

## HISTORY

# Cowboy culture inspires Los Compadres

## Club organized for local riders in the late 1930s

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Before television and ubiquitous screens of all sizes, there was expansive time for friends and leisurely pursuits. People entertained themselves, making music, conversing and playing sports and cards. They cared deeply about their friends, amigos, buddies, pals or compadres. Such was life in the desert.

The desert was more remote than most places, causing those few people here to cherish social gatherings and camaraderie. Visiting tourists were generally well-heeled and could afford more expensive amusements. The locals that serviced the tourist trade had limited prospects for entertainment. So, in 1939, the manager of the tony new Bullock's department store decided horseback riding would be a good pastime for many of his new employees.

Cowboy culture dominated the little village of Palm Springs. There were a good number of stables servicing the big hotels like the El Mirador and The Desert Inn already. The established riding club in town was mostly for wealthy retirees as rides were during the week when Average Joes had to work. Harris Posey, the manager at Bullock's, and a young employee named Ernie Dunlevie decided to organize a club of local riders, regular folk with their own horses. They advertised in The Desert Sun for participants.

Their first meeting took place at the Visalia Saddle Shop on Palm Canyon Drive in November 1939 and attracted some forty people! The club was organized and officers elected in anticipation of the coming season. Los Compadres, as they dubbed themselves, were a varied and interesting group, garnered from all walks of life.

Almost immediately WWII broke out, hindering the development of the club for the lack of available members. But the notion had taken root and was established enough, like many things in the desert, to persist.

Los Compadres' activities were varied but in the western tradition that was pervasive in the desert before Modern-



Los Compadres saddling up for a guest ride in the 1940s.

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ism. In 1945 for Western Week, The Desert Sun announced that the new season was officially underway when "Plans completed by Los Compadres for ... many events scheduled leading up to the grand climax ... when a great Western parade and gymkhana will be staged ... under the guidance of the Los Compadres club," promising a colorful and exciting week. Kangaroo courts, dances and other events were advertised.

"Concessions at the gymkhana have been turned over the Boys' Club for their benefit. Two big dances will be staged during the week — one, a street dance Tuesday night in the Plaza, and the other at the Roller Rink on the Field club grounds Saturday night. Clyde Smith's Smokey Mountain Rangers will present the music."

The Desert Sun in 1948 noted: "Palm Springs square dancers covered themselves with glory at the Hemet (competition) and wound up in second and third place in the finals. Los Compadres team No.1 ... won first place Thursday night, the Oak Glen Oakies took first place Friday and Los Compadres team No.2 ... won first place Saturday ... Harry Kester of Palm Springs did the calling."

A curious headline in 1947 screamed: "Headache." The article continued: "Los Compadres seeking site for former Tor-

ney guardhouse. The Los Compadres, popular Village riding organization, is having 'guardhouse-trouble' these days. It is highly probably that some members of the Los Compadres, former GIs, will remember the interior appearance of these buildings that dotted army installations where they served during the last war — but that's not the reason why the organization purchased the former Torney General Hospital guardhouse building. It is wanted as a meeting place for the members. The headache now develops, that having to remove the building from its present site on Torney General Hospital grounds as per agreement with the War Assets Administration, the Los Compadres have no place, where, if moved, it can be set down."

"Originally, and before the building was bought, the Los Compadres had a site for the building near Smoke Tree Ranch. 'But,' pointed out Phil Delano, seeking the assistance of The Desert Sun in finding a location, 'the place we had in mind is now out of the question. It is watershed area, and the law says the building might be endangered by floodwaters. Nix,' declared Delano, quoting the law, 'you can't put it there.' The building is 25 by 57 feet long and villagers who may know of a site that could be bought, but cheap, should call Phil Del-

no ..."

By the 1950s, Los Compadres had greatly expanded its membership and was completely entrenched in the community, regularly staging gymkhanas, rodeos, square dances, western week, trail rides, pack rides and cookouts of all varieties.

The membership was playing a lot of broom polo, which was hard on the handles, so it appealed to villagers for donations of old brooms which had "worn out their usefulness on the business end" to be donated to the club to facilitate the game.

And a location at the south of town, still quite near Smoke Tree Ranch was acquired for the recycled clubhouse. A neighborhood bearing the name of the club would grow up around it.

By the 1970s, that neighborhood, Los Compadres Estates was on its third phase of construction. The developer touted the prime, wind-protected, south end location still "far enough removed from the foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains to provide spectacular views all around and appreciably more late afternoon sunlight than enjoyed at homes close to the mountains."

New buyers were predominantly locals, not snowbirds. Offering four customizable models, each home included a custom designed swimming pool "with attached hot pool and a completely fenced back yard."

Not everyone in the neighborhood was a cowboy, but the western atmosphere was and is, still pervasive. And the club still endeavors to provide wholesome, outdoor entertainments, even in the age of TVs and screens of all sizes.

Los Compadres hosts an annual deep pit barbecue to which everyone, cowboys and regular folk, are invited on the first Saturday in November to celebrate together as compadres have for seven decades. Celebrate the start of the new season on Saturday Nov, 6, from 5-9 p.m. with a longstanding traditon. Tickets can be purchased at the door for \$18 for adults and \$10 for children at 1849 S. El Cielo Road in Palm Springs.

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