

Business Recognition Program: El Real Nursery
April 20, 2004
7 p.m. City Council Meeting



Tonight we have the pleasure of recognizing an outstanding Santa Clara business, El Real Nursery, and the Okumura family who established the business and still run the nursery today.

While the City has been recognizing the accomplishments of local businesses for many years, a more formal Business Recognition Program was established by the City Council near the end of 2003, upon the recommendation of a committee of the City Council, the Mission City 21 (Economic Development)

Committee. The recognition program is a joint one with the Santa Clara Chamber of Commerce and Convention-Visitors Bureau, and we have with us tonight Steve Van Dorn of the Chamber/CVB who will also be making a presentation to El Real Nursery.

This is the second use of the City's new, formalized business recognition program. The program recognizes the valuable contributions that all businesses make to the City of Santa Clara.

El Real Nursery has been a fixture on the El Camino Real since 1954. It continues as a family-operated full-service nursery that sells plants, fertilizer, garden decorations, and even seasonal items like live Christmas trees. Nursery staff also dispense advice year 'round on gardening plant care, organic gardening, and integrated pest management.

John Okumura and Don Okumura, who started the nursery, were raised in Mountain View, graduating from Mountain View High School.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States, especially along the Pacific Coast, feared more attacks on their cities. When President Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 9066, more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were removed from their homes and relocated in isolated inland areas of the United States. The Okumuras were among them.



John, Don and family were sent to an internment camp in Utah called Heart Mountain Relocation Center. Like many interned Japanese Americans, John and Don wanted to fight for America in the war. They signed up, and John served in Korea and Okinawa working in military intelligence. Don served in the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team fighting in Europe. The 442nd was eventually recognized as the most decorated unit in U.S. history.

Like many Santa Clarans, the family wanted to honor the veterans in their family. There are two bricks at the Santa Clara Veterans Memorial with the nursery's name and the names of John and Don Okumura.

After the war, the Okumura family returned to California. John married, and he and wife Jane were strawberry sharecroppers in Milpitas, on the McCarthy Ranch. Brother Don was a gardener and landscaper. Since John had a degree in ornamental horticulture from San Mateo Junior College, John and Don decided to start a retail nursery business.



El Real Nursery was born on the El Camino Real, with Don's focus on landscaping and John focusing on the retail side of the business. It was a family operation, with wives and relatives working at the nursery, too. The Okumura children attended local schools, but could be found at the nursery after school and on weekends.

The Okumura's business has thrived along the El Camino Real for many years. They have loyal customers from this community, from the region.

The meaning of the Okumura family name coincides with their interest in nature. The logo on the business card for El Real Nursery, the Okumura family crest, is the ume (say "oooo-may"), which is the plum blossom.

John's daughter Joyce took over the business in 1979. She says that the Okumura's are particularly proud of their family's small business survivorship in Silicon Valley. They have adapted to change - - what they sell and how their business looks - - to keep up with the times and with the desires of their customers. They have many "second generation customers," people who patronize the nursery because when they were growing up, their parents were guided by El Real Nursery's expertise.



Through the years, the nursery has been very involved in the community. Joyce gives talks to Girl Scouts to allow the members to obtain their life science merit badges. El Real Nursery offers classes at the nursery designed to acquaint children with the joys of gardening. Nursery staff are involved in a mentoring program at Wilcox High School. At one time, Joyce was a tutor in the City's Read Santa Clara program to mentor adults who are learning to read. Joyce is currently serving on the Board of the Triton Museum of Art. The nursery's work has ranged from helping customers simply trying to make their gardens and yards look nice, to those who want drought tolerant plants, to a group of Boy Scouts planting a garden at the Center for the Blind who wanted plants that were noted for their fragrance.

El Real Nursery even assisted the City of Santa Clara in shipping a dogwood tree to Izumo, Japan as a gift to commemorate our sister-city relationship.

When Joyce's brother Jerry passed away in 1992, then Director of Parks & Recreation Earl Carmichael and Teresa O'Neill, now on the School Board helped facilitate a tree being planted in Jerry's memory in Central Park, in a grove of redwoods.

We are here this evening to recognize El Real Nursery which has been a fixture on the El Camino Real since 1954. The City and the Chamber appreciate our Santa Clara businesses and are proud to have El Real Nursery in Santa Clara.

We congratulate the entire Okumura family, and their employees, on their long and fruitful accomplishments in this community, all of which can be traced back to brothers John and Don Okumura, and their extended families.

Congratulations on El Real Nursery's 50+ year's of excellent service to the Santa Clara community.

Thank you. I would now like to introduce Steve Van Dorn, President & General Manager of the Santa Clara Chamber of Commerce and Convention-Visitors Bureau.