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Rancho Santa Margarita Pays Tribute to Its Master Developer with Renamed Street, Richard Reese Way

{Story includes comments from Richard Reese at end.}

Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif. — The man whose vision defined Rancho Santa Margarita was honored Wednesday as the City Council voted unanimously to rename a street in his honor at their regular meeting on April 22.

Richard Reese Way will be the new name of El Portal, the 2,400-foot thoroughfare that runs alongside Central Park, the City Hall/Community Center complex, the city library and the city center between La Promesa and Avenida de Las Flores.

Reese was the community's master planner, and had similar roles in Anaheim from 1956-65 while Disneyland was being built, and then Irvine from 1966-79. After his retirement from Rancho Mission Viejo Company he chose to settle down in his self-styled "urban village," which incorporated on Jan. 1, 2000.

"He's truly the heart and soul of this community ... a gem of a human being," said Mayor Brad McGirr, who credited SAMLARC executive director Candice Fullenkamp for initiating the concept. "He's the man responsible for the city we have here today. ... We live in an urban village surrounded by wilderness. This city was planned in a very specific manner. I can't think of anything else I've done since I've been mayor that means more to me."

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The other four council members were in agreement. There was some discussion whether to call it Via Richard Reese, as the Planning Commission had proposed, in keeping with the city's Spanish theme for street names, or simply Reese Way.

Council member Jerry Holloway said other Reese families will move in and out of the city, but if the street is to honor someone specifically, it should include his first name.

Mayor Pro Tem Tony Beall said no one is more deserving to be honored in such a way, "and I think it will be a long time before it's ever done again."

In her praise of Reese, Council member Carol Gamble reminded audience members that in 1992, ABC's 20/20 news program referred to the city as "a modern-day Shangri-La" in a segment on planned communities.

That resonated with council member Michael Vaughn. "When my lovely wife and I first drove into RSM in January 1987, it was clear to us how special RSM was," he recalled. "I'm so exceptionally proud when people come into our community now, and I trust they have the same reaction."

McGirr stressed the deliberate choice of "Way" in the street-naming process; "There is meaning behind it; we want everyone to know that this City we are so proud of today is because of Richard Reese and his vision – we are doing it the Richard Reese Way."

This is only the second time in the City's history a street has been renamed. At the request of Community Lutheran Church, the street Via Sosiego (translated Calm Way or Calm Road) was renamed to Via Con Dios (Go with God). The street is occupied by several houses of worship and is commonly referred to by residents as Church Row.

The decision by the council also includes up to \$2,000 to reimburse the only business with an El Portal address, Tutor Time Child Care/Learning Center, to cover costs of an address change and update state-issued childcare licenses. Tutor Time supported the idea from the outset. The cost of signage is expected to be about \$1,800, largely because PV Maintenance has offered to replace five small street signs at no cost to the City.

McGirr said he expected an unveiling ceremony to take place in the near future, and invited Reese, who was in the audience, to share his reaction to the Council's decision.

"The first time you brought this up to me, the first thought that went through my mind was that I haven't been that surprised or excited since I was 4 years old and got an electric train set for Christmas, said Reese, 87. He credited all city council members through the years for maintaining his vision, saying the master

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developer has control of the community “up to a point, but when you sell the first home it no longer belongs to you, it belongs to the residents. As a master planner you pray the leadership of the community will carry that vision forward.”

Reese also told those in attendance of an “affirmation” sign that hung on his office wall when he began the project in 1979, and that it was really a promise to those who would eventually settle in the county’s southeastern cul-de-sac: “It is possible to create an urban village in a permanent open space setting in such a manner that people will have the opportunity to choose to live lifestyles that reach beyond the mere satisfaction of basic human needs and embrace wellness, well-being, full self-expression and participative governance—as normal everyday activities.”

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