard. He describes it as a "constant struggle," some of the employees had to wait for paychecks. In the end he declared bankruptcy, "Which has been weighing on me all these years."

"It was a fun job," said Dian Overly, former graphic artist for The Squire. "Even when we had to move several times, as I recall, from office to office (probably part of the financial problems); and from the Squire experience, I moved on to the Leshner organization.

Mustard explained that the final straw was the butcher strike against supermarkets. Overnight he lost one-third of his revenue when the grocery stores stopped advertising. He recalled that at the time local stores had their own butchers, but chain grocery stores wanted to consolidate butchering to a central location. In addition Dean Leshner, owner of the Contra Costa Times, was buying up quite a few of the

smaller local papers and allegedly putting pressure on advertisers.

After the paper shut down, Mustard worked for a while for the Montclairion selling advertising, "that didn't work out too well," he said.

Then he purchased, with the help of a partner, the Claremont Press where he did all the production work. He moved on to the Tri-Valley News where he was Editor and General Manager of the Danville office.

Following that, he heard of a new paper through an acquaintance that was opening in southern Oregon. Because he wanted to get out of the rat race and find good schools for his kids, it seemed like a good opportunity. When the recession came along the never stellar economy of southern Oregon dried up as did that paper. The local fire chief was a good friend; he suggested doing a newsletter for the fire district. "That was a huge hit, everyone loved it," Mustard commented.

In 1984 he moved to the Midwest and is retired now, although he enjoys his hobby - model trains. Prior to retirement, Mustard had a job as an Information Technology Recruiter.

As he looks back to the days of the newsroom on Golden Gate Way he's disappointed, "I was never able to deliver a quality product." In retrospect he calls it a "Wonderful experience. I still love Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda."

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