

FRONTIER VILLAGE . . . IN THE BEGINNING

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FRONTIER VILLAGE . . . IN THE BEGINNING

INTRODUCTION

Frontier Village, a western themed amusement park opened its gates to the public October 21, 1961. It was Located on Monterey Highway Road; once part of the old Hayes estate.

A few articles have been written about the "golden years" of Frontier village 1965 to 1970. The days of adventure rides like the tilt-a-whirl and the Apache whirlwind, an electric powered runaway mine train. However, none have documented the beginning, the dream, the inception of the historical park which closed its stockade gates forever twenty years later on September 28th 1980.

The focus of this essay takes place well before the opening of those wooden gates in 1961. This essay is about three men who came together by chance to turn a vision into a reality.

Joseph Zukin, Jr. an entrepreneur of the time with a dream and determination: Laurie Hollings, a creative and aspiring designer and Ron Jabaut, a bigger than life rookie police officer. This essay is about Frontier Village...In the beginning.

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CHAPTER 1.

THE DREAM

Joseph Zukin Jr., an entrepreneur and businessman owned the first service station, carwash combination in the city of Palo Alto in 1957. Ron Jabaut, Korean War veteran and a Palo Alto rookie police officer often stopped by the station while on patrol for a quick check of the premises and a chat with Zukin.

On one such visit, the two men discussed Zukin's recent visit to Disneyland in Southern California. Jabaut and his family had visited the amusement park shortly after its official opening in July 1955.

Zukin spoke of the great attraction for families and the cleanliness of the park. He was especially enthusiastic about the layout of Disneyland. Each section had a theme with appropriate rides and attractions. The men agreed there was nothing like it in northern California.

One evening Zukin revealed his dream for a family amusement park to be built somewhere in the Santa Clara Valley. Jabaut shared his viewpoint for such a project. He was excited with the idea and thought about the many children

in the area who might never get to see Disneyland but would enjoy an amusement park in their backyard.

Zukin's dream focused on a theme park. Jabaut concurred with idea for a Western motif since he enjoyed reading Western Frontier History.

The timing could not have been better. Television programming during the early fifties featured western shows like *Wanted Dead or Alive*, *The Rifleman* and *Bonanza*. *Davy Crockett* part of the *Walt Disney Present Showcase* had developed into its own sitcom. The Davy Crockett fur skinned hat had become a marketing tool for Disneyland in its themed Western area and for the show.

Zukin shared his dream with another friend, Laurie (Laurence) Hollings. Hollings a well-known designer in the valley had worked for various studios in Hollywood including Walt Disney Enterprises. His experiences included set design and designing intricate amusement rides with a company in Sunnyvale. His designs for the San Francisco War memorial Opera House made him a valuable asset to Zukin and the village.

The idea of a western themed amusement park appealed to Hollings. Several names were discussed. The name **FRONTIER VILLAGE** suited all the men as the name for the park. It created a picture of a western town, which was being bolstered in television and the movies. Frontier evoked the idea of the first in the area, the early west.

Zukin recalled a meeting with Laurie Hollings, "We discussed the need for a sheriff or Marshall for the western village. Every western town had a lawman. We concluded that there was no better figure than Ron Jabaut for that character in our own village."

The men thought the title of "Marshall," held more esteem than that of 'sheriff', again, because of what that character portrayed on television and motion pictures.

Dick Barrett, columnist for the San Jose news once wrote in his column, "Share it with Barrett." *The choice of Ron Jabaut for the character of Marshall of Frontier Village was Zukin's greatest idea. Marshall Ron signifies the typical 'good guy' lawman we can all identify with. Marshall Dillon of Gunsmoke is pale next to our Marshall Ron.*

With Laurie Hollings aboard and Ron Jabaut's commitment to the Marshal position, Zukin tapped Michael Khourie, local attorney to join the newly formed Frontier Village Corporation Board.

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FINDING A HOME

Frontier Village began taking shape on the drawing board in 1958. While the architecture continued to be penciled into Zukin's dream, he looked for the right spot to build the village.

He scoured available property from San Mateo to Gilroy ruling out many because of distance to the growing inner circle of technology in the area around San Jose.

Acreage in Sunnyvale appeared to be just the right spot. However, development there and the encroaching neighborhoods caused uproar at the Sunnyvale Planning Commission. Neighbors thought the idea to be very good but the mentality of "not in my backyard" prevailed. Zukin did not want to push the plan into a controversy so withdrew his bid on the land in Sunnyvale.

Forced to come up with another sight, he found encouragement from Mayor Paul Moore of San Jose. Moore took Zukin to a site on Monterey Road. The property, about one and a half miles north of the new IBM plant was the Hayes estate.

The estate lay among the blossoming prune and apricot orchards, which lined the two-lane road from the outskirts of San Jose leading south to the cities of Madrone, Morgan Hill, and Gilroy.

The 600-acre property once owned by Anson and Mary Hayes became a working farm in 1889. The back of the estate, which the Hayes family named, "EdenVale," had been developed into a private park, designed by a landscape architect from Monterey. The mansion stood elegantly in front of the property.

There was much history in the estate. The home, which sat on the acreage, was the second home to be built on that spot. The first being destroyed by fire in the early 1900's.

With Anson deceased and his wife remarried it was up to her, now Mary Hayes Chynoweth to design and rebuild the home. She wanted it big enough for her two sons, Everis and Jay and their families to live in together. Unfortunately, Mary died before the new mansion had been completed. Her sons and their families continued to live on the property and son, Everis served a term in congress in 1906.

The Hayes family also owned the San Jose Mercury Herald in the early 1900's. After the death of Everis Hayes in 1942, the estate and grounds fell into disrepair and eventually sold to the City of San Jose in 1950.

Zukin's only interest in the property was the thirty to forty acres, which had been the original park on the estate. The land planted with Eucalyptus and Redwood trees along with numerous Monterey Pines. The Hayes family had California Oak trees planted for additional shade.

The sale of the first thirty acres of the property was completed in July 1959. Zukin and Hollings decided to build the village on ten of the acres leaving five acres for parking. The remaining fifteen plus acres they set aside for the Village's future development. The Hayes mansion remained on the west side of the proposed village.

FINANCING

The Frontier Village Board of Directors realized additional funding had to be found in order to complete what they termed, 'the first phase' of developing the Hayes property into Frontier Village.

The original figure of 2 Million dollars now appeared to be an understatement. The new figure came closer to 3 million dollars.

In November 1959, The Corporation applied for and was granted permission from the California Department of Corporations to offer approximately 1 million dollars of promotional stock to the public. The stock sold for five dollars per share.

From November to February 1960, the sale of the stock lagged. The board of directors for the corporation suggested that a formal request be made to Ron Jabaut (the Frontier Village Marshall to be), to accept the temporary position of Sales Representative for the promotional stock. Jabaut, who had never sold, emerged himself learning every detail of the company's finances.

He became acquainted in depth with the blue prints for the village and the attractions, which were still in the planning stage.

Zukin guaranteed the shareholders they would always get their original investment back but obviously could not guarantee the dividends.

Jabaut commented, "The people who purchased the stock had to be real visionaries. They purchased shares for something they could not see, and buildings that had not been built. They had to visualize the park from a simple drawing. Most of all they had to imagine what Frontier Village would bring to the community. In no way was it a get rich venture and I made that crystal clear to all who purchased the stock."

Ron Jabaut's presentations pointed to the entertainment for the families in the community with the park and its Western theme. He elaborated on the success of Disneyland in Southern California and the enjoyment of the many children in the bay area who would have a theme park so close to their own home.

A.L. Tanner, one of the earliest shareholders reminisced. "No doubt about it, Ron's passion for Frontier

Village and his enthusiasm for the venture really sold that stock issue."

The tall muscular, soon to be, 'Marshall Ron" of Frontier Village not only convinced prospective investors to buy the stock he also became the Village's number one marketing tool for the pending park.

The last of the stock issue sold in the spring of 1961. Joe Zukin, Jr... His dream slowly becoming a reality; shared that dream with twenty three hundred shareholders in Frontier Village.

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PROMOTING THE VILLAGE

As the stock started on an upward swing, the Frontier Village Corporation initiated a public relations campaign to generate interest in the new amusement park.

Ron Jabaut, six-foot four, 215 pounds, long dark sideburns and dressed in grey striped pants, fancy white ruffled shirt and string tie, with a black western style duster appeared to be the epitome of the western lawman. Marshal Ron wore a black western style hat on his head, a real Smith and Wesson six-shooter on his hip and a shiny silver star that read *FRONTIER VILLAGE MARSHAL*.

The former police officer became the official promotional character for the pending Frontier Village under construction.

Marshal Ron made appearances on local television and radio promoting the opening of the Village targeted for spring of 1961.

A San Jose Mercury-News article in November 1960 featured the Marshall and his five-year-old daughter Denise in a new Model T Ford miniature car.

The vehicle was fully equipped for highway travel but exactly three-fifths of scale model of the original Model T Fords. Arrow Development Company of Mountain View manufactured the car exclusively for Frontier Village. It would be used as the parks "Formal" conveyance for visiting VIPs.

The Marshal appeared before service clubs through out the valley giving tantalizing descriptions of Frontier Village when completed.

Marshal Ron was featured in a full page add in the San Jose Mercury News for the opening of the Bay Mart store in San Jose. The December 1960 spread showed the Marshall and Santa Claus arriving at the new store and emphasized that the Marshall would be signing pictures of himself for the children attending.

The popularity of the Marshall of Frontier Village grew faster than the corporation expected. By the time, the Village prepared for groundbreaking the figure of Marshall Ron on television, at store openings and theaters drew numbers of people to the property on Monterey Road.

They came to have a look at the site where the first historical park of its kind in Northern California was to be located.

Meanwhile, Ron Jabaut continued to research biographies of famous lawmen of the west so that he could answer the many questions children and adults asked.

The calls for the Marshall continued to come into the Frontier Village offices. The Campbell Fire Department requested the Marshall to help promote Fire Prevention Week in October 1960. As an added incentive to their poster contest Marshall Ron awarded the winner two passes to the amusement park soon to be built.

Marshal Ron promoted interest in the park far beyond what the corporation had anticipated. His bigger than life appearances excited children and adults alike.

Terrence Bramer wrote, "Marshall Ron is like having Marshall Dillon step out of the television set and shake your hand. His genuine interest in kids and knowledge of the development of the west makes him the ideal P.R person for Frontier Village. Until it's completed, HE IS Frontier Village."

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THE LAND TAKES SHAPE

Saturday, July 30, 1960 San Jose Mayor Paul Moore, Joseph Zukin, jr. and Michael Khourie, directors of the Frontier Village Corporation came together on the Hayes estate for a groundbreaking ceremony. Amid local news reporters and while cameras snapped, Mayor Moore and five year-old Denise Jabaut, posed turning over the first shovel full of dirt.

Zukin's dream would soon become a 3 million dollar family amusement park. The target date at that time was set for spring 1961.

The plan was to build the park in sections. First, a gay nineties section with central park, bandstand, and an antique train. Second, a section termed "a western town" a replica of an old frontier town. A stagecoach run and burro pack ride would occupy another section of the western village. Third, a mine ride, fishing pond and water rides along artificial rivers. The fourth section an island with an Indian camp, elk, and deer in a corral, along with other animals. Picnic tables and a bridge would complete the island scene.

As the dirt was moved from one area to another on the Hayes property, great pains were taken to save as many of the trees and other foliage as possible. In many cases, gardeners moved and replanted bushes and smaller plants in order to save them to flourish again.

A circular waterway, resembling a narrow river encircled a section of land, which would be named 'Indian island'. A state of the art rycycling system was built to filter the water in the waterway and another pump installed for the future fishing hole filled with trout.

Boulders for the pond came from Hidden Valley and placed by a master stonemason from Portugal. Other man made boulders were placed strategically above the fishing pond thereby, giving the appearance of a small lake. Fifteen feet above the pond, the tracks for the "Last Frontier mine' ride were secured in place.

Designer, Laurie Hollings of Sunnyvale used suspension of the boulders on the inside of the mine ride to give the appearance of falling rocks. In addition, he used fluorescence and black lighting to give the tunnel a 'scary' look.

The fenced entrance to the park, the stockade,, connected two towers or blockhouses that overlooked the parking area.

The stockade and blockhouses were made from old railroad ties taken off the San Francisco Bay Bridge. The steps in the blockhouses led to a platform for children enabling them to look out over the park. The first floor of the stockade was designed to be used as a ticket window.

The 'Little Red School House', the first building on the property was a scaled down version of the one-room schoolhouses throughout the early west. The schoolhouse served as the first offices for the Frontier Village Corporation. Later it would become a complete replica of the original early schoolhouse complete with old books, desks and a multitude of school type antiques. The tower of the schoolhouse held the bell from the old Alma School, which was taken down when Lexington Dam was built.

Railroad tracks were laid for the mile ride miniature train in a circular fashion around the perimeter of the park then back to the train station. The red and white train station with gingerbread turrets, an old-fashioned clock and ticket station office cost \$30,000 to build.

The train station became a focal point of the park for all coming through the entrance.

The North side of the park was designated for the stagecoach ride and burro pack ride. The stagecoach ride would parallel the train in areas known as the, 'badlands'.

The island, 'Indian Island', had been constructed a bit higher than the land opposite. A wobbly suspension bridge built on an upward angle became the entrance to the island over the river waterway.

An outdoor stage erected on the island side with elevated bleachers across the river for an audience could accommodate special events and performers with seating for 200 people.

With the water system in place, paths paved and trails groomed, the time had come for phase two in planning.

Designers turned their attention to search for manufacturing companies to build their scale model equipment.

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FINISHING TOUCHES

With groundbreaking accomplished in July 1960, and the land leveled, water system in place the park appeared ready for the finishing touches. The search for equipment began.

Arrow Development Company designed the scale model-T cars and the miniature old-fashioned train with open seating exclusively for Frontier village.

The search started for other equipment larger than scale. The most logical place to look for other western equipment a little larger than scale seemed to be in the west. However, the hunt for the equipment took the designers to Wisconsin to find a company that could build a model of the old Concord stagecoach and the 1920 -model carousel. Two oversized Indian war canoes with seating for thirty people each were ordered from a company in New England. Since the canoes had to be hand finished, it became doubtful that they'd be ready before the end of the summer of 1961.

It took longer than anticipated to find a trained team of horses ready to pull the stagecoach.

The team eventually was found in Canada through the efforts of James Crane. Crane an executive in Los Altos became famous for arranging big game hunting expeditions in the 1950-1960 eras. Through his connections, two teams of four trained horses were shipped to Frontier Village.

The Village hired Len Johnson former bareback circus rider to handle the horses and burros. Johnson formerly worked with his brother in the motion picture industry as a stuntman. At the time he was hired, Johnson owned a small ranch in South San Jose where he trained horses. He connected with a company in the Palm Desert area for two teams of burros, trained for backpacking they were quickly purchased by Frontier Village. The Village during this time was in the process of building stables and stalls so the animals were temporarily housed at the Santa Clara County Fair grounds.

As the terrain of the village took shape, Laurie Holling, Designer, architect, painter and general brick and mortar man involved with Frontier Village moved along with the old frontier town concept.

A path leading to the right from the ornate replica of the 1800's old west depot meandered into Main Street. Like the footpaths in Virginia City, Nevada, Frontier Village had a raised heavy hewn sidewalk made of boards.

The first building entering main street was the gaudy Silver Dollar Saloon. The faux Tiffany type windows and swinging doors invited friend and foe to enter. A wrap-around mahogany bar with a brass railing occupied one side of the saloon complete with floor spittoons. Tables and chairs reminiscent of scenes from the western television shows of the time were scattered around the room. The walls were covered with simulated red velvet wallpaper. On the far, side of the structure a small gaslight stage and an old-fashioned upright piano. The stage eventually would feature can-can dancers and other local talent of young people from the area. No liquor would be sold at the village so, some of the workers called the ornate building the "sarsaparilla saloon."

Down Main Street, light poles made of painted railroad ties with hanging oil lanterns of the era were placed strategically for night lighting.

The buildings along Main Street were given false fronts or a façade of those typically portrayed in a scene of the old West. A trading post with a hitching post in front, a general store, and the Frontier Village Print shop were part of the Main Street scene while other false fronts were put in between the actual stores to be occupied. A Mexican Cantina built to resemble an adobe structure made of red clay was placed as a stand-alone building. The other stand-alone building was the Marshal's office and jail. The building with the old hitching post in front was a 20x30 structure. With four large windows in front and windowed French, style doors for the entrance.

While building the jail, Marshal Ron asked Hollings to make one of the jail bars slightly flexible. He wanted the children to "have fun" breaking out of the confines. He also did not want a child to become frightened if an aggravated parent threatened to leave a child in the jail for safekeeping. The Marshal scoured barns and estate sales in the Gilroy and Morgan Hill areas to furnish the building. He bought an old-fashioned roll top desk and matching chair, which occupied a corner of an old barn in San Martin.

He felt fortunate to have found an antique picture of Abraham Lincoln in a mahogany frame from an estate sale in Gilroy along with some old wanted posters.

Further, down Main Street, the "fishing hole" had been completed. Plans called for a small building to be erected for a smokehouse. Wooden benches placed around the pond for small anglers added to the attraction.

While the hammering and painting went on in the main part of town, the Indian island took shape. Authentic Indian tepees were scattered about the island. Each one individually and authentically painted was stabilized on the ground with heavy underground wiring. Pens for the small animals which would eventually inhabit the island were made with protective coverings and feeding areas.

With a delay in obtaining some of the equipment Frontier Village needed, and the uncooperative December through February 1961 rains, it appeared that the spring date for the grand opening of the village had to be delayed. Laborers, electricians and the entire small Frontier Village staff worked feverishly hoping that a summer date might be projected.

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MEANWHILE THE MARSHAL. . .

The period between the ground breaking in July 1960 and the decision in April 1961 to delay the grand opening for Frontier Village until late summer due to difficulty with equipment searches and other weather related problems put a hold on many public relation plans.

Therefore, the use of Marshal Ron in his public relations role became the vehicle to keep the public aware of the pending grand opening of the Village.

Ron Jabaut completed selling the promotional stock while hand shaking and making public appearances on behalf of the village as the official symbol of Frontier Village.

Marshall Ron helped the Rotary club of Los Gatos send off their new club President, Ron Briggs in August 1960. He gave presentations on "the old west" to Kiwanis, Rotary and Lions club in San Jose September through November of 1960. Marshal Ron rode his horse, Danger, in the San Jose Christmas parade. He appeared as Santa Claus's escort to the delight of the many spectators.

Marshal Ron became a frequent guest on several San Francisco television stations between December and March 1961. His tricks with a bullwhip, talk on gun safety, and vignettes of the old west became very much in demand.

He continued a presence at the village as it was being built as well, he wanted to have a thorough knowledge of the building complexity in order to answer the regular questions he encountered.

The Marshal's picture appeared in local newspapers and Trade journals. During the spring of 1961, his picture was featured on the front page of a national newsletter for the telephone communications industry.

Marshal Ron's clothing took on a new appearance. He went from the plain vest, shirt with string tie, western pants and boots to a black mourning coat (a type of western duster) ornate embroidered shirts and vests and specially made leather boots. One item that did not change; his Winchester 45 and the hand tooled leather holster made by the famous Hollywood artist, Orval Alfonso.

The Village received a letter in May 1961 from a shareholder, Bud Basolo, jr. affiliated with Durham Meat Company of San Jose.

Basolo had a ranch in Denver Colorado, which he co-owned with movie star Randolph Scott.

One of the few buffalo ranches in the United States. He offered the village a "baby'---a "baby' Bison.

The buffalo was to be flown from Denver on a United Airline flight to San Francisco. The animal would be appearing for promotion of a fair at a Hillsborough school. After the fair, it could be transported to Frontier Village. Basolo requested Marshall Ron be at the airport when the buffalo arrived. Everyone felt this would be a great photo opportunity for the Village, which was still uncertain of an opening date.

Marshall Ron along with Bud Basolo and newspaper and television reporters arrived at the airport just in time to see the door of the United Plane open. Basolo quickly opened the pen door lassoed the head of the 270 pound baby buffalo and started pulling. Marshall Ron joined in coaxing the animal down the gangplank. The most difficult task, as Marshall Ron recalled, "Trying to get the shaggy coated animal, we named Cimarron, into a Volkswagen bus without me being trampled under his sharp hooves."

This was not to be the end of animal adventures for the Frontier Village Marshall.

In June 1961, the Department of fish and Game contacted him. They found an orphaned fawn in the Mt. Hamilton Air Force Base area. If he could come and raise the buck until the village's deer area on Indian Island was completed he could have it. With a permit in hand from the department Marshal Ron went to the Mountain View police Department, where the fawn had been stashed in a cell. He picked up the two week old baby and brought him home. His three older girls quickly named it "Bambi."

In the next three months, Marshal Ron would be called upon three more times to be a pet rescuer, another six-month-old fawn, a Chinese duckling and a raccoon all headed to Frontier Village via the Jabaut backyard.

While waiting for the elusive grand opening date, during the summer of 1961, the frontier village Marshal received an invitation to work with the sheriff of Knotts Berry farm in Southern California. After spending a week in Southern California shadowing the sheriff and the sheriff in Disneyland's Frontier Land he felt confident in his role.

October soon became the targeted month for grand opening of the village. However, in August a date had not been settled upon.

A representative of a gunfighter club approached Marshal Ron and asked if the club could put on a gunfight demonstration at the village when it opened. Marshall Ron though pleased with the offer, countered with an idea of his own. Since he was well versed in western history he offered to write a script based on a factual gunfight in the old west and the club agreed to participate in the dramatic presentation. He felt this type of an act would also make people aware of historical events they may come across in their own reading.

Marshal Ron wrote five scripts based on historical events between the law and gunfighters in the 1800's. The scripts were incorporated as acts in the village. The holdup of the Bank in Minnesota by Jesse James and the Younger brothers, Black Bart's escapades and the gunfight at the OK Corral, were just a few. He also scripted the holdup of the train in the Badlands area and of the stagecoach. Many of the acts were performed until the last days of Frontier Village.

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THE LITTLE VILLAGE THAT COULD

The Frontier Village Corporation had most of the equipment in place by the middle of September 1961. However, the canoes were not ready and the smokehouse not finished the board targeted October 21, 1961 as the opening date.

Over two tons of trout were waiting in the fishing pond dubbed "The old Fishing Hole," waiting and getting fatter each day. Cimarron, the buffalo appeared peaceful, Bambi, the dear and friend Rudolph were content, and most of the storefronts had new owners and merchandise.

On Saturday October 14, the village opened to San Jose officials and other VIP's in the San Francisco Bay area. It was a shakedown of sorts to make sure all was going to go as planned. Marshal Ron, the official greeter opened the huge gates with a "Howdy Pardners."

Sunday October 15th was designated "Shareholders Day." Shareholders and their families enjoyed the train ride out to the badlands. The pretend holdup of the train which halted when the Marshal appeared. They rode the bumpy stagecoach and waved to other guests on the train.

More than 3000 people attended the first shakedown opening.

On the following Saturday, October 21, 1961 with a whoop and a holler and the sound of gunshots the Frontier Village gates opened to the public.

The Marshall seeing the fright of some children during the previous weekend at the bank robbery and shootout acts added a bit of fun into the all too real gunfight. Phil Nosonger, proprietor of the General store donned his top hat and apron, helped to scoop up the "dead" bandit in wheelbarrow, and carried him off. To the delight of the crowd. Over 5000 people attended the village on the opening weekend.

Bill Strobel, staff writer for the Oakland Tribune wrote: *Frontier Village -A young cowboy's paradise. Marshal Ron, the official host at the \$3 million family amusement center, is the embodiment of all the good guys on television, radio or in the movies.*

Marshal Ron and Frontier Village became synonymous.

The canoes arrived and were ready by the following weekend, the smokehouse finished by the following summer.

The hit of the opening show in the Silver dollar Saloon and the outside theater were three little girls, ages 8, 7, and 5 known as "The Sisters Three."

Dick Barrett and Frank Freeman continued writing tidbits about the village. Every new ride and attraction received some publicity. After the village closed twenty years later, two young men who once worked in the village during the seventies, created a website with some Frontier Village history and their own take on the excitement of the amusement park.

However, to this day, nothing has been written and very few knew about. . .

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Joseph Zukin	Comments and his dream
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Terrence Bramer	Letter
San Jose Mercury	Archives
Elliot Fong	Village website
Sheryl Perez And Denise Marchu	Village entertainment information, comments

In addition to the above, I must comment that I too lived through the days of Frontier Village. I watched my husband, Ron Jabaut; go through a metamorphosis of sorts. The quiet, rather shy police officer to the flamboyant Marshal and public icon for Frontier Village. It became another adventure milestone in our fifty-five years of marriage.

Gloria Jabaut