

The Heart of Carlsbad

Looking for our geographic center
and finding our true heart.

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There isn't just one perfect bite, but many, in the heart of Carlsbad Village.

Our Geographic Heart

It's predictable that we at Carlsbad Magazine are fans of the late Huell Howser. We have been accused, as he was, of an indefatigable optimism—his for “California’s Gold,” ours for Carlsbad. And years ago, over a margarita at Norte’s or a beer at the G, can’t remember, we mused about where the exact center of Carlsbad might be.

We were inspired by Howser’s hunt for the Golden State’s geographic center. Howser turned from the palm and the pine that divide SoCal from NorCal on Highway 99 onto a lonely road leading to an unremarkable spot in North Fork, CA. O’Neals, CA fought North Fork over this. These are imprecise calculations. But North Fork won eventually.

What if Carlsbad’s heart was in a remarkable place? Or someone’s garage? Wouldn’t we want to know? We undertook some very unscientific experiments to find the heart of Carlsbad. Our first attempt was to fold a map of Carlsbad at its widest girth and its tallest height. That put the heart of Carlsbad at the intersection of Palomar Airport Road and Vida De Las Robles. This would be remarkable because it’s where the Ralph Wrisley marker and Buddy Lewis Trail are.

Then we tried the pencil method. We took our unfolded map and put it on card stock. This was a Howser suggestion. We then balanced the map on the tip of a pencil. Once the teeter-tottering settles into stillness, the heart is on the tip of the lead. This landed us in the west end of the parking lot of McClellan-Palomar Airport. Jerry McClellan would be pleased.

We asked our friend, Micah Hale, to help us find it. Hale is an archeologist who now lives deep in the heart of Texas, but had lived in Carlsbad and worked for Dudek Engineering. He was the guy who identified the sunken ship, the Glen Maine, off of Turnarounds when it reemerged one stormy winter. Surely he could find the heart of Carlsbad. He used GPS coordinates, math and science and stuff to pinpoint the heart of Carlsbad. He found it in the west end of the airport’s parking lot.

That was a letdown at first. We had half hoped for someone’s garage or swimming pool at least. A parking lot?! Unremarkable. But pondering it further, we thought of all of Carlsbad’s upper crust we have interviewed and profiled over our 20 years. These global trotters—surfers, skaters, snowboarders, Oscar winners, authors, et al—step off from their world travels in that parking lot. And they return home, to the very heart of Carlsbad. That’s remarkable.

a) Using the pencil method to find our geographic heart. b) X marks the spot of Carlsbad’s heart. c) Carlsbadians are the true heart of Carlsbad.



Our Historical Heart

Once, riding bareback on a horse named Spirit, I was feeling away from it all, in the wild lands of Carlsbad. My friend Andrea “Sippel” Pasek was astride Pepper. This was the ’70s and we were on a trail that is now a road named Faraday running along what is now the backside of The Crossings. We were plodding through the chaparral, lost in our own thoughts, when we were suddenly buzzed by a Cessna Piper Cub. It disrupted our wilderness experience and spooked the horses. The memory reminded me that today’s heart of Carlsbad is not your grandfather’s geographic heart. The airport was once “out of town.” This was before La Costa was annexed. Borders have a growth, not a fixed, mindset.

In 20 years of writing histories of Carlsbad, the historic heart of Carlsbad has always been the Village. Our Mayberry Main Street was called Elm Avenue. If you are headed west on Elm, the Barrio would be the heart’s left ventricle. Yet the Barrio has a heart of its own at the corner of Roosevelt and Walnut. The Schutte Mansion/Twin Inns (now Sun Diego) was the right ventricle. Bauer Lumber (now New Village Arts) was an artery of our growing strength. The Carlsbad Theater our romantic impulse.

It was not where everything happened, though it bore the lion’s share. It supplied what happened. It’s where we got day-old donuts for a nickel at the Wonder Bread place (now Pizza Port) on the way to the beach. Or grabbed some 40 weight at Carlsbad Auto Parts on the way to the Carlsbad Raceway. If businesses didn’t go by personal names like Sonny’s, Stringer’s or Lola’s, it was Carlsbad (type of business here). The Village was our center, from weddings in the gazebo to funerals at Carlsbad Union or Sts. Mike’s or Pat’s.

Always Our True Heart

We may have a heart of concrete geographically and a heart on the edge of the sea historically, but our true center is the people. In our profiles of newsmakers, our Local column or Elm Ave, we ask our subjects about the best thing in Carlsbad. The people answer even tops the weather answer. Carlsbad gathers well in protest or petition when we have a problem. We stop on Elm to let people turn left into Poinsettia Plaza Shopping Center. We donate to the Boys & Girls Clubs or Lancer or Bobcat boosters even if our kids don’t go there anymore. We buy inflatable Santas to make Ho Ho Highland. We go to the Taste of Carlsbad Village, not for the food, but for the people. This is us. And this is our true heart.