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50 years of Paradise

The Mission Bay getaway set standard for themed resorts, keeps guests coming back

Four point quiz

(Answers below)

1. How many steps are there at the 70-foot high observation tower?
2. What animal is depicted in iron at the top of the tower?
3. What was the nightly cost of a hotel room in 1962?
4. What was the cost of a cocktail at the Barefoot Bar?

ROGER SHOWLEY • U-T

Paradise Point is paved with a half-century of memory lanes crisscrossing its 44 acres on Mission Bay's Vacation Island.

Opened as Vacation Village at the height of the Cold War in June 1962, the Barefoot Bar was built beneath a pile of sand and could double as a bomb shelter. The joke was you could get bombed at the bar but not bombed from the sky.

There were relics from Hollywood, courtesy of its developer, Jack M. Skirball.

And in many ways, it set the stage for themed resorts here and elsewhere through the use of architecture, landscaping, menus and staff.

And for its thousands of guests over the years, it maintains a lure to come back and revisit fond moments — and to share them with children and grandchildren.

Mission Bay, called "False Bay" by Spanish explorers, was a shallow inlet and wildlife refuge before the city began transforming it in the 1940s into a 4,235-acre aquatic wonderland. Leasing of various sites began in the 1950s, and Skirball, his brother William

SEE PARADISE POINT • C3



Paradise Point's style mixes modernism with fantasy. PARADISE POINT

Answers: 1. 81; 2. Red-eared slider turtle; 3. \$12.25; 4. \$1.75

IN DEPTH



Paradise Point turns 50 this year. PARADISE POINT



One of the resort's 462 guest rooms. K.C ALFRED • U-T



Guests dance to the music of The Last Call at the Barefoot Bar & Grill at Paradise Point. K.C ALFRED • U-T



The marina at Paradise Point offers boat rentals and other watercraft. Segway tours and surf lessons are also available in the area. K.C ALFRED • U-T

PARADISE POINT • Even after upgrades, buildings are backdrop for tropical hideaway

Paradise memories

Paradise Point invited guests to submit personal stories of their time at the Mission Bay resort. Winners received vacation packages, and their testimonials appear on the hotel's website. Here's a sample:

Dale Oderman of Colorado Springs remembers the \$30 special honeymoon night package he got when he and his wife were married there in 1970: "It was the start of a very happy marriage and a family of three children, now all grown up."

Leslie Swan of Mission Viejo and her husband, also married at the hotel more than eight years ago, brought their children for vacation last year: "What meant so much to me was showing my 4- and 6-year-old kids where it all started for our family — the Sunset Ballroom."

Scott Crane's memories mix with those of his parents, Bob Crane and Sigrid Valdis, who starred in the 1960s TV show "Hogan's Heroes" and spent the first of many weekends at the resort in the 1960s: "I have so many fond childhood memories of my family playing on those beautiful beaches, feeding the wild birds and fish, climbing the tower, riding tandem bikes and swimming in the massive pools. ... There is no other hotel in the world to which I have a special connection."

FROM C1 and local contractor Robert Golden teamed up in 1959 to compete for a hotel site on what was called Tierra del Fuego, a man-made island off Ingraham Street.

Skirball (1896-1985) was an ordained rabbi, Hollywood producer of Alfred Hitchcock films and developer of Bowlero bowling alleys (including one in what is now the Scottish Rite event center in Mission Valley). The Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles is named after him and his wife, Audrey.

He won a 50-year lease in 1960 (now expiring in 2050) from the city over two other bidders. Architect Elbridge T. Spencer (designer of Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel) and his wife, Jeanette, as interior designer, worked to transform the treeless island into a \$3 million Hawaiian-like getaway.

Fountain and bells

Opened June 16, 1962, with a family-oriented treasure hunt, the hotel was sprinkled with Hollywood touches: the porpoise fountain from the 1963 movie "Cleopatra"; decorative masonry over the front doors of some of the suites; and 20 commemorative mission bells that once lined El Camino Real from San Diego north (eight are on view today). Modernism mixed with fantasy in the form of the observation tower, a 70-foot-high wood and steel structure with distinctive iron work at the top depicting a red-eared slider turtle. Undulating steel work weaves around the lobby ceiling, a nod to the Giant Dipper roller coaster in South Mission Beach.

Skirball sold the property for \$61.7 million in 1983, two

years before his death, to P&O Enterprises, operator of the Princess Cruise Line, which changed the name to San Diego Princess.

The current owner, LaSalle Hotel Properties, bought it in 1998 for \$73 million and changed the name to Paradise Point. Destination Hotels & Resorts, which runs LAuberge Del Mar, took over management in 2010.

A \$20 million renovation brought all 462 rooms up to date with a contemporary look.

But the buildings are just the backdrop for a tropical hideaway of palms, bromeliads, ginger and macadamia nut trees.

"We've been on the job almost three years, and I'm still going out there finding plants I didn't know were there," said Spencer Bemus, branch manager of Bemus Landscape.

He said as many of 20 crew members work there daily, tending to the 18-hole putting green golf course, relocating species and monitoring an elaborate landscaping watering system that senses the soil's moisture and air temperature to conserve on water use.

"It does feel a lot like Hawaii," he said. "It's right on the water — you really can't beat it."

A 'text concierge'

General Manager David Hall, while celebrating the 50 years of Paradise Point, is looking to the future. You can take Segway tours around Mission Bay. Or book a lesson at the Surf Academy at the Mission Bay Aquatic Center.

In the next few months, Baleen seafood restaurant — originally developer Skirball's vacation home — will be transformed into a

less-formal dining spot with better views of the bay and a more contemporary food and beverage selection.

"All that's going to be improved and modernized," he said.

As many as 20 of the bayside bungalows may be upgraded. Guests might be able to sign up for VIP treatment and get first-in-line water taxi service to SeaWorld. Tap your smartphone, and the "text concierge" will deliver four

Coronas to your spot on the sand.

Other changes might involve new attractions and activities for guests, but Hall doesn't think increasing the room count is necessary to keep the property competitive or profitable: "Adding rooms that takes away green space is not the right thing to do."

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Barefoot Blockbuster vintage cocktail

- ¼ oz Peach Schnapps
- ¼ oz melon liqueur
- ½ oz Myers Dark Rum
- 1 oz banana purée
- 3 oz pineapple juice
- Garnish with fresh pineapple and maraschino cherry



You are cordially invited to Junior Achievement's 24th Annual San Diego Business Hall of Fame

presented by the Jack foundation
in the box

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AS WE CELEBRATE SAN DIEGO'S BEST:

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RECOGNIZE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR COMMUNITY

Joe Craver
San Diego Red Cross

Mary Walshok
UC San Diego Extension

This event will also include a tribute to past San Diego Business Hall of Fame laureate and founding father of Junior Achievement of San Diego, Walter Zable.