

# PREFACE

## **Solana Beach: An Overview**

Solana Beach is a unique California beach town where residents take pride in their community and have historically fought to preserve its defining characteristics. Unlike some coastal towns that have undergone unchecked development, Solana Beach has maintained a strong sense of identity shaped by its fortunate history and by the continuing efforts of its engaged citizens.

Like many California beach towns, Solana Beach began as a rest stop along Highway 101, serving travelers between Los Angeles San Diego, and points further south. Its proximity to the Del Mar Fairgrounds made it a convenient stop, and over time, the area grew into a small but vibrant community. The City's early years are well-documented in two books the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society published: The 1920s to 1930s: Early Solana Beach (Nelson, 2002) and La Colonia & Solana Beach (Nelson, 2010). These works offer invaluable insight into the City's foundations, chronicling its growth from a quiet service stop into a successful coastal town.

The history of these transformations has also been carefully preserved through a project led by Jim Nelson and the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society, which placed plaques on historically significant buildings throughout the city. These markers, linked to historical descriptions on the Society's website, help tell the story of Solana Beach's commercial and cultural history.

## **This Book**

As Solana Beach continues evolving, capturing recent history in a narrative story is important. There is a risk that the history of its early days and the spirit of its vibrant community may fade from memory. This book is intended to provide a broad look at the development of Solana Beach from the City's incorporation in 1986 through to 2024. This effort seeks to preserve the City's transformation from its 25th Anniversary celebration in 2011 through the COVID era, documenting almost four decades of local history. It focuses on the City's original commercial heart—Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue—and their pivotal roles in shaping the later-developed community, capturing recollections, photographs, and stories that might otherwise be lost.

Additionally, this book examines suburban development and its transformative impact on the City. This suburban expansion brought opportunities and challenges, influencing the City's character and community dynamics.

Solana Beach embodies the true spirit of a small town, bringing together residents, business owners, and city officials, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. Community projects were often "all-hands" efforts, with volunteers from every corner of the City contributing.

Throughout these changes, Solana Beach has maintained a strong commitment to community engagement and cultural enrichment, ensuring that its small-town spirit endures amidst growth and development.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this rhythm. Many cherished community events were canceled, altered, or experienced declining participation. At the same time, the downtown business sector was severely impacted, with noticeable changes in infrastructure, public spaces, and private development.

The manuscript draws upon a wide range of sources, including online archives including those of the Civic and Historical Society, YouTube videos, personal research, and the support of AI tools that have played a helpful role throughout the process, serving as research assistants and editorial aids to refine and structure the content.

It also incorporates content assembled initially for the City of Solana Beach's 25th Anniversary celebration by the Civic and Historical Society, business community members, and other citizens, as well as privately published photo books that chronicle key projects in the city's development.

Many of the photographs included here are drawn from those commemorative publications. While they reflect Solana Beach as it appeared up to the time of the 25th Anniversary, several of the locations depicted have since changed—or no longer exist. These images set the narrative scene and offer valuable historical reference points.

Photographs are embedded within the relevant paragraphs or presented in groups at the end of each section, helping readers connect visual context to the stories being told.

Beyond written records, the evolution of Solana Beach—as chronicled here—has also been shaped by conversations with and the lived experiences of individuals who contributed to the transformation of the City's business community after World War II. Several community members reviewed early drafts of this work, and their insights and support—both past and present—have significantly enriched the result.

To enhance the reader's experience, Table of Contents includes links to YouTube videos published by others on the subjects covered in each chapter. By downloading

the YouTube app and logging in, readers can follow these links for further insights—copy the link into a browser.

Also included are links to full-color YouTube videos: a complete recording of the slideshow presented at the City’s 25th Anniversary celebration at City Hall, two previously unpublished photobooks from that event, and an additional commemorative photobook featuring various City Projects from the 2008-2012 period.

## **CREDITS**

The writer wishes to thank David Ott, Sean McLeod, Brian Fuller, Carl Turnbull, Mo Sammak, Nichole Peterson, Garrie Lynn, Jim Harker, Allen Moffson, George Fleming, David Winkler, Joe Kellejian, Josh Guera, Greg Petre, Ron Blumberg, Rich Lieb, Laurie Greene, Kimberly Jones, Michele Stribling, Vicki Driver, Peter House, and Carol Childs.

Thank you for reading parts or all of this document and providing helpful comments.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>PREFACE</b>  | <b>3</b>                            |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5hlyJNY_Yo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5hlyJNY_Yo</a>                         | <i>Making Place in Solana Beach</i> |
| <b>SURPRISING SOLANA</b>  | <b>7</b>                            |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/shorts/GS0WHB1gWb8">https://www.youtube.com/shorts/GS0WHB1gWb8</a>                           | <i>Annies Canyon Trail</i>          |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfuxAeOQMhA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfuxAeOQMhA</a>                         | <i>Things to do in SD</i>           |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSBW3TjgDM&amp;t=270s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSBW3TjgDM&amp;t=270s</a>   | <i>Neighborhood</i>                 |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@solanabeachcivichistorical7985">https://www.youtube.com/@solanabeachcivichistorical7985</a> | <i>Hist Society</i>                 |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/roUsa16DhJk">https://youtu.be/roUsa16DhJk</a>   | <i>Ariel View</i>                   |
| <b>INVENTING A CALIFORNIA BEACH TOWN</b>  | <b>9</b>                            |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSBW3TjgDM&amp;t=211s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSBW3TjgDM&amp;t=211s</a>   | <i>Neighborhood 1987</i>            |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ-hLdBhBxw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ-hLdBhBxw</a>                         | <i>Creative Community</i>           |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHQv8QleRlc&amp;t=8s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHQv8QleRlc&amp;t=8s</a>       | <i>Over Solana Beach</i>            |
| <b>FLETCHER COVE</b>  | <b>18</b>                           |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG5cYE_S3sk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG5cYE_S3sk</a>                         | <i>Fletcher Cove Park</i>           |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG5cYE_S3sk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG5cYE_S3sk</a>                         | <i>Inauguration</i>                 |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5UW6pxUJ30">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5UW6pxUJ30</a>                         | <i>Fletcher Cove Beach</i>          |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/VM3ffasWHp4">https://youtu.be/VM3ffasWHp4</a>   | <i>Fletcher Cove</i>                |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/1KaBxsgeeoE">https://youtu.be/1KaBxsgeeoE</a>   | <i>City Song</i>                    |
| <b>THE PLAZA</b>  | <b>27</b>                           |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/ZQHKMF99exc">https://youtu.be/ZQHKMF99exc</a>   | <i>Outdoor Dining</i>               |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/L_3946LF8AY">https://youtu.be/L_3946LF8AY</a>   | <i>Fiesta 2024</i>                  |
| <b>HIGHWAY 101</b>  | <b>32</b>                           |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4nE_M-FNfY&amp;t=8s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4nE_M-FNfY&amp;t=8s</a>       | <i>Revitalization Project</i>       |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvL_ZNjfP0U&amp;t=47s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvL_ZNjfP0U&amp;t=47s</a>     | <i>Cliff St. Bridge</i>             |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyKBR_7nUxo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyKBR_7nUxo</a>                         | <i>Replanting of Torrey Pines</i>   |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4nE_M-FNfY&amp;t=2s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4nE_M-FNfY&amp;t=2s</a>       | <i>101 Revitalization</i>           |
| <a href="#">Hwy 101 Part 3g1 California-San Diego County-Solana Beach Part 1 - YouTube</a>                                    | <i>101</i>                          |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/MhCsFB0kSxM">https://youtu.be/MhCsFB0kSxM</a>   | <i>Distillery Nightclub</i>         |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/CiglLdFWL_I">https://youtu.be/CiglLdFWL_I</a>   | <i>Solana Succulents</i>            |
| <b>CEDROS</b>   | <b>44</b>                           |
| <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSAhfnoegZE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSAhfnoegZE</a>                         | <i>Design District</i>              |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/nKW6-ILZtxQ">https://youtu.be/nKW6-ILZtxQ</a>   | <i>COVID shopping</i>               |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/TCiO4s49aKk">https://youtu.be/TCiO4s49aKk</a>   | <i>Shopping</i>                     |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/y19y1zKyBiA">https://youtu.be/y19y1zKyBiA</a>   | <i>Farmers Market</i>               |
| <b>LA COLONIA</b>   | <b>51</b>                           |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/hAsUnrsC9Fo">https://youtu.be/hAsUnrsC9Fo</a>   | <i>La Colonia</i>                   |
| <a href="https://youtu.be/CiglLdFWL_I">https://youtu.be/CiglLdFWL_I</a>   |                                     |
| <b>THE SUBURBS</b>  | <b>55</b>                           |
| <b>THE COVID ERA</b>  | <b>61</b>                           |
| <b>THE CITY TODAY</b>   | <b>63</b>                           |

## Other Sources

<https://studio.youtube.com/video/Fka5xHRE4Xg/edit> *Birth of a City Slideshow*

<https://studio.youtube.com/video/E0opfftfKvg/edit> *Remodeling Projects*

**Video details - YouTube Studio** <https://studio.youtube.com/video/E0opfftfKvg/edit> *Birth Book*

# SURPRISING SOLANA



## Discover Solana Beach — Your Coastal Escape Awaits

Welcome to Solana Beach, the hidden gem of Southern California's coastline. Just north of San Diego, this charming seaside town offers everything you love about the coast—with a vibe that's all its own.

### Breathtaking Scenery

Nestled between two natural lagoons and rising gently from the Pacific shoreline to the hills beyond, Solana Beach offers stunning ocean, lagoon, and mountain views at every turn.

### Art Everywhere You Look

From colorful murals to creative public installations, art is woven into the city's streets and spaces—adding even more beauty to your beach strolls.

### Small-Town Fun, Big-Time Relaxation

Join the locals for lively parades, family-friendly street fairs, summer concerts, and movie nights in our beachside park. There's always something happening—yet it never feels crowded.

### Unique Shopping & Dining

Explore the Cedros Avenue Design District, packed with one-of-a-kind boutiques, art galleries, cafes, and cozy eateries. It's a favorite for locals and visitors alike.

### Laid-Back, Year-Round Paradise

Enjoy temperate weather in every season, perfect for beach days, trail walks, or simply soaking in the coastal calm.

Advertisements, such as the one above, are found on Visit Solana Beach websites, social media pages, or real estate listings and may vary in wording. Still, they all share the same sentiment - **Solana Beach is a special place.**

Yet, beyond its coastal charm and extensive business district, Solana Beach carries a rich and fascinating history that continues to shape its identity today.

Solana Beach, officially incorporated as a city in 1986, had long established itself as a unique community. Initially, its business district catered to visitors heading to the County Fairgrounds and the Del Mar Racetrack. By the time of incorporation, significant transformations were underway. The once-prevalent trailer parks had largely disappeared, leaving only a few remnants. Old service stations still stood, though their original functions had vanished over time. Meanwhile, Cedros Avenue was undergoing a remarkable transformation. In the 1950s, defense contractor William S. Jack constructed Quonset huts along this avenue to house his **BILL JACK SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMPANY**. Initially used for manufacturing, these lightweight, semi-circular, prefabricated structures have since been repurposed into boutique shops and imaginative spaces, contributing to the avenue's evolution into a beloved arts and design district.

From its earliest days, Solana Beach was a City determined to define itself. Through collaboration among residents, the business community, and city leadership, a vision emerged that emphasized thoughtful growth, economic sustainability, and a unique identity that distinguished it from neighboring coastal towns.

In the following sections, we will delve into this evolution, examining the pivotal moments that shaped Solana Beach's business community and highlighting the various individuals instrumental in transforming this once waystation-oriented town into a thriving coastal destination.

# INVENTING A CALIFORNIA BEACH TOWN

When Solana Beach was incorporated in 1986, the original parcel's land covered only 201 acres of mostly undeveloped land, which had been purchased 64 years prior. Over time, the area transformed from a rural coastal outpost into a thriving community. Its development was shaped by land use planning, infrastructure expansion, and key figures like Colonel Ed Fletcher, whose vision helped lay the foundation for the town's early growth.

Following the construction of Lake Hodges Dam, a project led by Col. Fletcher, water became available to the area, leading to the cultivation of farmland along the outskirts of what would become Solana Beach. These agricultural lands produced avocados, flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Following World War II, the nationwide housing boom led to rapid expansion in the region, as single-family homes and small subdivisions replaced farmland. The completion of Interstate 5 in the 1960s spurred even further development, helping extend Solana Beach eastward.

**Early Development (1920s–1940s)** - Colonel Ed Fletcher, a prominent land developer in San Diego County, played a central role in establishing Solana Beach. In 1922, he and his business partners acquired land in the area and began promoting it as a desirable coastal community. The Santa Fe Land & Water Company was formed two years later to develop residential properties and infrastructure. In 1924, Col. Fletcher used Lake Hodges water to lower a section of the ocean bluff to provide easier access to what became the town's main beach.

Laying out a new town required careful planning. Highway 101 and the Santa Fe Railroad bisected the land, while the surrounding lagoons made access challenging. Main roads were laid out to extend eastward from the coast, with residential streets running north-south to maximize ocean views. This feature would later become a defining characteristic of Solana Beach real estate. The concept of “View Assessments,” now part of the Solana Beach municipal code, evolved from these early considerations.

In addition to road access and the running water that Lake Hodges provided, the town required sewer infrastructure. Early single-family homes and businesses relied on septic systems, while wells provided water. Over time, sewer pipelines and pump stations were installed, beginning with the Solana Beach Pump Station, located adjacent to Highway 101 in the San Elijo Lagoon, which moves waste to treatment facilities in Encinitas. Today, several pumping stations serve the City.

The expansion of electricity and telecommunications also played a crucial role in early development. By the 1920s and 1930s, **San Diego Consolidated Gas & Electric Company** extended power lines northward, supplying homes and businesses with electricity. Telephone poles carried electrical and communication lines, which remained in place until electrical undergrounding efforts, particularly in the downtown area, modernized these services.

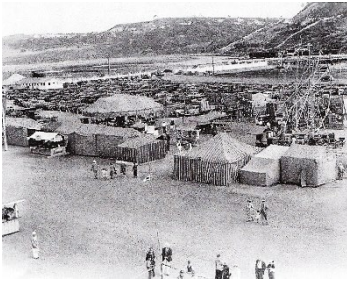
Managing stormwater runoff presented another challenge due to Solana Beach's naturally sloping terrain. Early drainage systems relied on culverts and natural channels. Local children once rafted on Stevens Creek, one such natural channel, which was later partly covered to create **LA COLONIA PARK**. One flood-prone area along Cedros Avenue persisted even after commercial development. This issue was finally addressed with the "Big Dig" (a project that lowered railroad tracks below street level), which redirected stormwater through underground systems into the Pacific Ocean, San Elijo Lagoon, and San Dieguito River.

Solana Beach's connectivity improved by establishing the **SANTA FE RAILROAD STATION**, now the Solana Beach Amtrak Station site. This rail link supported commerce and real estate development, while businesses such as small markets, cafes, and service stations along Highway 101 catered to both travelers and locals.

Colonel Fletcher's influence extended beyond City boundaries. In 1922, he convinced the 22nd District Agricultural Association to establish the **SAN DIEGO COUNTY FAIR** in Del Mar. The Fairgrounds significantly impacted Solana Beach's commercial corridor along Highway 101 and Via De La Valle, contributing to the City's economy.

**Growth as a Coastal Community (1940s–1960s)** - After World War II, Solana Beach attracted veterans and young families seeking an affordable coastal lifestyle. As residential neighborhoods expanded, new businesses emerged along Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue, including hardware stores, grocery stores, and surf shops, some of which became local icons. The expansion of the former Skyline Drive, now called Lomas Santa Fe Drive, improved access to inland areas, encouraging further growth.

**Establishing a Town Identity (1960s–1980s)** By the 1960s, Solana Beach had a well-established business district and a growing residential population. While not incorporated until 1986, the locals increasingly referred to it as a "town."



The **DEL MAR FAIRGROUNDS AND RACETRACK** brought tourism and commerce to the area. Cedros Avenue gained recognition for its artistic community, setting the stage for what would later become the



**Cedros Design District.**

### **Becoming a City (1986–Present)**

As growth continued, residents sought greater control over local development. By the 1980s, concerns over zoning, municipal services, and infrastructure prompted a push for incorporation. One of the motivations for this was the construction of condos along South Sierra Avenue on the bluffs overlooking the ocean in the mid-1970s. Many in the Town felt that the County did not care about the impact of these developments on the town's character. In 1986, Solana Beach was officially incorporated, marking the beginning of its modern era.

After Solana Beach became a city in 1986, it assumed responsibility for various municipal services that San Diego County had previously provided. One of the most significant changes was taking control of law enforcement. Rather than establishing its own police department, the City contracted with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department to continue providing law enforcement services. Fire protection and emergency services also became a City responsibility, leading to the establishment of the Solana Beach Fire Department. This function created challenges for the City. From 1948 until Chief David Ott's appointment in 2003, the City had twelve different fire chiefs. In 2005, Ott became Assistant City Manager and was subsequently promoted to City Manager in 2006 while continuing to serve as Fire Chief for a brief period. He served until 2014, managing the continuing transformation of the early town into a city. Under Ott's direction, the City entered into cooperative agreements with neighboring cities to combine the departments and management staff into a single, enhanced fire and emergency medical services organization.

Public works and infrastructure maintenance were transferred to the City, allowing for localized control over street repairs, sidewalk maintenance, drainage systems, and public landscaping. The City also took over planning and zoning, giving it the authority to manage land use, issue permits, and regulate development according to its priorities rather than county-wide regulations.

With cityhood, Solana Beach took management responsibility for its parks and recreational facilities, including Fletcher Cove and other public spaces. This enabled the City to oversee park improvements and recreational programming tailored to the needs of its residents and visitors. Additionally, the City assumed code enforcement and building regulation duties, ensuring that local ordinances reflected the community's values.

Waste management and environmental programs also became City-led efforts, although trash collection continued to be a service provided by private companies. The City began overseeing recycling programs, stormwater pollution prevention, and other sustainability initiatives. Another major shift was the transfer of business licensing and economic development planning to the City, allowing for greater control over local business regulations and efforts to support economic growth.

The decision to incorporate was driven by a desire for local control, better responsiveness to community needs, and more influence over development and services. Becoming a city also allowed Solana Beach to retain a greater share of its local tax revenue rather than sending it to the County.

### **Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration (2011)**

In 2011, Solana Beach celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its incorporation with a citywide event. A citizens' committee, led by a member of the City Council, took charge of planning the celebration.



One of the first steps was designing a special logo to commemorate the occasion. Local artists were invited to contribute ideas, and the committee ultimately decided to modify the official City logo to reflect the milestone.

The celebration's main event took place at City Hall, featuring a historical photographic presentation of Solana Beach's growth and development. Residents were encouraged to contribute images from their collections showcasing the city's past. The Chamber of Commerce and the Civic & Historical Society also combed through their archives, while the San Diego Historical Society's collection was searched for relevant images. Additionally, The San Dieguito Citizen, an early local newspaper, provided access to its archives.

Civic & Historical Society members gathered at La Colonia Community Center to review these materials, selecting and digitizing photographs of interest. The images

were organized and paired with new photos taken in 2011 to capture the City's evolution. The final product was a slideshow presentation illustrating the transformation of Solana Beach, with historical images morphing into their modern counterparts. Enlarged versions of these photos were displayed as posters during the celebration and later placed in the Visitor's Center near the local train station for ongoing public viewing.

Aerial photographs of the California coastline, taken by the California Coastal Commission since 1972, also played a key role in the event. The committee secured the Solana Beach coastline images from the earliest available records and the most recent surveys. On the day of the celebration, these images were displayed around the City Council Chambers, allowing attendees to visually compare the City's growth over time. These coastline photos continue to be used today at the Civic & Historical Society's booth at Fiesta del Sol, the City's annual summer street fair.

No celebration would be complete without a parade. Every organization in Solana Beach—public and private, large and small—was invited to participate. The streets were filled with convertibles, trucks, fire engines, bicycles, scooters, baby carriages, and walkers, all moving in unison with their respective banners.

Many of the photographs featured in this book originate from this community effort, which preserves the city's rich history for future generations.



## Public Art in Solana Beach

From its earliest days, Solana Beach has prioritized public art as a vital part of the community. One of the first citizen advisory groups formed by the original City Council was the **Public Arts Commission**, tasked with expanding public art in the City—from murals and sculptures to creative installations that enhance public spaces. The Commission acts as a liaison between residents, artists, and City leaders, advising the City Council and City Manager on all art-related matters, ensuring that Solana Beach remains a vibrant and creative community.

The Commission selects, places, and maintains artwork in public areas. This includes acquiring new pieces, relocating existing ones, and ensuring current installations remain in good condition. In 2008, however, the Commission shifted its focus from permanent installations to a temporary art program, which allows artists to apply to showcase their work in designated locations. Entryway markers at City boundaries are permanent installations.



Supporting local artists is a priority, and preference is given to those who live or work in Solana Beach when opportunities arise to participate in City art projects. The Commission actively seeks funding and partnerships, encourages private donations, and collaborates with organizations to secure resources that sustain public art initiatives. Additionally, the Commission organizes and supports city-sponsored cultural events and art programs, ensuring that Solana Beach continues to cultivate a dynamic and creative atmosphere.

One notable initiative was "Arts Alive," which took various forms over the years. The program included an annual banner contest, where artists and students designed banners to be displayed on City lampposts along Highway 101. After several months of public display, the banners were auctioned to help fund their programs—originally at Fiesta Del Sol. Another version of the initiative was an art walk, such as one held along the Rail Trail, where artists exhibited their work, met the public, and engaged with the community through an event enhanced by live music and performances, including stilt walkers. The Commission also reserved the first floor of City Hall for rotating art

exhibitions, allowing artists to display and sell their work while providing residents with a dedicated space to enjoy local art.

Above all, the Public Arts Commission is committed to preserving and celebrating the artistic and cultural identity of Solana Beach. Through thoughtful curation, innovative programs, and community engagement, they ensure that public art remains an essential part of the City's landscape—honoring its history, character, and creative spirit.

### **Planning for the Future: The General Plan**

Following incorporation, early City Councils developed a Land Use Plan to manage growth within City borders. The Solana Beach General Plan, adopted in 1989, set fundamental goals to shape development, balance economic priorities, and preserve the City's coastal character.

A key objective was maintaining Solana Beach's small-town, coastal village atmosphere by ensuring that new development complemented the City's natural environment. The plan emphasized protecting beaches, bluffs, and environmentally sensitive areas while promoting coastal access and conservation efforts. The General Plan encouraged a mix of residential, commercial, and open spaces, recognizing that a strong local economy depended on visitor-serving businesses and tourism. Improving traffic circulation while maintaining a pedestrian-friendly environment was another priority, with a focus on alternative transportation options, such as biking and public transit. Housing policies aimed to provide a variety of housing types to accommodate different income levels. At the same time, parks, trails, and recreational areas were preserved to ensure public access to the City's natural amenities. Community engagement was central to the City's vision, emphasizing public input, transparency, and local involvement in shaping policies. Over time, Solana Beach's General Plan has evolved to address new challenges, such as environmental sustainability, climate adaptation, and infrastructure modernization.

As of 2025, Solana Beach has matured into a nearly fully developed City, with 98% of its land in use. The business community continues to evolve, with a growing emphasis on tourism, digital presence, and economic diversification. Modern planning policies prioritize walkability, mixed-use development, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, particularly in areas like Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue.

The City's commitment to balanced growth and environmental stewardship remains at the heart of its identity. Policies promoting "Complete Streets" have introduced bike

lanes, improved sidewalks, and enhanced public spaces to reduce car dependence and foster a more vibrant, connected community.

### **Land Use Plan Update**

The Solana Beach Land Use Plan (LUP) was designed to guide the City's development, conservation efforts, and long-term growth strategies. It designates land use categories, with residential areas accounting for 56% of the City, commercial zones for 4%, recreation and open spaces for 13%, public or institutional uses for 4%, and so forth. Commercial activity is concentrated along Highway 101, Cedros Avenue, and Lomas Santa Fe Drive, while parks, beaches, and golf courses preserve natural spaces.

The LUP plan emphasizes smart growth, encouraging pedestrian-friendly and mixed-use developments while supporting economic vitality. It prioritizes environmental protection through policies that preserve coastal resources, manage impacts of predicted sea-level rise, and maintain open spaces. Transportation strategies focus on improving mobility through biking, walking, and public transit.

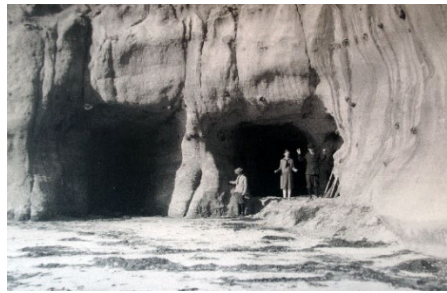
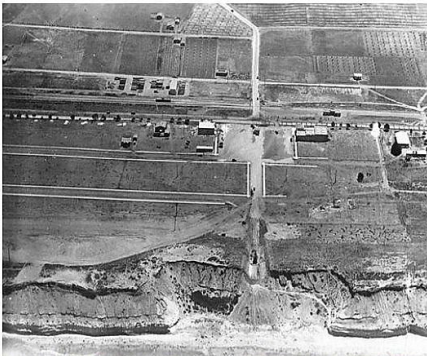
The City's Local Coastal Program (LCP) aligns with the California Coastal Act, ensuring that development in the coastal zone remains sustainable and environmentally responsible. Policies address shoreline management, wetland buffers, and climate adaptation to protect Solana Beach's coastal environment. The overarching goal was to strike a balance between economic growth and environmental concerns while preserving the City's small-town charm and high quality of life.



The City commissioned this photo as the cover for the Land Use Plan. It was captured by helicopter, and a series of images were stitched together to create the panoramic

view of Solana Beach. The photo was enlarged and placed over the Council table in the Council Meeting Chambers.

From its origins as a rural outpost to its emergence as a distinctive coastal City, Solana Beach's journey reflects a balance of preservation and progress, shaped by visionary leadership, community engagement, and a deep appreciation for its unique coastal setting.

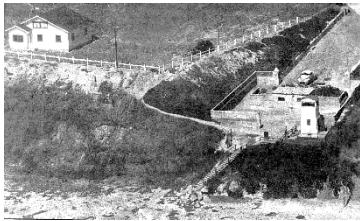


**EARLY VIEWS OF THE PLAZA AND BLUFFS**

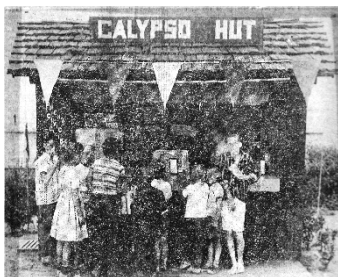
# FLETCHER COVE

The story of Solana Beach (which means “a sunny place”) begins on the City’s western edge, where the ocean, bluffs, and beaches define Solana Beach’s landscape and give the town its name. Along this coastline, the bluffs rise to one hundred feet in places, shaping the shoreline that has drawn residents and visitors alike for generations. To the north, a beach forms at the outflow of the **San Elijo Lagoon**, fed by Escondido Creek, while to the south, another beach is shaped where the **San Dieguito Lagoon** meets the Pacific Ocean. At the heart of this section of coastline lies **Fletcher Cove Beach and Park**, where the City’s story truly begins. Named after Col. Ed Fletcher, the founder of Solana Beach, Fletcher Cove remains the City’s most iconic and historically significant beachfront.

Commonly referred to as **Pillbox** due to its history as a World War II coastal outlook installation, Fletcher Cove is the City’s principal beach and park. Located at the western end of Plaza Street and the City’s central Plaza. Fletcher Cove has easy public access, parking, and proximity to the Solana Beach train station. When Col. Fletcher first envisioned Solana Beach, it lacked a key



amenity—a direct route to the ocean. In the mid-1920s, he solved this problem by blasting an opening through the bluffs using a water cannon, creating a passageway that connected his property to the shoreline. The bluff opening, along with a man-made ramp, quickly became a major attraction for early residents and prospective buyers. The new access point provided a view and a direct path from the railroad tracks to the ocean.



As the town grew, Fletcher Cove became a hub for community gatherings and recreation, and with the Plaza further established it as the heart of the community. In its early days, the Cove was little more than a parking lot with a lifeguard station. Still, it soon became home to a railroad ticket station and a snack shack called the **CALYPSO HUT**.

The site of Fletcher Cove Park was originally a parking lot for the beach, with a lifeguard station at the western end. In 2007, the City obtained final approval from the Coastal Commission to dedicate the Distillery parking lot across from the Solana Beach Post Office for beach parking and to convert the original beach parking lot into a

park. At that time, it updated the bathroom facilities and improved the landscaping. There was a desire to transform the area into a park featuring a playground, grassy areas, showers, picnic tables, and a basketball court overlooking the ocean. A plan from M.W. Peltz Associates included ocean-themed elements, such as a large sun and a mosaic compass at the park's entrance. There were insufficient funds to build the Park, so the community contributed funds to make the design possible. A local artist, Betsy Schultz, decorated the Park's retaining walls with ocean-themed mosaics and donor tiles.

In 2024, a second major renovation of Fletcher Cove Park was undertaken, resulting in further improvements, including refurbishing the existing tot lot and resurfacing the basketball court.



The Park was an immediate success. The Parks and Recreation Commission, comprised of residents who are part of the city's citizen involvement efforts, immediately put the park to good use. It began what would become an annual event: a summer Beach Blanket Movie Night, serving as a fundraiser for the organization's other activities. Community members strapped on utility belts for this event, built a stage, and prepared a movie screen. A local band provided pre-sunset music. The City Council welcomes the attendees. Booths were set up to sell refreshments, and tickets were sold for a raffle of merchandise donated by local merchants. Among the movies were ones featuring extreme sports, filmed by a local producer and filmmaker. The event continues today.

The Park is also the locus of a weekly, family-friendly summer event developed by the Solana Beach Foundation and City staff called **Concerts at the Cove**. The Belly-up provides the music. Attendees sit on the lawn or in beach chairs. Kids dance to the music. It is a well-attended social affair. It is still going on today.



The Parks and Recreation Commission is also responsible for the annual **Christmas tree lighting**. The Commission provides funds for the tree and ornaments and, with the help of the City staff, decorates the tree. The Mayor and City Council typically conduct a ceremonial tree lighting on the first Sunday of December. Santa's sleigh arrives by fire truck. In the early days, Santa was played by Joe Kellejian, a City Councilman.



A second tree lighting was recently started on the second Saturday of December at La Colonia Park.

Before the conversion of the Fletcher Cove parking lot to Fletcher Cove Park, Fiesta Del Sol was held in that parking lot. After the redesign, the Fiesta was relocated to the Plaza and the Distillery parking lots. **FIESTA DEL SOL** is a festival that has been a Solana Beach tradition for over 40 years.



The **FIESTA DEL SOL** is a fundraiser for The **SOLANA BEACH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**, initially held in the Fletcher Cove parking lot and organized by Chamber Board members. Unlike other beach town street



fairs, the Fiesta incorporated live music from **BELLY UP** (a well-known music venue), turning it into a full-fledged music festival. In recent years, it has attracted as many as 50,000 visitors, and while it is now held in the Plaza area, it



remains a defining event for the community. The **FIESTA DEL SOL** graduated from a small fundraiser for the Chamber of Commerce where the members of the Chamber's board were expected to staff, set up, staff the actual event, and take it down to a full-blown community-engaging event.

## FLETCHER COVE COMMUNITY CENTER

Up the hill, the **Fletcher Cove Community Center** has been another important gathering place for Solana Beach residents for nearly eight decades. Originally, a Civilian Conservation Corps barracks was relocated from the Army's 14th Infantry Regiment at Camp Vista. After the war, local men collaborated to convert the barracks into a community center, adding a horseshoe pit, shuffleboard court, and outdoor seating areas to the site. However, coastal erosion threatened the original horseshoe



pit, and over time, it was abandoned. Fencing was subsequently installed to protect the area.

Since its inception, the Community Center has served as a hub for meetings, celebrations, and civic events.

The **SOLANA BEACH CIVIC AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY**,



founded in 1953, has long used the space for annual gatherings such as the Holiday Bazaar, as well as for classes and local meetings. However, by 2007, the building had deteriorated significantly, battered by coastal weather and years of deferred maintenance. Recognizing its historical and cultural significance, the City of Solana Beach launched a renovation project. **Stephen Dalton Architects**, working pro bono, redesigned the building, incorporating a glass-paneled south wall to capture ocean views and wide patio doors for outdoor access.

Despite the City's efforts, funding for the renovation fell short of expectations. The community rallied together, forming the **Solana Beach Foundation**, a nonprofit dedicated to raising the necessary funds. The campaign, a joint effort between the City and the Foundation, urged residents to support the project.



A mailer was prepared with this message to the residents:

*"Over the years, the structure was rebuilt and maintained by the citizens of Solana Beach. It was*

*the locus of town events and the meeting place for numerous groups... Many residents still remember attending art classes, parties, and wedding receptions in this humble building with the fabulous ocean view. It became the jewel of the public space in Solana Beach. Today, the Community Center is still used by many of our citizens... still a vital and loved facility. Unfortunately, this gem is in need of significant repair... The City only has a portion of the funds needed to renovate the structure. This is a great opportunity for our City of Solana Beach to come together for a 'Barn Raising.'"*





The community answered the call, successfully raising enough funds to hire a contractor.

By 2011, the newly revitalized **Fletcher Cove Community Center** was completed. The shuffleboard court was filled in during the renovation, creating a

grassy peninsula offering a panoramic ocean vista. Among its new features was an electric piano, used by local residents who gathered each month for a community singalong. The Center also continued to be the meeting place for the monthly gatherings of the Civic and Historical Society, continuing its role as a cherished gathering place for future generations.

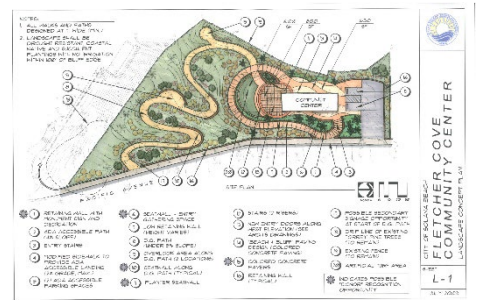




**BUILDING THE COMMUNITY CENTER**

## OVERLOOK PARK

**OVERLOOK PARK**, which surrounds the Community Center, is another testament to community-driven development and participation. Mike Nichols, a City Council member working pro bono, designed the Park. As with previous projects, the **Solana Beach Foundation** led fundraising efforts, and the City provided direction and oversight. The project was largely a grassroots effort, with citizens, local organizations, and contractors



volunteering their time, labor, and materials. Citizens brought their garden tools and cleared the landscape of decades-old pickleweed, also called iceplant. Once the land was prepared, residents brought succulents from their gardens to plant the landscape or helped plant those brought by the nurseries. Nichols oversaw the placement of walking paths and seating areas, ensuring the park maximized accessibility and natural beauty.

A defining feature of Overlook Park is its sea-themed ceramic mosaic artwork, created by local artist Betsy Schulz. Among these intricate mosaics were those crafted with the help of local schoolchildren, adorning picnic tables. The mosaics decorated pathways, depicting marine life such as spiny lobsters, fish, crabs, and octopuses. The artwork visually links **OVERLOOK PARK** and **FLETCHER COVE PARK**, unifying the two spaces under a shared celebration of coastal life and creativity.



Overlook Park remains a symbol of community collaboration and pride, a space created by the people of Solana Beach for future generations to enjoy. Like Fletcher Cove, it reflects the City's ongoing commitment to preserving natural beauty, fostering civic engagement, and creating lasting public spaces.



**PREPARING THE SITE AND THE OPENING**



**ARIEL VIEW OF THE COMMUNITY CENTER AND OVERLOOK THE PARK**

# THE PLAZA



The **PLAZA** was the centerpiece of Col. Ed Fletcher's vision for a thriving town center. Col. Fletcher sited the Plaza west of Highway 101, a short block from Fletcher Cove Beach. Fletcher saw the potential for his property to develop into a sustainable residential and business community, with the creation of the Plaza and other improvements increasing the value of

individual lots. Situated along **HIGHWAY 101**, the primary north-south route between Los Angeles and San Diego in the early 1920s, he began shaping the area by constructing one of its first landmarks, a hotel.

## THE SOLANA BEACH HOTEL



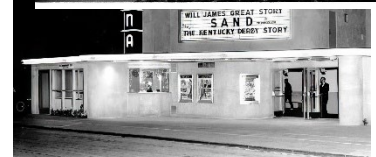
The **Hotel's** iconic stone buttresses were built using stones gathered from the surrounding countryside, and the building quickly became more than just a place for travelers to stay—it was a community hub. In January 1944, the Justice Court was located there. The hotel also hosted the first Sunday School sessions that would later give rise to the **SOLANA BEACH PRESBYTERIAN**

**CHURCH.** Over the years, the building has housed various businesses, including a restaurant (which once raised chickens on-site), a photo studio, a nursery and florist, a shoemaker, real estate offices, and an insurance firm. Today, the building is home to the **SOLANA BEACH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.**



The **HOTEL** has undergone several major renovations. The first was in 1990. Early that year, the **CHART HOUSE**, a national restaurant chain, moved its corporate headquarters to Solana Beach, settling into a building on Sierra Avenue where the **SOLANA**

**THEATER** (built in the 1930s) had been. That building had a colorful history—after the theater closed in the 1970s. It became the **ORGAN POWER PIZZA PARLOR**, featuring a historic Robert Morton organ from the **THEATER**, before



transitioning in the 1980s into the office space it is now. The building was controversial when it was first constructed before the City was incorporated because it obstructed one of the central views of Fletcher Cove.

**CHART HOUSE** required additional parking spaces for its employees, so it leased and renovated the nearby **SOLANA BEACH HOTEL**, converting the rooms into office and training spaces for the company and utilizing the Hotel's existing parking facilities. The Hotel exterior was also remodeled.

By the late 1990s, **CHART HOUSE** had relocated to Chicago, closing operations in its two properties in Solana Beach. The hotel property was converted for other uses.

### The Plaza's Business Evolution

The following information relies heavily on a book published by the Civic and Historical Society, titled Early Solana Beach, for the location of businesses in early Solana Beach. It will describe



developments made since its publication. Although the early structures remain essentially unchanged, the companies that occupy them have not. After building the Hotel, Fletcher located a bank (which later became **BANK OF AMERICA**) and a grocery store on the north side of the

Plaza. The grocery store doubled as a post office. Both buildings were later converted into **HARKER REAL ESTATE**. Today, the real estate office still contains the original bank vault. The grocery store later became a shoe store and a hair salon, which now operates as **DIRTY DOGS**, a dog wash. Alongside the dog wash, various businesses have come and gone, including a dry goods store, a doctor's office, a barber shop, and now a dental center.



Across the Plaza to the south was a former auto center and gas station. The Victorian-style central building, once a pool hall and bar, was then transformed into a series of restaurants: **DeLUCAS**, then into a **DAIRY QUEEN** in the 1980s, followed by **PASTA PRONTO**, then a sushi restaurant, and today it is called the **PILLBOX TAVERN**. At the southwest corner was a bicycle shop, which became the post office and later evolved into a bar named **SURF AND SADDLE**, then **MCCAFFREY'S**, then **TIGHT END**, and today is called **SADDLE BAR**. A beauty parlor and a dentist's office also share adjacent commercial spaces on the south side of the Plaza.



The Plaza served as the original land office for selling property in the new town for a brief period.



It was a hub of local commerce, reflecting the growing community's needs.

Today, the structures remain largely intact—except for the former gas station—but their uses have adapted to the community's changing needs.



As for the Plaza itself, following World War II, local citizens—many of whom were members of the Women's Civic Club, now the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society—led efforts to enhance the Plaza. In the late 1960s, community members assisted in landscaping the

area and installing a median featuring a fountain and a sunburst sculpture, which became a well-known City landmark.



In 2008, the merchants on the north side of the Plaza collaborated with the City to revitalize the Plaza. The Plaza was no longer attractive. The landscape was overgrown, and the trees blocked the view across the Plaza to the ocean. The merchants painted and fixed storefronts, rebuilt the fountain where the sunburst sculpture sits, and relit the Solana Beach sign. The fountain had been off for years. It was used by surfers (before the showers were placed in Fletcher Cove Park to wash off the salt) and by others as well. Lights were installed in the fountain.



Mike Nichols designed the renovation, creating the Veterans Memorial at the corner of the Plaza, moving the palm trees once located in the center median to the north and south edges of the Plaza, opening up the view to the ocean, and redesigning the walkways to Fletcher Cove.

From Col. Fletcher's early vision to today's evolving business landscape, the Plaza has

remained a central part of the Solana Beach story. There has been a considerable change in the character of the commercial buildings in the Plaza area today. New structures have been added, old ones have been removed, and others have been repurposed. Today, the predominant use of commercial space in the Plaza and other commercial buildings on connecting streets is office space. Though the Plaza's function as the City's commercial center has changed, it continues to anchor the community's history—one shaped by its residents, businesses, and the enduring spirit of adaptation and renewal.





**PLAZA VIEWS BEFORE AND AFTER**

# HIGHWAY 101

Until the construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s, Highway 101 was the main north-south highway through California, significantly defining the “beach towns” of the early automobile era in Southern California. The section of Highway 101 that runs through Solana Beach is strategically located between Los Angeles and San Diego. During the early automobile era, when cars were more prone to breakdowns and had lower fuel efficiency, Solana Beach provided several convenient rest areas, gas stations, and auto repair facilities. Its proximity to the Del Mar Fairgrounds and the Del Mar Racetrack further enhanced its appeal, as did the town’s steady growth and ability to meet the needs of both local citizens and visitors.

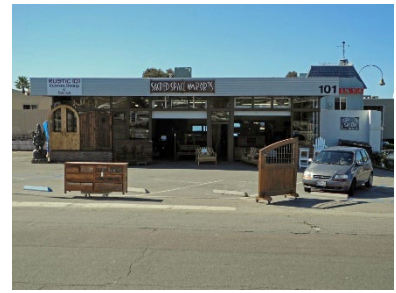
However, the elements that made Colonel Fletcher’s land valuable as a beach community—Highway 101 and the railroad—also made it challenging to develop a cohesive downtown. Unlike many cities with a traditional town center corridor, Solana Beach had commercial development on the west side of Highway 101. That is because there was only a narrow and unbuildable strip of land between the eastern edge of the Highway and the railroad tracks.

## SOUTH HIGHWAY 101

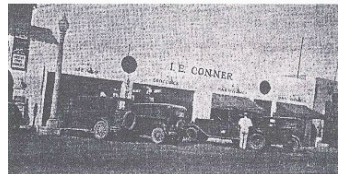
Early businesses along the southern stretch of Highway 101, near the Plaza, included a car dealership and **COCHRAN**’s gas station, which later became **SACRED SPACES**, a custom iron-making shop. Today, it's the **SAN DIEGO ELECTRIC BIKE**.



Continuing south, **KURTZ** drugstore became the **SOLANA BEACH PHARMACY**, another early business that evolved into **BEBE DRUGS**, **WATERS**, a delicatessen, and later **KILN**, a shared office space.



Further south was **CONNOR'S**, a mercantile grocery store with a meat market. The store also housed the town's first library. Then, the section of the street became a barber shop, an auto parts store, a radio repair shop, and the first library building. Finally, it contained **MASUTO**, a sushi restaurant with an upstairs apartment rental,





The location of one of the early homes in Solana Beach was later the site of a mixed-use restaurant and office complex. It housed **BEACH GRASS CAFE**, which later became **SUNNYSIDE**. In 1983-84, a detached garage on the property became home to the **HIDEAWAY**



**CAFÉ**, a funky breakfast and lunch spot.



Many businesses along South Highway 101 relied heavily on travelers passing through town rather than on local customers. The lower land costs on property furthest from the Plaza allowed larger buildings, such as motels like **ANALOS** (Solana spelled backward), which later became low-income housing. Other visitor-serving businesses included hotels and

restaurants catering to pass-through travelers and visitors going to the Del Mar Fairgrounds, the Del Mar Racetrack, or further south to Baja California.

A heavy equipment rental lot eventually became

**REVOLUTION**, a bicycle repair shop and business. The next collection of shops originally included a laundromat, now occupied by **UPS**, a salon, and then



a veterinary practice that evolved into a dog care facility and is now a physical therapy practice.



A large **CVS** store sits next to this stretch of Highway 101. The neighboring lot to the south was a former trailer park and a gas station. After the gas station closed, it became a drive-through coffee shop and a solar company, **SEQUOIA SOLAR**. Behind the station were a few houses, a salon, and a trailer park. The whole property was redeveloped into the **SANDBOX**, a mixed-use complex with offices, apartments, and three restaurants. Continuing south across Dahlia Street, the former **BANK OF AMERICA** building (bank operations were relocated to that building decades ago from the Plaza and ultimately to **TOWN SQUARE CENTER**) was converted into a private office space.





This southern section of the 101 has two shopping centers, **BEACHWALK** and **MERCADO DEL SOL**. **BEACHWALK** has historically housed several restaurants, including national chains such as **CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN** (now **LANAS**) and **RUBIO'S**, which were long-time tenants but have since closed. It was also the original home of the popular **PACIFIC COAST GRILL** before it moved to a beachfront location in a neighboring town. Its

fourth large restaurant, named **BLANCA'S**, closed in 2009.

**SOLANA BEACH KITCHEN** is in the location today. There have been three restaurants in the center since then. The shopping center also has cleaners, a bridge club, and health-related establishments. **MERCADO DEL SOL**, the other but smaller shopping center, is home to **BANGKOK BAY**, a popular Thai restaurant, and **SAMURAI**'s original location, which was relocated to the **TOWN CENTER PLAZA** shopping center. It also has a Deli called **QWIK CORNER**, a bead store called **OSKADUSA**, and other offices.



#### RESTURANTS IN BEACHWALK



Adjacent to **Beachwalk** is a large building that once housed a bowling alley before being converted into an office for the magazine *Psychology Today*, then changed into a fitness facility, first named **FROGS**, then **FIT**, and later the **BXNG CLUB**, which closed in 2025.

South 101 is also home to two hotels, the **HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS** and the **MARRIOTT**, and one of Solana Beach's two time-share properties,



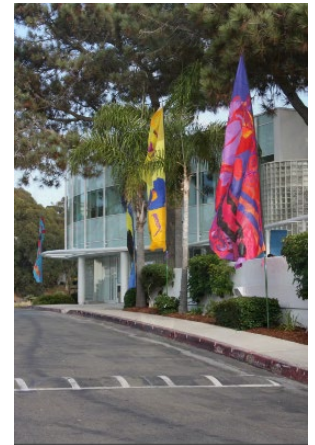
the **SANDPIPER**. These properties, along with the short-term rentals in the South Siera condos (and more recently, Airbnb rentals),



house visitors to the City.



Between the two hotels, a large building housed the restaurant **MON AMI**, which later became **DIEGO'S** nightclub. While the club was popular among patrons, it faced opposition from residents and was eventually shut down. The building was sold to the City and became **CITY HALL**.



Adjacent to the Marriott Hotel is the **PARIOLI** restaurant. The restaurant showed two-reel movies outdoors in the summer for years. Next to the **HOLIDAY INN** is an **ENTERPRISE CAR RENTAL AGENCY**.

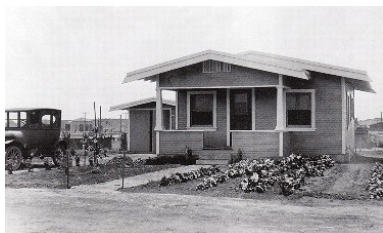
One unique feature of Highway 101 in downtown Solana Beach is that several businesses extend to the street behind them. If the business itself did not span the entire depth of the lot, the rear portion often housed a second commercial establishment. While most of these were office buildings, some areas near the Plaza included restaurants, such as **THE NAKED CAFÉ**. Sierra Avenue, the street that several of these lots backed into, contained several condominium complexes lining the bluff, with over six hundred apartments. Despite being located adjacent to shopping centers, the design of the centers—intended for automobiles rather than pedestrians—requires condominium residents to walk through parking lots to access the businesses. An unintended consequence of the shopping centers being built to service automobile traffic years before the condos were built.



Today, South Highway 101 continues its early pattern of catering to a mix of businesses serving travelers and residents, featuring the same two shopping malls, hotels, a large drugstore, numerous restaurants, and several office buildings. On the other hand, when a building changed its original use, the closer it was to the Plaza, the more likely it was to change into office space.

## NORTH HIGHWAY 101

Businesses along Highway 101 heading north from the Plaza have a rich and evolving history. In its early days, the area saw little development. The first building from the corner of the Plaza became **HOMELIFT** and was later transformed into a rug store with a resident interior designer on the premises. A spearfishing shop followed; today, it is inhabited by EPIC BICYCLES. One private home eventually became **LOVE'S** restaurant and the **TEDDY BEAR CAFE** before becoming **SUSHI STATION**.



A row of restaurants follows, including **PIZZA PORT**, **MANDARIN COAST**, then **TIDEWATER BAR**, and today, **CHAUNCEY'S PIZZA AND BAR**, a yogurt shop (later a gelato shop), a juice bar, and Java Depot, which briefly became **ALCE** and is now **MIA'S**. At the corner stood **MR. T'S** (later renamed **T'S**) is famous for its takeout Bloody Mary mix. Among these businesses was **PAM'S PLACE**, an eclectic shop offering goods for both tourists and residents.



offering goods for both tourists and residents.



The Fuller family owns a significant portion of this block, extending from Highway 101 to Acacia Avenue. At the center of this property is the Boardwalk and Solana Beach Shopping Center, an arcade-style shopping center built in the 1940s by the Bryer Company as an outdoor

shopping center, a commercial architectural design popular in small towns. The arched, roofed walkways accommodated multiple establishments. Because the street sloped downward



from Highway 101 to Acacia, visitors could look through windows at the rear of the arcade and see the lower-level shops accessed from Acacia Street. Businesses within the center included a bead shop, a Pilates Studio called **PEGASUS**, a beauty salon, a barber shop, **BL BIKES**, an electric bike rental service, and a toy store/postal mail drop called **COASTAL POSTAL**.

Like South Highway 101, the back street to the west parallel to North Highway 101 also housed retail establishments. Most were professional or beauty-related businesses, with one flexible workspace facility and a tattoo parlor.



Continuing north from **T's**, a former gas station known as **MURFIN'S** was repurposed into a series of shops, including a salon, a doctor's office, and furniture stores.

The northern section of the street also contained a school, the **HANNA FENICHEL CENTER FOR CHILDREN DEVELOPMENT**, and the **VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS (VFW) POST 5431**.

In the 1960s, surfboards transitioned from wood to fiber and foam, and movies like *Gidget* and *Endless Summer* romanticized the sport and coastal lifestyle. In the 1960s, music groups like *The Beach Boys* popularized surf and car culture. Companies like **SURF RIDE** and **MITCH'S** thrived along north Highway 101, with **MORELAND CHOPPERS** next door to **MITCH'S** surf shop, embodying California's legendary motorcycle scene memorialized by *The Wild One*.



**SOLANA SUCCULENTS** is a unique addition to the area, a specialty nursery dedicated to succulents and cacti. Operating for over three decades, it remains a distinctive fixture in the community.

Except for **ROBERTO'S** (previously **JOLLY CONE**), the northernmost end of Highway 101 is occupied primarily by offices.

As with south Highway 101, some businesses on north Highway 101 extend through to Acacia. The Acacia Street properties are separate businesses, when the commercial establishment does not extend from 101 to Acacia. The commercial establishments along Acacia tend to be offices.



## HIGHWAY 101 REVITALIZATION

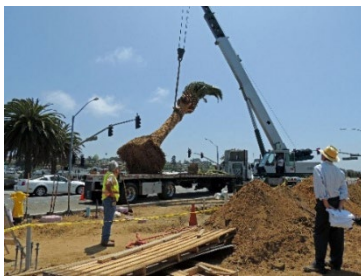
For much of its history, Highway 101 in Solana Beach was more of a transit route through the town rather than a destination. Travelers knew they were in town only by entry and exit signs. The Plaza's layout relating to the Highway and the pedestrian walkways on the west of 101 did little to create a cohesive downtown, and the road's design further fragmented the area. The Highway 101 Association sought to transform the road and the pedestrian walkways west of 101 to capture the same vibrant energy that the **CEDROS DESIGN DISTRICT**, discussed in the next chapter, had achieved.



The streetscape on the business side of the 101, as well as the roadway itself, was quite unattractive. The streets were scarred with cuts from constructing or repairing water, drainage, sewer, drainage, and electric service. Except for some resurfacing, the only repaving was done on a stretch of road going north from Via Del La Via to Lomas Santa Fe Drive using experimental road paving material made with recycled rubber from old tires. The sidewalks were a collage of surfaces poured by the property owners when they developed their property. Some areas were not surfaced at all. The medians had been allowed to grow so that the trees blocked the view of cars going north to the stores on the west side of the highway.

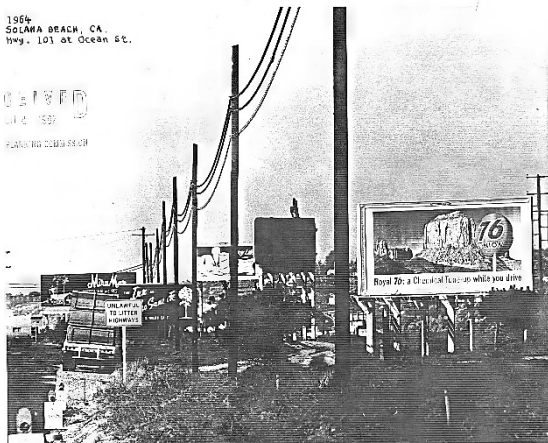
In 2013, Lesa Heebner, then the City's SANDAG representative, helped secure funding through a SANDAG bond. While redesign plans had been proposed and produced in the past, there had never been sufficient funds to implement them. With the bond funding, a designer could be hired. A considerable collaboration occurred with the 101 Association, a group of business owners and operators along 101.

The redesigned street featured curved concrete seating areas inset with mosaic designs. Pedestrian crossings were added in multiple places, facilitating access across Highway 101 to the train station and businesses on 101 and Cedros. The mosaic design by one of the pedestrian crossings is a representation of the night sky on the date of Solana Beach's becoming a city. A uniform design was applied to all bus stops, and the sidewalks were standardized along the City's length. The Plaza was also updated, incorporating seating areas at its corners along Highway 101. Merchants along the corridor renovated their building façades to complement the revitalization efforts.



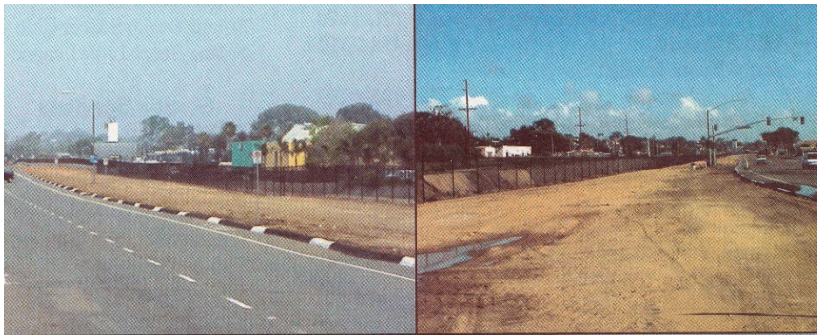
**REDOING HIGHWAY 101**

## The Rail Trail



The existence of the rail line that paralleled Highway 101 and cut through Solana Beach was a feature that contributed to its growth in the early days but also created a challenge for its commercial center. The proximity of the tracks to 101 meant that commercial establishments could only be built on the west side of the Highway. The City addressed this issue in stages. Initially, efforts focused on making the eastern side of the highway more appealing. After World War II, Highway 101 was cluttered with billboards and utility poles. In the late 1950s, the Women's Civic Club (the

precursor to the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society) launched a campaign to remove billboards along Highway 101 in Solana Beach and San Elijo Lagoon—an area known as “Billboard Alley.”



Once the billboards were removed from the railroad right-of-way in Solana Beach, the Women's Civic Club landscaped the area with Torrey pines, Aleppo pines, and oak trees, creating a walking and running trail. They also succeeded in undergrounding utilities along

Highway 101, the Plaza, and Acacia Avenue. The Civic and Historical Society then designed and landscaped the 101 medians and helped establish the first bike lanes along the Highway.

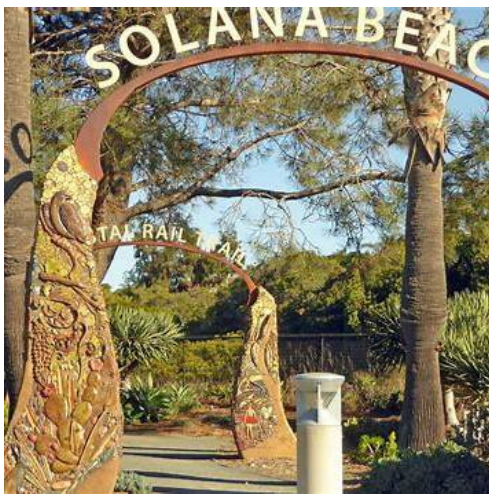
In the 1990s, the North Coast Transit District (NCTD) designated Solana Beach as a primary Amtrak and Coaster station. 1995, the Solana Beach Train was constructed, replacing the Del Mar train stop on the bluffs. The new station became a key stop for AMTRAK'S PACIFIC SURFLINER and the NCTD COASTER. In 1994-1998, Solana Beach Councilman Joe Kellejian, then on the SANDAG board, secured funding to lower the train tracks that bisected Highway 101 and Cedros and to construct a pedestrian bridge connecting Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue. In 2007, the City obtained



funds to build a second bridge over the rail tracks at Cliff Street. This undergrounding, locally known as “The Big Dig” project, enhanced pedestrian connectivity and safety. However, the realignment eliminated the popular hiking, running, and biking path.



In early 2004, Lesa Heebner was key in securing a grant to construct a Rail Trail along the remaining strip of land between the railroad tracks and Highway 101. These funds and some community donations transformed the strip into an inviting pedestrian and cycling route.



The City also embraced outdoor art, again commissioning Betsy Schulz to design and build artistic entryway arches at the south end of the Rail Trail. Many residents contributed artifacts for the arches, enhancing the trail’s cultural identity.

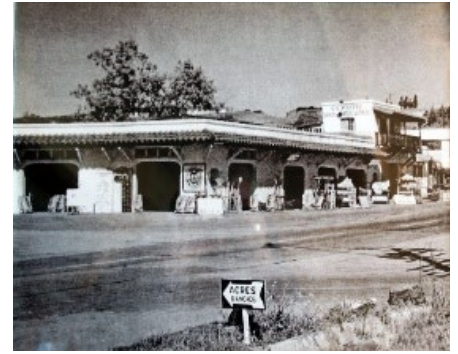


**The** Rail Trail’s development culminated in the creation of **HARBAUGH SEASIDE TRAILS** at the north end of the Rail Trail. The Nature Collective, formerly the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, acquired this property. This property is now dedicated as an open space adjacent to San Elijo Lagoon, helping ensure that the northern view created by the earlier removal of effort to remove the billboards was preserved. It was opened in 2020.

# CEDROS AVENUE



In the early days of Solana Beach, two of the town's largest businesses and employers stood on opposite sides of North Cedros, just north of Skyline Drive, now Lomas Santa Fe. On the west side was **SOLANA BEACH LUMBER & BUILDERS SUPPLY**, and across the street was **WILKENS RANCH AND GARDEN SUPPLIES**, the main hardware store for the area.



Today, the Solana Beach Train Station and its parking lot occupy the former lumber yard, while the **SOLANA BEACH PLAZA** replaced **WILKEN's**.



Near the station, the Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce's Visitor Center kiosk welcomed travelers arriving by train for the Del Mar Fair and Races at the Fairgrounds. Additional information was available at the Chamber Office, located just off the Plaza. This setup was intended to serve visitors arriving by train, who disembarked and headed down South Cedros toward the Fairgrounds. Often, they looked for places to eat or drink before or after their visit. The Visitor Center helped guide

them to dining options along Cedros or across the tracks on Highway 101.

In later years, the North Coast Transit District (NCTD) and the Fairgrounds began to provide bus service to and from the Fairgrounds, thereby reducing the opportunity for the City to introduce itself to visitors. The Chamber placed a kiosk inside the train station to provide visitor services. In 2011, the Chamber, in collaboration with the City and NCTD, upgraded this service with a digital kiosk that provided location information on Solana Beach businesses and featured a slideshow on the City's businesses. However, the Chamber still manned the Visitor Center kiosk during the Fair and Racing season.





A few years later, this service was further refined by completely automating the Visitors Center and shifting any personal interaction to the Chamber Office.



For years, the **SOLANA BEACH PLAZA** parking lot across the street on Cedros Ave. Built in the late 1980s, the **SOLANA BEACH PLAZA** expanded with a second story in the 1990s. Because of Solana Beach's sloping geography at this location, commercial properties had ground-level access to both floors. The first-level storefronts facing Cedros housed businesses such as **CHIEFS**, a burger and brew spot; facing Lomas Sante Fe Drive was an Italian restaurant-turned-health food venue; a dry cleaner; and

what is now **SOLANA FROSTY**, formerly **SUBWAY**.



The

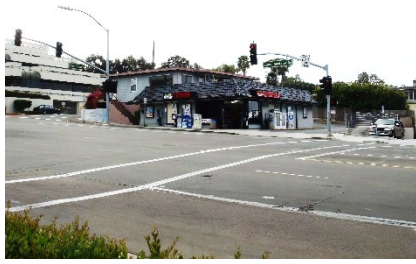


second level of the **PLAZA** includes **THE FISH HOUSE**, a seafood restaurant, an extreme sports shop, and a tailor. Now-closed businesses included a Chinese restaurant,

the **BLUE WATER** fishing store, Dream Dinners, and a wig store.



This Plaza also hosted a Sunday **FARMERS' MARKET** before it relocated to South Cedros.



Across Lomas Santa Fe, just opposite this building, stood a restaurant once known as **SAM'S PLACE**, now **SIMILAN THAI**. To the east on Lomas was a convenience and liquor store called **HOPS AND SCOTCH**. Also in this vicinity, over the stores that face south Cedros, is **PEET'S COFFEE**, which was previously an auto parts store and office space.

Opposite the train station are car repair facilities, a consignment store, and offices.



Further along North Cedros were some offices, a bicycle shop, and **CLAIRE'S**, a popular breakfast and lunch café. The northern end of Cedros was once **Central School** and is now home to THE **SOLANA BEACH SCHOOL DISTRICT** offices.

Further north, across Ocean Avenue, is a warehouse converted into bays, each housing an individual business. This is where **TRIOS**, a well-known high-end art store, has now closed and moved from South Cedros.



South Cedros, often called Solana Beach's "Miracle Mile,"



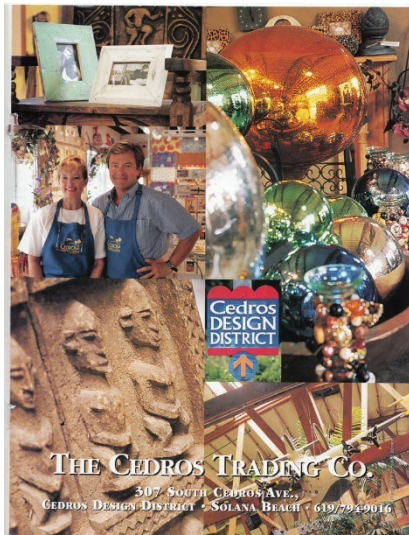
has undergone significant transformations over the years. Originally a mix of private homes, storage, and oil tanks, the area became home to woodworking, cabinetry, ironworks, and the town's newspaper. Over time, these

industrial structures were repurposed into shops and offices,



## CEDROS DESIGN DISTRICT.

The Quonset huts were purchased by Dave Hodges, who founded **THE BELLY UP** and then rented out the other individual huts. **THE BELLY UP** was sold to its current owners.



The transformation of South Cedros into Solana Beach’s premier shopping district was largely driven by Sean MacLeod, who recognized its potential and founded the **South Cedros Property Owners Association (SCOPA)**. **SCOPA** was a coalition of 26 local property owners, formed by S. Cedros Property owners Dave Hodges, Jim King, Gerry Biddulph, Harvey Hertzberg, Carl Turnbull, and Henry Davis. This group established a system of self-assessed fees based on square footage, which they used to fund improvements and negotiate City support for their initiatives. MacLeod owned **ART INDUSTRIA**, a warehouse that he transformed into **444** (former **TELEDYNE MANUFACTURING**), a conglomerate of small shops, one of the first on the street. He, as leader of **SCOPA**,

initiated the first major upgrades along the street in the early 1980s, which included the installation of sidewalks, curbs, and gutters, the undergrounding of utilities, and the addition of pedestrian streetlights, making the street more pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing. **SCOPA** operated as if the street were under a single owner, keeping it clean and attractive.

They turned the street into a kind of “Midway” with sights and treats along the half-mile of stores. Only one small restaurant, **BELLY UP TAVERN**, was on the strip. But there were a couple of coffee shops, including **ZINC’S**, which became **LOFTY’S**, a popular stop. Other South Cedros businesses include an enclave called **THE VILLAGE** at the south end of

Cedros with a breakfast place called **LOCKWOOD TABLE CAFÉ** and later, **HOMESTEAD CAFÉ**. These coffee houses and places like **CARRUTH CELLARS**, an urban wine tasting room, and **CULTURE BREWING COMPANY**, a craft beer place (which used to be the **CULLIGAN WATER SOFTENER** store), encouraged people to slow down and rest before continuing to shop. Today, there are even more coffee shops and another restaurant called **RARE SOCIETY**.

Over time, the district was further enhanced with public art, bright colors, and decorative elements that gave it a distinct and vibrant character. Even the utility boxes were painted.



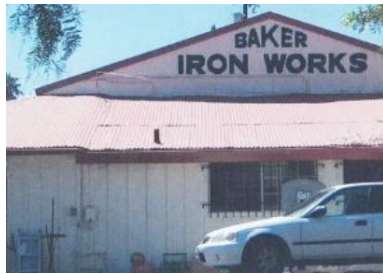
In 1997, the Cedros Design District street arches were installed. Their curved silhouette was designed to reflect the Quonset huts. The goal was to attract visitors from the Fairgrounds and Races and establish Cedros as a destination similar to **Balboa Park**, **Old Town**, the **Gaslamp Quarter**, or **Little Italy**, though on a smaller scale.



The Cedros Design District thrived with several key businesses that became major draws for shoppers. The **DAVID ALLEN COLLECTION** highlights artistic wood creations crafted from raw tree cuts sourced from jungle forests in Southeastern Asia alongside Indigenous art from the same regions. **SOLO** housed a collective of interior designers, each with curated décor collections. **LEAPING LOTUS** was a multi-vendor marketplace offering what it advertised as “100 shops” of home décor, gifts, and artisan products. The **ANTIQUE WAREHOUSE**, now closed, was a converted skating rink transformed into an antique marketplace with



individual vendor spaces. **MIA'S GARDEN** specializes in plants for both indoor and outdoor decoration. **TRIOS** was one of many art stores. **MUTROPOLIS** caters to pet owners with specialty pet products.

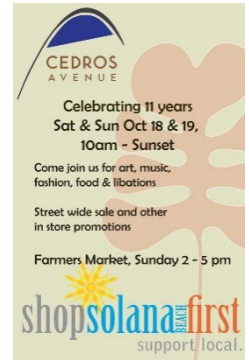


**BEFORE AND AFTER**



**JUST AFTER**

Restaurants, boutiques, jewelry stores, furniture shops, and coffeehouses contributed to its reputation as a place with a lively atmosphere, hosting events such as street parties, WWII-era searchlights, Italian chalk art, jazz bands, wine bottling, and street performers on stilts. The relocation of the **Farmers' Market** to the south end of Cedros, on the sidewalk in front of the 444 building, further encouraged Sunday strolls, creating a vibrant “see and be seen” spot for locals. Marketing efforts by **South Cedros Associates** ensured that nearly every promotional material or video about Solana Beach highlighted the Cedros Design District as a must-visit destination.

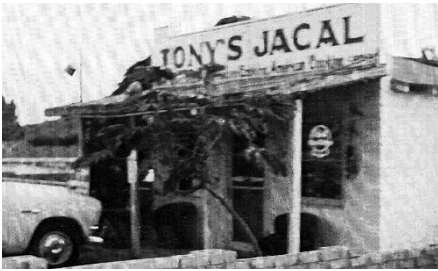


In recent years, changes in the District’s retail landscape are altering its original character. Office spaces replaced the 100 shops of **LEAPING LOTUS**, while **WEST ELM FURNITURE** took over the space formerly occupied by the small individual stalls of **ANTIQUE WAREHOUSE**. If the advertised number of retail stores in Cedros' marketplaces was accurate, recent transitions have resulted in fewer operating retail spaces, reducing the variety of shopping options available to visitors. **MIA’S GARDENS** was redeveloped into a mixed-use complex that includes offices, apartments, and the **RARE SOCIETY** restaurant. **TRIOS** relocated to North Cedros but has since closed.

As Solana Beach continues to evolve, Cedros Avenue remains an example of its commitment to blending history, commerce, and creativity, ensuring its place as a must-visit destination for years to come.

# LA COLONIA

Between Cedros and the suburban neighborhoods east of Interstate 5 lies **LA COLONIA**, a historic community that predates Solana Beach. Established around 1920, La Colonia was originally home to Mexican American workers who tended the region's citrus groves. Today, it is well known for its authentic Mexican restaurants, including **TONY'S JACAL** and **FIDEL'S**, which grew from serving a local clientele to becoming popular with visitors from the County Fair and Racetrack and patrons from San Diego County. The area has also been home to skilled craftsmen and builders. **BAKER IRON WORKS**, a long-standing Solana Beach institution since 1927, was responsible for producing the support structure of the Sunburst sculpture in Solana Beach Plaza.



**LA COLONIA RESTAURANTS**

At the heart of La Colonia is **LA COLONIA PARK**.

Every year, on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, ceremonies are held to honor and recognize military veterans and first responders' service and sacrifices. The City of Solana Beach annually hosts the event in collaboration with the **Solana Beach Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5431**, established in 1947. It is the same ceremony every year.

The event begins with the **Camp Pendleton Young Marines** presenting the national and state flags, setting a respectful tone for the ceremony. Music plays a big role in the gathering, with the **Santa Fe Christian School Band** performing patriotic songs. Throughout the event, guest speakers, including veterans and local leaders, share personal stories and reflections on what military service means to them and the community. In addition to the public and City officials, the veterans appear in uniform. The band plays a song presenting each branch of the service, and the service members stand and salute.

One of the most moving moments of the ceremony is the dove release, known as “Feathers from Heaven.” This symbolic gesture honors those who have served and sacrificed, offering a peaceful tribute. After the ceremony, everyone is invited to enjoy light refreshments, creating an opportunity to connect with neighbors, veterans, and their families in a relaxed and welcoming setting.



Another of the City's tributes to those who served is in the Plaza. Eight palm trees are planted in the Plaza in remembrance of those who gave their lives. La Colonia has a wall of photos in its Community Center to honor those from La Colonia who served. In 2014, the Veterans' Honor Courtyard at La Colonia Park in Solana Beach was dedicated. This courtyard serves as another location to honor and commemorate them.

La Colonia Park is also the site of another Festival, **Día de los Muertos**. This annual celebration, co-sponsored by the City of Solana Beach and the **La Colonia Community Foundation**, honors the Mexican tradition of remembering and celebrating deceased loved ones.

The festival features traditional altars, live music, folk dancing performances, children's activities, diverse food options, and vendor merchandise. Proceeds support

community initiatives, including college scholarships, food distributions, and youth and family programs.

La Colonia also hosts its own December tree-lighting ceremony, featuring traditional holiday treats for children, including Mexican sweet bread and Mexican hot chocolate.

The Parks and Recreation Committee has held a **Paws In the Park** event for pets and their owners.



In 2019, the City constructed **LA COLONIA SKATEPARK**, a 5,500-square-foot concrete skatepark that features a variety of amenities suitable for skateboarders of all skill levels.

The park has been used as a soccer field and for other

sports for years. Recent renovations have included upgrading a half-court basketball court, Tot-Lot, and pickleball court.



A second **COMMUNITY CENTER** in the Park was established in 1991, with a kitchen and space for larger community events.



The **Park** is also home to the Stevens House, Solana Beach's oldest residence, now serving as the **City's Heritage Museum**.

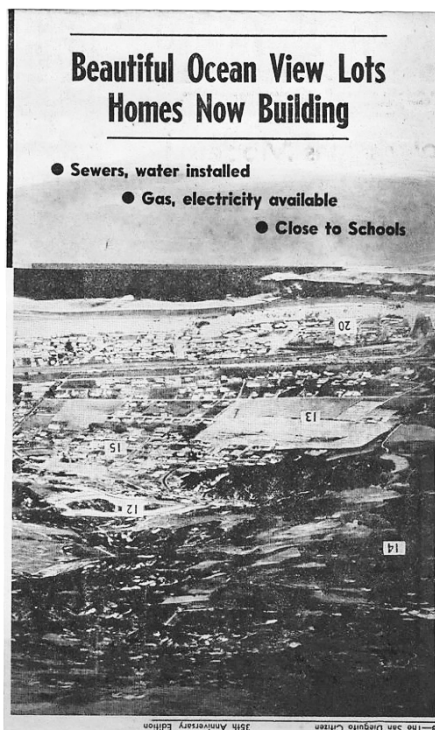
Today, La Colonia is seeing some gentrification. While the neighborhood retains much of its original character, newer homes and modernized properties gradually change its architectural landscape. However, many long-standing families still reside in the area, and cultural traditions remain strong. It remains a vital cultural and historical landmark in Solana Beach, preserving its rich heritage, strong sense of community, and significant contributions to the City's character.

# THE SUBURBS

The suburban development of Solana Beach is closely tied to the City's post-war expansion, infrastructure improvements, and the evolution of planned communities. Unlike the historic downtown core along Highway 101, which grew around the railway and coastal commerce, the suburbs emerged in response to population growth and the demand for modern residential living.

Before World War II, Solana Beach was a small coastal town with scattered homes, citrus groves, flower fields, and farmland stretching from the ocean bluffs to the inland lagoons. At the time, most residential developments were located close to the original town center, near the railway station and the ocean. The construction of Lake Hodges Dam in 1918 provided a reliable water source, enabling increased agricultural production; however, the town remained largely rural. The introduction of Highway 101 in the 1920s helped establish Solana Beach as a beachside destination, and the construction of the Del Mar Fairgrounds in 1936 further increased the area's appeal. Col. Ed Fletcher provided the rudimentary beginnings for a town, including roads, a

grocery store, a bank, and a hotel. The town had to provide the infrastructure in a piecemeal fashion. Large-scale development did not begin until the late 1940s.



Following World War II, Solana Beach experienced a housing boom similar to many parts of America. Returning veterans and their families sought housing, leading to the transformation of farmland into single-family homes and small subdivisions. The completion of Interstate 5 in the 1960s played a pivotal role in accelerating suburban growth, improving regional access, and making Solana Beach a convenient and attractive residential option. With its natural geography of ocean views, lagoon overlooks, and inland hills, the City's development pattern followed the contours of

the land, creating distinct neighborhoods with scenic vistas.

At the time, Skyline Drive was a major east-west roadway through the middle of Solana Beach. Along this corridor, larger land-use properties such as churches, schools, and

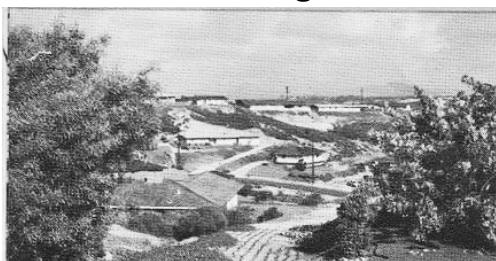
the **BOYS & GIRLS CLUB** were established. Near the intersection of Skyline and Interstate 5, commercial properties—including banks, gas stations, and office complexes—emerged on both sides of Skyline. Another significant roadway, Via De La Valle, defined the City’s southern border. As the **DEL MAR FAIRGROUNDS** area grew, condominium developments, commercial centers, and additional gas stations replaced those that used to be on Highway 101 when it was the main north-south route along the coast, and office buildings were built along Via De La Valle in Solana Beach.

## The Growth of Planned Communities

One of the most significant moments in Solana Beach’s suburban history was the development of the **Lomas Santa Fe Master-Planned Community** by Ted Gildred in the late 1960s. Across the United States, planned communities like this gained popularity after World War II, as returning veterans and their families sought affordable housing near major cities. At the time of this development, **Skyline Drive**, initially named **Plaza Street** by Col. Ed Fletcher, was renamed **Lomas Santa Fe Drive**, aligning the road’s identity with the new development and reflecting the movement of the City’s population center to the east.

Unlike the organically developed neighborhoods along the coast, Lomas Santa Fe was designed as a structured, suburban-style community with defined residential neighborhoods, recreational amenities, and commercial centers. The **LOMAS SANTA FE COUNTRY CLUB**, completed in 1969, became a central social and recreational hub, offering a private golf course, tennis courts, and a clubhouse. The adjacent **LOMAS SANTA FE EXECUTIVE GOLF COURSE**, built in 1973, provided a more accessible alternative.

Alongside these recreational facilities, the **LOMAS SANTA FE PLAZA** and **TOWN CENTER PLAZA** emerged as commercial hubs catering primarily to suburban residents with grocery stores, medical offices, banks, and essential services. Unlike the Highway 101 corridor, which, over time, was oriented towards tourism and beachgoers, these new shopping centers were designed to meet the daily needs of local families.



**LOMAS SANTA FE PLAZA**, anchored by **VONS**, quickly became a key shopping destination for residents east of I-5. Over the years, this development housed a mix of essential and specialty stores, including **ANTHONY'S SHOE REPAIR**, a long-standing cobbler and leather goods service, **SPROUTS**, a grocery store. **POSTAL ANNEX**, a business services provider, and **SALON WORLD SUITES**, a collection of independent hair and beauty professionals. Restaurants and cafés played a significant role in shaping the plaza's suburban identity. **PIZZA NOVA** and **SAMAURI** provided convenient dining options—with a **STARBUCKS** for those who need a coffee break. The plaza also became home to the **NORTH COAST REPERTORY THEATRE**, a cultural institution attracting patrons across North County.



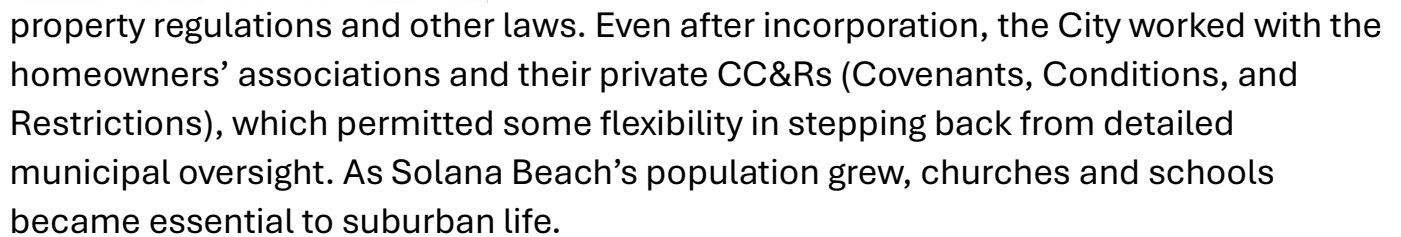
**TOWN CENTER PLAZA**, located near the intersection of Lomas Santa Fe Drive and Interstate 5, emerged as a second suburban shopping hub in Solana Beach. Initially anchored by **RALPHS**, the center featured key retailers such as **CVS PHARMACY**, offering pharmaceutical and everyday convenience items, **MARSHALLS**, **STAPLES**, and **DIXIELINE LUMBER**. Over time, it

became home to familiar national chains like **STARBUCKS COFFEE**, a favorite for early morning commuters, and **PANERA BREAD**, a well-known café and bakery.

Below the plaza, the **SCRIPPS MEDICAL SERVICES CENTER** opened a facility in the adjacent **EXECUTIVE CENTER** office complex, providing residents with primary and specialized medical care. The **EXECUTIVE CENTER** prompted other business expansion toward the edge of **LA COLONIA**, where a cluster of warehouses and small shopping enclaves began to develop, reflecting the area's layered growth and changing commercial landscape.



suburban expansion continued throughout the eastern half of Solana Beach. Neighborhoods such as **Solana Highlands, Spindrift Del Mar, Santa Elijo Hills, Isla Verde,** and **St. Francis Court** followed in the 1970s and 1980s. These developments were characterized by carefully planned streets, cul-de-sacs, and similar architectural styles emphasizing suburban uniformity. Many of these communities were built before Solana Beach was incorporated as a City in 1986, meaning their development was regulated under County laws rather than City ordinances. As a result, homeowners' associations (HOAs) played a significant role in maintaining neighborhood aesthetics and enforcing



Beach grew, additional religious institutions and non-denominational congregations such as **CHURCH BY THE SEA** emerged.

Education was another key factor in the development of the suburbs. In the early years, students in Solana Beach had to travel long distances to school, as the first local elementary school did not open until 1925. As the population grew, the City established a more robust educational network. **SKYLINE SCHOOL**, located near the suburban heart of Solana Beach, became one of the primary public elementary schools. **SOLANA VISTA SCHOOL** served younger students before they transitioned to Skyline. For middle school students, **EARL WARREN MIDDLE SCHOOL** provides education for grades 7 and 8. Early on, high school students primarily attended **SAN DIEGUITO UNION HIGH SCHOOL** (now **SAN DIEGUITO ACADEMY**) and then other high schools when they were built, including **TORREY PINES HIGH SCHOOL** in nearby Carmel Valley, **LA COSTA CANYON** and **CANYON CREST ACADEMY** when it opened in the early 2000s.

Private schools also emerged to serve families in the area. **SANTA FE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS**, a college preparatory institution, was established along Academy Drive and became one of the most well-regarded private schools in North County, offering education from kindergarten through 12th grade. **FUSION ACADEMY SOLANA BEACH** provided a more specialized approach with one-on-one instruction for middle and high school students.



The **SOLANA BEACH LIBRARY** opened its doors in 1925, housed in one of the city's earliest stores along Highway 101. By 1946, the library began a nomadic journey, relocating from one shop or residence to another, until it found a temporary home just a few doors away—again along Highway 101—by 1953.

During this period, Solana Beach experienced dramatic population growth, expanding tenfold between 1925 and the 1950s and doubling again between 1950 and 1960. The modest Highway 101 location soon proved inadequate for the reading needs of a rapidly growing community.

In response, a group of dedicated residents formed the **FRIENDS OF THE SOLANA BEACH LIBRARY**, united to find a larger, more permanent home. Their search led to the **LOMAS SANTA FE SHOPPING CENTER**, where the library gained more space—but even that location was quickly outgrown.

With the support of the City Council and the **FRIENDS OF THE SOLANA BEACH LIBRARY**, a campaign for public funding was launched. The **FRIENDS** also contacted the wider community, gathering support for a new facility.

In June 2000, a contract was awarded for the construction of a 10,500-square-foot library located on the Earl Warren Middle School campus at 157 Stevens Avenue. This innovative shared-use facility was designed to serve both the San Diego County Library system and the San Dieguito Union High School District.



The new **SOLANA BEACH LIBRARY** was officially dedicated on June 22, 2001. It opened to the public on July 5, 2001—a lasting testament to the Solana Beach community's vision, perseverance, and unity.

## The Impact of Suburban Growth

As suburban Solana Beach matured, it created a dual-core economic structure. The original downtown centered around beach access, tourism, and local businesses along Highway 101. At the same time, the suburban east became virtually self-sufficient with its shopping centers, medical offices, churches, and schools. Despite its growth, estimated as of 2024 to cover 98% of available land in the City, suburban Solana Beach has retained a low-density, family-oriented character. The planned communities east of I-5, particularly Lomas Santa Fe, transformed the City into a suburban hub while the City also maintained a connection to its coastal resident and visitor-serving roots.

# COVID ERA

Solana Beach was the brainchild of land developer Col. Ed Fletcher, who recognized the potential of its prime oceanfront location, where the main north-south highway and railroad run closely parallel. A century ago, he laid the foundation for the town by introducing essential infrastructure, including a reliable water supply and a train station, and also helped to create a key economic driver: the Del Mar Fairgrounds. We have seen that these investments catalyzed growth, setting the stage for the community's evolution through major historical events, including the Great Depression, World War II, and more recent challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Solana Beach has evolved through distinct phases, which can be seen not only in residential growth patterns over time but also as shaped by new businesses, shifting business centers, and changing community needs. The City initially grew around a central core that provided essential services, including beach access, a hotel, a grocery store, a bank, a train station, and a gas station. As the town developed, a dry goods store, a market, a bar, and a restaurant followed, forming the foundation of a small but vibrant commercial hub. The Plaza soon became the heart of the community, home to a theater, a dance hall, drugstores, and offices.

As the town expanded, new attractions emerged, including a bowling alley, a skating rink, a nightclub, shopping centers, an arcade, more restaurants, and additional office spaces. Businesses served both residents and travelers, reinforcing the area's mixed-use nature. However, as the years passed, the skating rink, bowling alley, theater, and nightclub closed and were adapted to different purposes.

The arrival of Interstate 5 and the growth of suburbanization further altered the City's commercial landscape. New shopping centers, hardware stores, stationery stores, banks, clothing and home furnishing stores, boutiques, and drugstores appeared. These developments moved the residential and commercial center of Solana Beach eastward toward its geographic center, drawing business activity away from the Plaza, Highway 101, and even Cedros.

Solana Beach is undergoing another transformation, shaped by the long-term impacts of the recent COVID-19 pandemic and by the continuing and accelerating growth of the *Digital Age*. How people live, work, and interact with brick-and-mortar businesses has undergone significant changes, dramatically altering the City's economic landscape.

The arrival of COVID-19 brought an abrupt shift in economic activity across the country. Travel slowed, people stayed home, and in-person activities, whether for work, shopping, entertainment, or socializing, stopped or slowed noticeably. This contraction profoundly impacted the entire community, with local businesses struggling to stay afloat. In response, federal, state, and local governments introduced loan and grant programs to help companies weather the crisis.

The early *Digital Age* had already introduced online shopping and telecommuting, but the COVID pandemic accelerated these trends. Video conferencing platforms like Zoom have become the new standard for meeting spaces. At the same time, e-commerce giants like Amazon and services like DoorDash have eliminated the need for in-person shopping and dining. Delivery trucks became the modern-day storefronts, offering same-day convenience and seamless returns.

Retail businesses in Solana Beach were among the hardest hit. Although we have seen that it is common for specific retail businesses to change at any particular location over time and for many reasons, storefronts reopened more slowly coming out of COVID, and those that did often transitioned into office spaces or service-based businesses. Despite benefiting from relaxed outdoor dining regulations, restaurants continued to experience fewer customers and difficulty keeping staff. Interestingly, throughout the years, restaurants in this City that have gone out of business tend to reopen as other restaurants have. Part of this must be an assessment that the original location was basically a good one. More realistically, it is likely influenced by the fact that the previous restaurant had a liquor license or that redesigning a kitchen was less expensive than creating a new one. Today, commercial space in Solana Beach is becoming increasingly used for offices or health and beauty-related services, with restaurants ranking third in importance.

This shift in the type and number of City businesses has broader financial implications for Solana Beach. Unlike most cities in the United States, which rely heavily on property taxes, California cities primarily depend on revenue from sales taxes, hotel occupancy taxes, and various business fees or grants from other sources. As business patterns continue to change, so does this City's revenue structure. Adapting to these economic shifts while supporting the local business community is essential for maintaining financial stability and fostering long-term growth.

Solana Beach has always been a dynamic and evolving City. As it navigates the post-pandemic world, the challenge lies in striking a balance between its historical charm and the realities of a digital and decentralized economy.

# THE CITY TODAY

In a century, Solana Beach grew from a wedge-shaped 201-acre plot of land that gently sloped toward bluffs of around 300 feet into a roughly square-shaped parcel ten times its original size—2,182 acres, or just about twice the size of Balboa Park. As a place to live and conduct business, it is highly desirable, with 13,000 residents and only about 1% of its land remaining undeveloped.

The picture above the map on the inside back cover shows a City nestled between two estuaries—lagoons to the north and south—with the Pacific Ocean to the west and rising hills to the east. The City offers breathtaking views in all directions. Adjacent to the City's southern border is one of California's fifteen county fairgrounds, home to the Del Mar Fair and the Del Mar Racetrack. Solana Beach also boasts a railroad station; the rail line runs through the City parallel to Scenic Highway 101. The City is easily accessible via Interstate 5.

Like many coastal California cities, Solana Beach exudes a friendly, small-town vibe. It hosts parades, street fairs, and annual celebrations such as Memorial Day. In summer, the City comes alive with free concerts and movie nights at the beachside park, and in December, with a festive holiday tree lighting and a Santa parade.

Solana Beach offers a full range of infrastructure, including six churches, three public schools, two private schools, a library, a Boys & Girls Club, Scripps Coastal Medical Center, and several specialty clinics and urgent care facilities—ensuring the comfort and convenience of residents and visitors alike.

Outdoor activities abound. The City provides numerous trails and paths for hiking, biking, and walking. Residents and visitors can swim at five beach access points or several pools. There are two golf courses, horseback riding facilities, tennis courts, gyms, and a variety of parks, ranging from large to small, featuring basketball courts, tot lots, skateboarding areas, baseball diamonds, and soccer fields.

There are over half a dozen shopping centers, a racetrack, the county fair, music venues, and a theater for the less athletically inclined. Over ninety City-licensed businesses specialize in physical wellness and enhancement—from hair stylists and nail salons to skin care specialists—and the City boasts four full-service spas.

Or, you can relax and enjoy the near-perfect climate and unforgettable sunsets.

