

Tony Mansour owned and operated the largest and most successful – by far – Los Angeles electronics store in 1970s, a time when disco music, bigger and better sound systems and other consumer electronics were hot commodities.

In a recent phone interview he recalled hearing about a town for sale in the Sierra foothills in 1979. He couldn't resist checking it out. A quick tour of the gently rolling hills and sweeping views left him smitten.

He wrote a \$5,000 check as a good faith deposit on 6,000 acres of large undeveloped parcels, smaller outlying parcels and three villages of unsold lots mixed in with roughly 1,300 homes. "I saw that land and fell in love," he said. "I've always loved the land." Escrow closed in 1981.

El Dorado Hills' original master developer, Alan Lindsey, had been gone for a decade by then, the victim of downturns in the regional aerospace industry throughout the 1960s.

Lindsey's default in the late 1960s left one investor, John Hancock Insurance, holding the bag through the recessionary 1970's, desperate to get out from under El Dorado Hills. They'd already begun selling the project piecemeal.

Lindsey's original master plan, authored by famed shopping center designer Victor Gruen's staff in 1962, promised the good life: lavish recreational amenities, vast greenbelts, modern (by 1950s standards) homes, convenient community shopping areas in every village and eventually, one of Gruen's famed shopping malls by the freeway.

Less glamorous infrastructure such as water and sewer lines had been undersized however, with no financing mechanisms in place to upgrade them. By the late 1970s the original water rights were expiring for lack of use and the high cost of electricity had become a crushing burden for residents.

The Mansours retained the village concept, but discarded the balance of the Gruen plan and set their priorities:

- Assemble team of advisors
- Secure water rights
- Establish financing mechanism for infrastructure improvements
- Visit planned communities nationally and interview developers
- Address high cost of utilities
- Preserve the terrain and the trees

- Enlist support of the Urban Land Institute to validate the vision

To prevent any further piecemealing, the purchase included all remaining Lindsey parcels. Community-wide design controls were implemented as soon as possible.

Since the Mansours had no experience in land planning, these vital early decisions required the advice of experts.

Tony Mansour made his fortune buying and selling stereos, but was also blessed with an innate business sense. He quickly grasped the importance of planning, and devoted himself to re-inventing El Dorado Hills.

In 1984 Mansour asked the highly respected (then and now) Urban Land Institute to validate his ideas on best uses for the 6,000 acres, which included what became Serrano, Blackstone and Town Center.

A panel of national experts spent almost a full week in El Dorado Hills. The recommendations in their final report, with minor variations, validated Mansour's vision and went straight into the El Dorado Hills Specific Plan, which passed muster with the Planning Commission in 1987 and the Board of Supervisors in 1988.

If only it were that simple.

Major capital infusions were required, some prior to close of escrow. "Out parcels" were sold to qualified developers and builders, always with strict design controls, to finance infrastructure and enhance El Dorado Hills appeal.

The challenges were many and profound, but Mansour stuck to his vision for a world class community. Serrano, Blackstone and Town Center were direct results of that planning effort.

The Mansours sold the approved plans for Serrano and Blackstone, but retained the Town Center.

The results are evident today: great schools, diverse recreation options for all ages, charming and diverse neighborhoods, superb restaurants, ample retail options and strong home values.