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Venezia: O.C. Fairgrounds drama is far from over



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT
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Readers have e-mailed asking why I haven't written about the OC Fairgrounds since the sale bidding ended. Quite frankly, it was much easier to write about it during the summer when the issue was "to sell or not to sell." This thing's grown a zillion moving tentacles since then! When you consider the hidden and not so hidden agendas, bad intel, conflicts of interests, legislation, flip-flopping politicians, plus sheer stupidity, it's turned into a cluster you-know-what. On "Planet Fair Board " they're more out of touch with earthly reality than ever as evident by their actions giving OC Fairgrounds CEO Steve Beazley a raise and proclamation.

And speaking of Beazley, is he putting the screws ever so gently to Marketplace President Jeff Teller? There's no love loss there. Fair Board member Dave Ellis and Beazley blame Teller for fueling public outcry regarding the Fair Board's ill-fated attempt at buying the fairgrounds or what some insiders jokingly refer to as "Ellis's retirement plan."

In an e-mail dated Feb. 12, Beazley informed Teller his vendors will lose the weekend of Sept. 18-20 2010 as Sand Sport Super Show requires the entire fairgrounds. This needs board approval, but does it make sense? Both have successfully coexisted for 10 years. You'd think both operating in sync would be more profitable for the fairgrounds.

Politics is a gossipy business. The chatter out of Sacramento; the governor's office isn't happy about the path Ellis and attorney [Dick Ackerman](#) led them down. It's turned into a PR nightmare. Some politicians are quietly distancing themselves from both these guys.

And then there's the meeting Peter Buffa put together with OC Fairgrounds winning bidders [Steve Craig](#), Dwight Manley, Costa Mesa City Manager Alan Roeder, and Mayor Mansoor. I asked Peter if it wasn't a bit awkward since CM's actively trying to stop the sale, and buyers hope it will proceed. Peter said, "Not really, we all want what's best for the fairgrounds. If the sale's approved, Steve Craig and Dwight Manley are the city's best bet it will remain virtually as is, only better, more up to date." He explained Craig and Manley are "very open to keeping things much as they are now, only improving and expanding features like Centennial Farm." The meeting was basically to reaffirm it will "remain fairgrounds and to try and get everyone on the same page."

But Alan doesn't seem to be on the "same page." He told me, "We'll continue to do everything in our power to stop the sale." Are the city and the county exploring leasing the property from the state as another option? Alan only would say "We're looking at all possibilities. One thing about Costa Mesa, we never give up."

With all that's transpired, I couldn't help but think about former Fair Board members [Randy Smith](#) and John Crean. If they were alive today, I can't imagine any of this craziness would have ever gotten this far. I know John would have slapped someone upside the head long before this got out of hand. And make no mistake, this is way out of hand, and the players posturing know it too. This drama's far from over.

Freelance writer Barbara Venezia's opinion column appears online and in The Current every Friday. Email BV at bvontv@earthlink.net

Comments

thepotstirrer wrote:

So, Roeder wouldn't answer your question about the lease/option that Gary Monahan blurted out on the radio on January 31st, huh? Interesting... And, Babs, both Roeder and Mansoor spell their first names "Allan".

2/19/2010 9:36 AM PST

mycolumn wrote:

Oh My Gosh, Geoff West is correct, I left out an "L" in Allan's name. Guess my editor missed it too. Sorry for the error.

2/19/2010 10:06 AM PST

jteller wrote:

So where are all of the Beasley and Ellis supporters now? The old statement really does hold true, you can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all the people all of the time. The heat is getting turned up and I understand it is quite warm on "Planet Fair Board." Good, it's about time that this group is finally exposed for both their unmitigated arrogance and stupidity. The sooner they go the better for everyone but them. Good riddance!

2/19/2010 10:52 AM PST

annabelle56 wrote:

I have attended the sand super sports show and there is nothing super about it! It continues to die in popularity. I can't believe they would really be able to pull this off. Sounds like the fair folks are looking for events so they can shut down the swap meet. What a sad situation overall with the fairgrounds. The wrong people are definitely in power over there. What i also don't understand is why the Register hasn't done more stories on this. And Peter Buffa!!! yeah me too no voting for him and i thought he had a column with the daily pilot too. I guess Weird Al is the only one with a brain!

2/19/2010 11:30 AM PST

1ocrepublican wrote:

The Fair Board and Steve Beasley must resign! My family and I have been Republicans for three generations. "The Free Market" is the cornerstone for all Republicans. In saying that lets review what that concepts truly means; Both parties undertake the exchange because each expects to gain from it. But exchanges are not necessarily free. Many are coerced. If a robber threatens you with "Your money or your life," your payment to him is coerced and not voluntary, and he benefits at your expense. Slavery was also argued in its day to be the "Free Market". Republican History has taught us that we abolished "Slavery" and "Incarcerated Robbers", Republicans saw through those individuals that misused the "Spirit of The Free Market".

That brings us to the Orange County Fair Grounds. A group of Fair Board members violated the rules by hiring Dck Ackerman with tax payer dollars to lobby legislators to sell the Fair Grounds. Reason, they could purchase the property, below market value, remove union employees and manage the facility without oversight. They used the economic down turn and "California Budget Catastrophes" to perpetuate their own gain. The Attorney General's office also took unprecedented action in December, cutting their ties to the OC Fair Board, which they normally represent. In a letter to Kristina Dodge, Fair Board Chair, the Attorney general cited conflict of interest by the Fair Board in forming a private foundation to purchase the fairgrounds.

From all the "Visible Bids" it looked like none of the Fair Board or any of its family or business colleagues bid for the property. As I indicated "Currently Visible" but instead this property that has been estimated to be worth well over 180 Million dollars was purchased for 56.6 million dollars. I am happy to report "True Republicans" in Orange County have found this to be a violation of the "Free Market". We have stood up to those that used slavery and robbery as justifications of the "Free Market". We see once again the Fair Board acting out and punishing those that say no to their corruption. They must resign for the good of the Republican Party.

2/20/2010 12:30 AM PST

sassafras wrote:

Politico...I am not, yet truly interested BV. Your eloquence & animated style of writing keeps my interest. From what I understand to read, Steve & Dwight want property, agree to pay \$56.5 million , agree to keep " as is as possible SHOULD the indecisive board members keep out of the mix ", sounds wonderful to me. Liability, upgrading, etc. does not run cheap. The thought of EXPLORING option to lease from State of California who- for whateverrrrr reasoning which shall never set congenial with me, has horrifically strangled Taxpayers in the worst debt for many years, is stupid!! Keep equestrian, keep Cafe`s, keep swap meet customers, keep the established Fair itself each year & stop sniveling about all this. Stop trying to fix what ain't broken, or is it? I don't know truthfully.

BV.. your spelling is great- we know how to spell Allan- who cared & how petty to correct you- one voter's opinion- no big deals.

2/20/2010 10:34 AM PST

cmesalover wrote:

1ocrepublican I think you are a little bit confused about what a Republican is. Most Republicans want government to butt out of their business so they can make more informed decisions, particularly about local matters. The government likes to paint everything with a broad brush, without any consideration given to the unique set of circumstances that exist in different locales.

I can only assume the fair board was trying to "evict" the state government from the fairgrounds in order to have more local control. Being a Republican myself, I found their cause to be more than admirable. What is wrong with private control of the fairgrounds? A lot more options become available. That translates into more fun at the fair.

In my humble opinion, the governor is the one that needs to resign. He broke it, so he should fix it. The fair board was being far more reactive, than active. You need to think about it some more.

2/20/2010 2:53 PM PST

mrkotter wrote:

cmeslover...

The unFair Board is once AGAIN the culprit with another little scheme that has blown up in their feed-sacks. Just like their beloved and entitled-to precious Concert tickets/meals they glutonized from their privileged little appointments.

I invite you to attend one of their "dog and pony show" public fair board meetings to witness these disillusioned pariah's in action.

2/21/2010 10:45 AM PST