

Thursday, May 18, 2006

# **Group hears Great Park designer's vision**

## **Complex plans convey simple intention: for people to 'love the park,' Smith says.**

By ANDREW GALVIN  
The Orange County Register

IRVINE – Ken Smith, master designer for the planned Orange County Great Park, was asked Wednesday how he would like his contribution to be remembered years from now.

"I think that people should love the park," he replied. "It's as simple as that."

Smith spoke at an Orange County Forum luncheon where the crowd appeared ready to embrace his vision for the 1,300-acre park, which is to be built on the site of the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station in Irvine.

Using a slide show and a short video, Smith articulated the design ideas that won over the park's board of directors in January, when it selected him to be master designer. His plan includes a man-made canyon, sports fields, an amphitheater, botanical garden, a collection of vintage military aircraft, observation balloons and a great lawn.

"There's a great ambition to make Orange County a great metropolis," Smith said, noting that the El Toro site is one of the few remaining large empty spaces in the county.

Smith's proposal to commemorate the site's military and agricultural heritage - by retaining a small portion of the base's old runway and planting citrus orchards and possibly a bean field in one part of the park - appealed to several people who attended the presentation.

"The most interesting thing to me ... was the respect that he seems to have for preserving and enclosing ... the past," said Richard Turner, a Chapman University professor and an artist who creates works for public spaces.

John Hogan, chief executive of Hall & Foreman Inc., an engineering and surveying firm in Irvine, said he liked "the elements of the design that represent Orange County's heritage and specifically El Toro's heritage. I think his ideas are superb."

Smith's idea for observation balloons that would take park-goers 1,000 feet into the air while remaining tethered to the ground impressed Turner. One such balloon might serve as a visitors center during construction, Smith said.

"It will do more than any kind of P.R. and newspapers and TV could do" to build enthusiasm for the park, Turner said. "It's something that combines entertainment with a way of really engaging people in the scale of the undertaking, which you really can't appreciate from the ground."

A once-vigorous controversy over the El Toro site has mostly evaporated, Hogan said.

"I think there's still some lingering disappointment from certain elements of the county that we missed an opportunity to create an international airport," Hogan said. "I think the vast majority of county residents have embraced, or at least accepted the idea of a great park, so I think we're getting over it."

Jerry Harrington, 73, a retired investment broker from Newport Beach, supported an airport for the site. But he's not disappointed that a park will be built instead.

"We have to move ahead," he said. "I like parks."

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"Orange County is going to continue to grow, there's going to be more density, and it's going to change, and your children and your grandkids should be able to experience what Orange County once was." Ken Smith