



One of many HUD-Code homes that Viva Homes has placed in the Rancho Jamacha park in Spring Valley, CA. They are characterized by decorative block retaining walls to secure extra space and are often double-section units.

Viva Homes Founder Tom Paden Sr. Builds the Market, then Builds the Business

By Robert Mendel
AB Alumnus and Freelance Writer

EL CAJON, CA—In January of this year, Tom Paden, Sr. was named one of two recipients of the 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award of the California Manufactured Housing Institute (CMHI). It seems the entire HUD-Code housing industry in California, which is substantial, owes a debt of gratitude to Paden, founder and owner of Viva Mobile/Manufactured Homes of El Cajon. Here's why.

Paden began his career selling manufactured homes in 1973, with the ownership of Aztec Mobile Homes in San Diego. He and his partner developed it into an operation with eight offices throughout San Diego and Los Angeles counties. In 1977 Paden sold his interest to his partner and opened Viva Mobile/Manufactured Homes in his hometown of El Cajon, where he began selling Skyline, Fuqua and Fleetwood products.

In 1979 Paden was instrumental in launching the organization which became the California Mobile Home Park Managers Association (CMHPMA).

That same year, he served as chairman of a blue-ribbon committee which prepared the final report on mobile home parks for San Diego County. That report made 31 recommendations and proposed four new ordinances, primary among them a proposal for changing the tax status on mobile homes from a vehicle tax to a property tax. San Diego County accepted all the recommendations and proposals.

The next job was convincing the state to agree. Paden

made 42 speeches in two and a half months supporting the measures. As a result, the state of California passed SB



Tom Paden, Sr., founder of Viva Mobile/Manufactured Homes, helped jump-start the HUD-Code housing industry in California.



Tom Paden Sr. in front of his current home in the Rancho Jamacha park in Spring Valley, CA.

1960, which states that a municipality cannot prohibit the placing of manufactured homes on residential lots. Prior to that time, the owner of a manufactured home could not put that home on his own property and live in it. Today, of course, a large percentage of HUD-Code home dealers do all their business selling housing destined for private residential lots.

Paden remained with the CMHPMA for 20 years in all, serving as education chairman for 13 years, while his wife lent a hand by managing the health insurance records for the association. Not surprising is the fact that he and his wife are now honorary life members. That commitment has paid off in many ways.

“We know all the park owners,” Paden says, “and they are our friends. I’m making 85% of my business from direct referrals. Most of them come from the parks. When customers come in to our offices they’re already sold on us and the company. The park manager has done it for us,” he adds.

Paden brought an innovative approach to sales and refined it over time. Unlike the practice of the vast majority of dealers, all Viva display models are currently set in mobile home parks, ready for occupancy. Paden’s strategy is to buy an old home in a local park, remove it and rework the lot space. He adds or improves utilities, puts in block walls to add to available area, and then sets a new home. He is often able to replace a single-section unit with a double-section, and always upgrades the park property. At present Viva has 19 units on display in 12 parks, several of which are already sold.

When contacted by potential buyers, after discussions with them, Paden will take them to a park to see one or two units that he feels will meet their particular needs. He usually shows customers just two homes, three maximum.



Tom Paden, Jr., president, Viva Homes, now runs the business on a day-to-day basis from offices in El Cajon, CA.

“If you need to show more you weren’t listening, or you’ll confuse them,” he says. “But you’ve got to keep working with them to find out what it will take to make a sale. You sell yourself first, then the company. Then people will buy your product,” he adds.

Viva today is a family operation. Tom Paden, Jr. serves as president, running the day-to-day operations while Tom Sr. comes in to the office “to help out.” Andrea Paden, Tom Jr.’s wife, manages the Viva office and the finances. Additional staff include Sales Manager Jeff Taylor and two sales personnel, Holly Bell and Jay Goldby.

There is change in the wind. Viva will soon develop a three-quarter acre lot adjacent to Interstate 8, the freeway running east from San Diego through El Cajon to El Centro, a region which has grown rapidly in recent years. The new Viva facility will be housed in a large HUD-Code home unit with six offices and a large waiting room. The lot will feature four display units from Golden West, with amenities for use on residential property and storage room for trade-ins. Golden West is Viva’s product of choice these days.

“It made a tremendous difference when Clayton bought Golden West. Their response to warranty work is immediate now,” Paden says.

Paden and his wife themselves enjoy the comforts of a 1,750-sq. ft. HUD-Code home located in Rancho Jamacha, Spring Valley, a park which has a dozen or more homes Viva has placed there.

Over the years, Paden served as president and board member of the California Mobile Home Dealer Association,



Andrea Paden, Tom Jr.’s wife, is the office manager and oversees the company finances.

chaired the San Diego Blue Ribbon Committee for Mobile Homes, chaired the San Diego City Task Force on mobile home issues and, as mentioned, helped found the San Diego Park Managers Association, now the California Mobile Home Park Managers

Association, in addition to his membership in CMHI.

Paden is a member of the Elks, a member of the Lions Club International and the San Diego County Honorary Deputy Sheriffs Association. He also served on the board of Silvergate Bank Corp. His unstinting commitment to his community and his industry have clearly played a major part in the success of Viva Homes.

For more information on Viva Mobile/Manufactured Homes, circle Reader Service No. 52.

For more information on Golden West homes, circle No. 53.