

The RRC: A Fraternal Reunion under one Roof

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This year will mark the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Retirement Resource Center that serves both staff retirees and emeriti, so this is an especially good time to recall how it came to be.

The story begins in in 2005, when the EA was still the ward of the Academic Senate office, which understandably was far more preoccupied with the affairs of the active faculty. As president of the ERA, **Mary Corrigan** attended the fall gathering in San Francisco of the combined Retirement Association and Emeriti Association Councils (CUCRA and CUCEA). As her VP, I went with her. After talking with people from other campuses, we came away persuaded that we had some catching up to do.

At the time UCSD's RA had 800 members, a lot more than we did, and it already had a small facility of its own. Fortunately for them and us, it was run by a human dynamo named **Suzan Cioffi**. When we returned from San Francisco, Mary asked Suzan whether there was some way we could combine forces. **Loretta Smith**, who was RA President at the time, was all for the idea: After all, she observed, faculty and staff had long worked well together throughout their active careers. As



Home of the:

- ◆ **UCSD Retirement Association**
2100 members (faculty & staff)
- ◆ **UCSD Emeriti Association**
570 members (academics & spouses)
- ◆ **Chancellor's Scholars Program**
400 scholars have been through this program in the last 10 years.
- ◆ **Emeriti Mentor Program**
with 45 active emeriti faculty mentors, and twenty-five former emeriti faculty mentors.

she said, it would be "like a fraternal reunion."

At the time the RA's claim on campus property could be characterized as "tight quarters." Its office consisted of one-half of Building 400, a 750-square-foot attachment to a structure that formerly served as a Marine brig. By late Spring of 2006, when Mary's term was approaching its end, she invited me and **Don Helinski**, who would serve as my VP, to meet with Smith, who invited her designated successor, **Bob Oakes**, to join us. Bob and I drafted a plan for a joint facility and submitted it to Chancellor **Marye Anne Fox**.

The document was entitled: *Proposal for The Creation of a Retirement Resource Center*. Copies went to **Marsha Chandler**, VCAA, and **Steve Relyea**, Assistant VC for Human Resources. We listed five objectives: 1) Maintain the autonomy, character, activities, and publications of each group; 2) Centralize administrative functions and expand staff support consistent with three decades of membership growth; 3) Expand the current RA office to include all of building 400, with the renovations required for optimal use; 4) Continue developing RA programs designed to maintain a link with the university community; 5) Expand current EA mentoring activities for the benefit of students and faculty.

A key part of our proposal was the last: an offer to make use of a

cont. on page 2 →

◆◆◆ Inside ◆◆◆

The RRC, a Fraternal Reunion Under One Roof 1

Remembering Lucy Killea 3

Allen Kaprow and Jack Ox: from "Happenings" to "Intermedia" 4

Climate Change & Population .. 6

Emeriti Assn. Book Club 6

Anecdotalage 7

Founders of the UCSD Retirement Resource Center



The Late Mary Corrigan
Professor Emerita
Theater and Dance



Suzan Cioffi
Director, UCSD
Retirement Resource Ctr.



Jack C. Fisher
Professor Emeritus
Surgery

new facility to take on more creative projects, notably student mentoring. **Mel Green**, an early Biology Department appointee, had amassed a decades-long record of mentoring students, undergraduate and graduate alike. Following retirement, he persuaded a number of us to join him in the somewhat unconventional pairing of senior professors with undergraduate freshmen. We included in the proposal a pledge to expand this budding program.

In a covering letter, we suggested that our plan be reviewed over the summer months and discussed again in the fall. Soon after our proposal was in the mail, I departed for my family's annual summer respite in the Sierra Nevada. Because mail forwarded to California's high country takes its time, I did not receive Chancellor Fox's response until the early August but the postmark told the story; she had approved our plan inside of twelve days!! Months later and in her presence for a dedication of a completed retirement center, I included in my welcoming remarks an offer to nominate her for an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records for fastest decision involving both governance and space in all of academic history.

But while our request for a fraternal reunion met with approval, our proposal for more space was not yet assured. Even before our proposal was submitted, I had visited **Boone Hellman**, VC for Facilities Planning and Construction, for advance guidance. Boone was quite familiar with the layout of Building 400, and he immediately realized that the way to unite the RA and the EA was to remove a partition that separated us from CAPE, then its co-tenant, and give us the entire space. Fortunately, construction of a student services building provided an ideal relocation for CAPE.

Removal of CAPE required some extra cleaning efforts; a few partially consumed pizzas had languished there for weeks. Meanwhile, Suzan summoned her considerable acquisitive skills. She queried other campus offices and kept her eyes on eBay. A letter was sent to the entire RA/EA membership reminding all of a unique opportunity: to establish a customized "gathering place." She also asked for gifts-in-kind as well as cash donations, and her combined efforts yielded rewards galore. From the Price Center came a timely gift of sixty moderately worn conference chairs. Several office desks and swivel chairs were secured. From Xerox came a color printer followed months later by another. Cash gifts totaling \$5,000 allowed for purchase of sound and projection equipment, a pull down screen, and a podium. Comfortable seating was bought for a small conversation space, soon designated as the "mentoring room."

Meanwhile, by agreement with the Academic Senate office, Suzan assumed responsibility for managing the EA. Past records were transferred along with data for 180 members. In addition to monitoring EA finances, she would oversee recruitment of new members, schedule a popular monthly lecture series, and publish *Chronicles*.

The outcome was a refurbished facility with three offices for staff, a

mentoring room, a more functional kitchen with new cabinetry, and a more comfortable restroom. Best of all, there were 730 square feet of meeting space, ample room for either sixty people seated theater style or forty seated at tables. AV Services installed the sound and projection equipment as well as a router. Human Resources generously provided computers. And while Suzan was making all this come together, members dropped in one by one or in small groups to admire what several months of planning and patience had wrought. My own first exposure came after returning to La Jolla late in August of 2007. The space was thrilling enough to see but equally gratifying was the joy and excitement on Suzan's face. A dedication and ribbon-cutting was held on Sept. 26, with members of both associations in attendance together with three special guests: Chancellor Fox, Relyea, and **David Miller** from Academic Affairs.

Since its official opening, the RRC has never been dormant. Given its own pulse and metabolism, the facility keeps pace with the many productive people it serves. Neither has an unexpected mishap failed to produce opportunities. A flood - - yes, a flood, due to burst plumbing - overwhelmed the building in 2008, bringing operations to a sudden halt, ruining the new carpet and water-logging the flooring.

cont. on page 3 →

While Suzan watched as the old flooring was removed, she saw how vast was the crawlspace beneath, and realized its potential for convenient onsite storage.

What this has meant for both associations is self-sufficiency. Light-weight folding tables, six “belly bars,” a half dozen tents, plus all the required paraphernalia



Prepping for an RRC Biannual Art & Music Soirée

of catering allow for the conduct of in-house events without commissioning trucks filled with costly rental equipment. Owning a complete dinner service with utensils means not having to discard countless paper plates, cups, and plastic ware, making the RRC one of the greenest operations on a now famously green campus. When the RA produces another of its successful bianual Art &

Music Soirees with as many as 200 in attendance, the cost will be closer to \$750 than the \$4,000 a professional caterer might charge.

While the Human Resources Department keeps the two associations on a lean budget, it has responded generously to special one-time funding requests:

keeping computers updated, replacing a tired set of conference chairs with contemporary light-weight stackable seating, and installing a much needed dishwasher to handle the increased load of numerous self-catered events.

Currently, a full-time staff of two, backed up by four part-time students and a phalanx of willing volunteers, work in support of two organizations with 2100 and 570 members respectively, in a facility measuring 1500 square feet, a place where committees and boards meet regularly, where 15-20 social and educational events occur monthly, where conversations between emeriti and their mentees take place frequently. Two publications are produced and distributed: the *Retirement Association Gazette*, and *Chronicles*.

