

Downtown a closer look!

MENLO PARK

By Tony Ray Baker

DISTRICT



Mercado homes

For many of us, Menlo Park was a big part of our childhood. I remember going with my dad to Pat's Chili Dogs about once a month, basically whenever he got that craving. We would order a couple of their hot chili dogs (the hot was really hot back then) and a basket of those greasy fries. We would sit in his El Camino and "burn our lips off," as he would say. It was soooo tasty good.

"A" Mountain, the icon of Menlo Park, was also a big part of our lives, as it stood proudly over the city for everyone to see. It has an amazing history and fun stories. For example, at the base of the mountain, the land was very fertile and so it was used for

agriculture from circa 2000 BCE until the 1930s. In the 1690s Father Kino established the Mission San Xavier del Bac nearby. The mountain was used to post sentinels at the peak to watch for raiding Apache Indians. Oh, and it is made up of layers of volcanic rock, but is not a volcano.

Sometimes, Dad and I would I hike up into the crater at the base of the mountain hunting for meteor remnants. Although the crater was probably created from a volcanic explosion millions of years ago, Dad and I thought it was a meteor, and that certainly made it more fun. I think its blocked off today for safety purposes.



New home in Menlo Park



Mercado Bike Share



Mercado Market



Menlo Park homes



MSA Annex

Every year on the Fourth of July, we would take Dad's El Camino and park somewhere near the base of "A" mountain. We would bring fried chicken, Mom's homemade potato salad and a cooler full of drinks. No matter what time the fireworks started, many Tucson residents, including us, would arrive in the late afternoon to enjoy a picnic, all the people and the show to come. We would always run into friends ... which was really the best part. It was a place where the community came together every year, and we all knew that we'd be sitting in bottlenecked traffic for a long time trying to get home after the show. But it was worth it.

Menlo Park disappeared at some point. I can't really put my finger on when, it just did - figuratively, of course. As Tucson grew and experienced more and more urban sprawl, Menlo was

not the center of attention it had once been. New firework shows opened at the high-end resorts and in an upcoming city called Marana. "A" Mountain (Sentinal Park) started deteriorating. The neighborhoods became more and more run down. Housing prices seemed to be stuck. You could buy a cute bungalow for \$80,000 to \$100,000. Oh, how I wish I had.

Flash forward to the rise of the Mercado District. It opened in 2010 as the first public market in Tucson, AZ, just a hop, skip and a jump from downtown. It was right ahead of the streetcar, which hit the rails running in July of 2014.

Those same cute bungalows today can be purchased today for \$200,000-plus, and if they have been remodeled, you can get one for about \$350,000. According to REALTOR.com, in April

of 2016 the median housing price in Menlo Park was \$133,000, and in April of 2018 the median housing price was \$247,400. "Days on market" in April of 2016 were over 80, and in April of 2018 they were only 41. Indicators predict that Menlo Park home values will continue to increase about 10.2 percent next year as compared to other Tucson home values at only 6.5 percent.

In 2011, a new home with 1,780 square feet closed in the Mercado district for \$320,100. Today, a new home similar in size is going to set you back a cool \$700,000. That's just the starter price, of course. Several homes in the Mercado are well over \$1 million.

As you can see, the Mercado district and the Streetcar were definitely the game-changers. I encourage you to head over to the Mercado and see what's happening. Take the streetcar for a ride or jump on a bike. Whatever you do, I'm sure you'll find lots of fun and excitement. Call me, Tony Ray, if you have any questions.