

# Dude ranch survivors

'It's over,' says one; but others see revival as tourist attraction

By SUSAN VOYLES

To meet Joan and Harry Drackert in their Indian Territory store in downtown Reno, you'll find no hint of the wild and rough times they had in tending bar for Indians, mustangers, wranglers, wild-eyed journalists — and divorcees.

The Drackerts were the bosses of the guest ranch at Pyramid Lake in the 1950s, where this assorted group would congregate in the late afternoons and evenings at the ranch's bar. The Drackerts moved on to two other ranches, the Donner Trail Guest Ranch, in Verdi, in the 1960s, and the Silver Circle Guest Ranch on Holcomb Lane, for a career spanning 31 years in catering to divorcees.

These guest ranches are now history. Even for Joan, now 70, and Harry, 79, the old days seem to leer from a distant past. Pictures taken over the many years are still in their envelopes, yet to be sorted and put in albums. And Joan says the whole affair is "old hat" unless you can get her "wound up."

For eight years, the Drackerts have been suburbanites, living in Huffaker Hills. They worry about the encroaching new apartment buildings rising outside their development.

And they have grown weary of operating their Indian art shop on Virginia Street even though business is good, Joan said. It's time to sell the store and travel, to break away from Reno, its dirty downtown streets, the perpetual indecision hanging over the redevelopment of downtown and the gambling scene.

"We've been in the public eye for 38 years. It's time to do something else," Joan said. "We've never had a private life. We haven't gotten rich, but I think what we have done, we have done well."

Changing attitudes about divorce and more liberal laws in other states put an end to the dude ranches. If there were any chance of a renewal of the guest ranch business in northern Nevada, she said, only half seriously, it



**SURVIVORS:** Joan and Harry Drackert in their Virginia Street store.

services of the ranch, Joan or Harry would testify their guests never once left the state during their six weeks' stay and then leave the courtroom.

Swearing falsely in regards to one's residence was among the most serious crimes in Nevada, with the penalty of up to 14 years in prison.

One of the Drackerts' best customers was Joe Liebling, who wrote a series of long articles about Reno, the Drackerts, Pyramid Lake and the Paiutes in

The New Yorker magazine from 1950 to 1955. He found it necessary to become a Nevada resident for six weeks in 1949 and kept coming back.

As a chronicler of the times, Liebling counted 130 lawyers in the telephone book in 1950, which worked out to one for every 160 residents. The glamour of the Nevada divorce began in 1920 when Mary Pickford got hers.

Some lawyers never tried anything other than an uncontested divorce, he

said. And many were called "Judge" because they started their careers as a judge or prosecutor in one of Nevada's rural counties.

In 1950, the divorce trade began to drop off, prompting the local bar association to upgrade its standards. The 1949 total of slightly more than five thousand divorce decrees was the lowest since 1943, Liebling said.

Lawyers would send their wealthier clients to one of the ranches "where



James Flenner Gazette-Journal

**FORMER DUDE RANCH:** Donner Trail Dinner House.

The Regional Transportation Commission and Citifare have been honored with the outstanding achievement award presented by the American Public Transit Association for "meeting the public transit needs of the people of Reno." Alan Kiepper, chairman of the awards committee, said the Reno system has achieved its goals as measured by "ridership growth, farebox return and other significant measures of productivity."

In the past five years, the system has grown from five to 37 buses and from four to 21 routes. Ridership has increased from 300,000 in the first year to more than 3 million. And the system has achieved a farebox recovery ratio of 51 percent to cover costs, exceeding the national average. It also received a vote of confidence by the people of Washoe County, who voted to raise the sales tax 0.25 percent to help support the system in 1982.

## 2 public relations speakers

On Wednesday, public relations people have a choice of two different luncheon speakers. Karen Galatz, Gov. Richard Bryan's press secretary, will share her experiences in handling the press at a noon meeting at the Ormsby House. Reservations for the meeting sponsored by the local chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators should be made by Monday. Call 785-6285 and ask for the community affairs office at Washoe Medical Center.

Allan Frank, president of Allan Frank and Associates Advertising, of Salt Lake City, will discuss handling since 1954 of "his finger-licking good" account, Kentucky Fried Chicken, at a meeting of the Reno Women in Advertising group at Harrah's Convention Center. Accompanying him will be Jackie Trujillo, who started as a waitress for the colonel 31 years ago and is now executive vice president for operations. For reservations, call Valerie Glenn at 827-5551.

## Question 12 debate

The Greater Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce will sponsor a free forum on the Question 12 tax initiative Thursday at 7 p.m. in the Airport Plaza Hotel. The panel members in support of Question 12 are State Treasurer Patty Cafferata and Howard Barrett, Nevada Taxpayers Association director. Representing the opposing views are Andy Grose, state economic development director, and Steve Brown, a Reno stockbroker. The panel will debate the issue and take questions from the audience.

STAFF REPORTS

to be provided to some of the thousands of people moving here.

"It's over, it's over. I hate to spoil your story."

Jean Ford, owner of Nevada Discovery Tours in Las Vegas, disagrees. The former state senator holds high hopes for a revival even though Rich and Lois Alfonso, of the Williams Guest Ranch near Pioche, must support themselves by work off the ranch. They are believed to be the only operators of a guest ranch left in Nevada.

But there is plenty of talk. Bob Perchetti, of the Tonopah Convention Authority and Chamber of Commerce, is trying to convince some local ranchers to get into the business. And a public relations man is trying to generate the same interest in Elko, Ford said.

Jimmy Hughes, the mayor of Mesquite, has opened up his family's ranch for hayrides and barbecues for guests of the Peppermill's Western Village in Las Vegas. But no overnighters.

Foreign tour operators, especially, are interested in "anything that smacks of the Old West," Ford said. "But it really takes a tremendous investment in marketing and letting people know you are there. One has to be prepared for the long haul."

"But with the renewed vitality of the state's tourism program, one doesn't have to do it all by themselves," she said.

Joan and Harry are among the last, if not the last, of the survivors of the dozen or so dude ranches in the Reno area that catered to the six-weekers. They were mostly women but some men who came here to file for the famed, painless Nevada divorce.

The residence requirement, reduced to six weeks in 1931 as a concession to the Depression, is still the same today.

Even though only the prospective divorcee, her lawyer and a judge were all that needed to be present for the decree, getting a divorce was serious business in Nevada. As part of the



Marilyn Newton Gazette-Journal

**FILM SCENE:** Adra Akers portrays blackjack dealer Silver, relieving a male dealer, in this scene from "Desert of the Heart," filmed recently at the Mapes Hotel-Casino in Reno.

## Filmmakers recapture Reno's era as Divorce Capital of World

By SUSAN VOYLES

Part of Reno's elegant era as the Divorce Capital of the World will be brought back to life with the production of "Desert of the Heart."

It is a story of a 1950s English professor, a New Yorker who spends her obligatory six weeks in Nevada to get a divorce. It's a story about how her life changes after meeting people in Reno.

Donna Deitch, the producer and director in Santa Monica, Calif., finished six weeks of shooting here earlier this month. She is one of only

a handful of women who have produced a commercial movie, having worked four years to raise the money.

But she says her struggle was more a reflection of the recent hard times rather than a statement on how difficult it is for women to break into the upper echelons of the filmmaking business, which has even given throes to big names such as Barbra Streisand and Jane Fonda.

She has not yet lined up a distribu-

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they could be looked after and probably coddled a little bit," Joan said.

The Drackerts managed the ranch at Pyramid Lake from 1945-56; the Donner Trail guest ranch from 1959-70; and the Silver Circle Ranch from 1971-76.

Harry, now hard of hearing but still owl-like-looking and bespectacled, says he misses his horses most. He was a champion bronc rider in the 1920s and devoted his later years to breeding racehorses.

To Harry, the divorce trade was a cash crop in the summertime, Liebling wrote. Some of the daily disadvantages to "dude wrangling" was "the daily corvee of bringing a detail of the women in to shop and have their hair done."

"He would load eight or 10 head in a station wagon and take off in the morning in plenty of time to get them to Reno before lunch, but if he made even a trivial detour of twenty miles to buy alfalfa or look over a quarter-horse colt, they would complain."

There were well-known people at one or another of the ranches — Mary Rockefeller, Arthur Miller, Saul Bellow and Evelyn Funt, Allen Funt's ex-wife. But mostly, they spent their time hidden away from the press, including photographer Don Dondero, local writer Rollan Melton, and Bill Berry, a local correspondent for several New York papers.

Joan laughed, recalling Mrs. Funt's demands for a bed if she were to join an overnight pack trip from Donner Trail — that was the only way she would go. "So they hauled a bed, a big brass bed on a truck," she said.

One gentleman for the London Times, eager to impress one of the boarders, once wanted to reserve a horse for the next day. "Now mind you, I don't ride very well. I would like a horse that is about to be destroyed," Joan recalled him saying.

Horseback riding "gave these people

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# Strike unthinkable for typically loyal Nissan worker

By EUGENE MOOSA/ The AP

UTSUNOMIYA, Japan — Teruo Suzuki likes working on the Nissan auto assembly line with a team of workers he says is like a "big family."

Strikes are unthinkable these days, he says. "The union knows that the best way to ensure a worker's livelihood is to seek the company's prosperity."

Suzuki, 41, is the head of a "kumi," or team, in one of two assembly lines turning out subcompact models — many bound for the United States — at Nissan's Tochigi Plant in Utsunomiya, about 60 miles north of Tokyo. The 736-acre plant employs 8,600 people and produces a total

of 360,000 Cedrics and Pulsars a year.

Suzuki is the "kumi-cho" — foreman — of a team that handles the underfloor assemblage, which involves mounting the engine, fuel tank, brake assembly and other tubes, pipes, and the wheel axis on the chassis.

"We take pride in our jobs because we're producing something, not shuffling papers or something," Suzuki says.

The close ties of the workplace extend to off-duty hours as well. On weekends, he manages the unit's baseball team, and sometimes after work he joins colleagues at the local "kara-oke," or sing-along bar.

From junior high school in Yokohama,

Suzuki entered the Nissan Technical High School to learn machine repair. After joining Nissan in 1960, he switched to assembly line work at the company plant in Yokosuka.

Nissan is not one of those Japanese firms that expects its production workers to start the day by singing the company song, but Suzuki and his colleagues are strong on corporate loyalty nonetheless.

Suzuki earns the equivalent of \$28,500 a year. Four years ago, he bought a new, \$60,900, two-story house near the plant on a 15-year mortgage. As is the case with most major Japanese companies, Nissan fringe benefits include special loan assistance to employees to finance homes,

education and other needs.

Suzuki is an active member of the All Nissan Motor Workers' Union, which is regarded as one of the more passive among Japan's company unions, which in general are far less militant than the industrywide labor unions in the United States.

Suzuki recalls that when he first joined Nissan, older workers described a four-month strike in 1953 that all but wiped out the company. They told him strikes were useless.

The All Nissan Motor Workers' Union represents all 76,000 employees below the

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ture's name was not yet known.  
Signing of the agreement is set for Oct. 10 here in Kohl's presence. Two days later Kohl will pay a visit to the Shanghai plant, which already has been assem-

The visit comes at a time of improved chances for West German companies in China, according to business circles.  
Los Angeles Times

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an incentive, something definite to do more or less on a daily basis. They had something to get up for," she said.

Joan, who still has "eyes like a chicken hawk," as Liebling described, said a sense of humor and a sense of humor shown by others kept her going.

Evenings at the dinner table were generally pleasant although a few "were a little short on intelligence," she said. For some, the experience was extremely stressful, others received midnight calls from husbands and others still made midnight calls to check up

on their husbands.

And, of course, some couldn't wait to strike up another romance. Liebling described one lady named Ana Lou, dressed in a lavender fur cape, at the grubby bar at the Pyramid Ranch. He quoted her in *The New Yorker* as saying, "The only talent ah hayv is just fo being takun cayuh of."

But all in all, Reno was a pretty pleasant place to be. Joan recalls Reno on her arrival from back East in the early 1940s as "pretty town, with dress shops and jewelry stores. It was like an overgrown small town."

She was also a six-weeker and fortunate enough to get a job at the Mount Rose Lodge, where she spent her first winter in tranquil-

ity, listening to the coyotes and watching deer in the front yard.

Liebling also was impressed. Reno was the only town he knew of "where you can see fly fisherman in the middle of town, wading in the shallows in pursuit of brook trout."

Watching those trout as he crossed the bridge became one of his expedients for killing time. "People get to know a lot of them in Reno," he wrote. Most of the temporary residents are killing six weeks to qualify for a divorce and the townspeople seem to have taken their tempo from them."

One result, he said, was that "you never had to walk more than a few yards to find a bar or someone to talk to."

## Film

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tor for the film but expects the \$3½ million (low-budget) film to be released next year. She has five documentaries to her credit and several shorts.

"I think people are interested in stories about women. Not so many films are being made about women as the leading characters and the changes in people's lives," she said.

Helen Shaver is Vivian Bell, the professor who returns to New York. Shaver recently appeared in "Best of Friends" with Eddie Murphy and Dudley Moore. Audra Lindley, known for her role as "Mrs. Roper" on "Three's Com-

pany," is a woman running a guest ranch.

Deitch spent almost \$500,000 to shoot the movie in Reno, with locations and services arranged by Shirley Dale of Incline Village.

The Mapes Hotel was brought to life for casino scenes. And scenes were also shot at the courthouse, a wedding chapel, the railroad station and Parker's Western Store. "A lot of locations are unchanged," she said.

Several hundred local people, as extras, will be seen in the picture. More than 700 people turned out on call day. Antique car buffs, members of various auto clubs, also were brought into service.

And the ranch at Pyramid Lake also was used. Joan Drackert, who ran the guest house there

with her husband Harry, was interviewed for the story.

The only real hitch was the inconvenience of flights, Deitch said. Dailies, film shot each day, were shipped to San Francisco for processing and sent back on a flight at 9:30 p.m. "Starting to look at dailies at that hour and getting up at four or five in the morning is a little harder," she said.

"But the only stumbling block was the afternoon wind. We were shooting exteriors and at a certain point the wind would come up," she said.

"But the cooperation from everyone was terrific," she said. "Everybody wanted to work on it and we're excited about it. It seems to have been a favorite time in Reno."

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