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Interim CEO says ranch foundation remains in the black

Annual audit of nonprofit cited in response to critics

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PLACE TO GATHER—The Camarillo Ranch House was named a California Point of Historical Interest in 2005. RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

Martin Daly looked out across the grounds of Camarillo Ranch, where four majestic trees tower above plush lawns and a 125-year-old Queen Anne Victorian mansion seems to preside over the entire 4.5-acre property, and marveled at the beauty and tranquility.

He strolled past small gardens decorating the sides of the ranch; a small chapel dedicated to the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Camarillo family's patron saint; and an old brick oven once used to bake bread and tortillas.

Adolfo Camarillo, the city's founding father who died in 1958, planted the three Norfolk pines and one Morton fig tree, which are listed in the state registry of historic landmarks. He also planted a small orange orchard near the rear of

the property, of which only about 16 trees remain, said Daly, interim CEO of the nonprofit Camarillo Ranch Foundation, which oversees the ranch's day-to-day operations.

"There's so much history here," he said. "This truly is the hidden gem of the city."

Why the lovingly preserved Camarillo Ranch—the city's most important claim to early California history—continues to draw criticism over its finances is a situation that puzzles Daly.

"As the former treasurer for four years, I take such criticisms personally," he said.

In letters to the city and the *Camarillo Acorn* over the years, foundation detractors have claimed that the nonprofit regularly misuses city money and keeps shoddy financial records.

During an interview with the *Acorn* last week at the ranch, Daly denied any financial improprieties.



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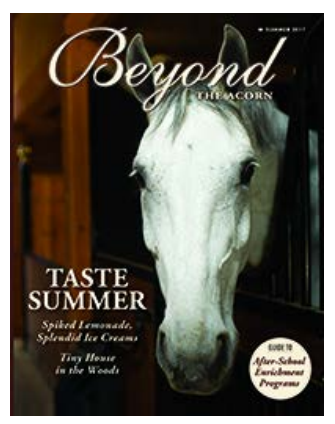


One recent letter accused the foundation's 14-member board of directors of misplacing \$125,000. Daly said he investigated the assertion and found it was untrue.

"They looked at the balance sheet but they didn't look at the profits and losses. The balance sheet is just one day. I'm assuming that's where that \$125,000 came from," he said.

In fact, its annual status report to the City Council said the foundation made "significant progress" in its finances last fiscal year and that "the positive trend continues."

According to financial documents in the report, the foundation had




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about \$312,300 in reserves, including about \$104,900 in an endowment fund and about \$207,400 in a reserve account.

In addition, the foundation has about \$168,582 cash on hand in various accounts, Daly said.

“For the last three to four years, we’ve been in the black,” Daly told the *Acorn*. “Last year we probably did about \$50,000 (in profits). This year to date, we’re probably somewhere around \$30,000.

“We have audited financials every year. A lot of nonprofits do it every three years. We use the same auditing firm as the city. So I don’t know why these people continue to criticize. The claim that we were somehow missing \$125,000—something like that is damaging for a nonprofit that relies on donations and volunteers.”

After reviewing the foundation’s report at their May 10 meeting, City Council members praised the board for its financial management.

“I think you’ve done an excellent job,” Councilmember Mike Morgan said.

Developed to be a showcase of local history, the ranch property from its inception was also expected to generate revenue to offset maintenance and other operational costs. To do so, the city created the foundation in 2000 to oversee the property and its finances, including any money generated from renting the house and property for private and public functions.

Although rental fees from wedding receptions held at the ranch are still the foundation’s biggest moneymaker, accounting for about 85 percent of its revenue, the nonprofit has worked over the past few years to expand the historic site’s reach into the community through what Daly calls “fundraising” events aimed at bringing in first-time visitors.

One such event, a weekly food truck night called Throwback Thursdays, started three years ago and now draws as many as 1,500 people a night during the summer. The free event has raised more than \$20,600 in vendor fees from food trucks since 2014, according to the foundation’s annual report.

Dallas-based Centex Industrial Development bought the 67- acre ranch in 1998. The company moved the house and barn to a new location, donating the buildings and 4.5 acres of land to the city.

The house, which was “in shambles when the city took it over,” Daly said, was restored between 1999 and 2000 with the help of a \$400,000 state grant and the work of an army of volunteers. It opened to the public in 2001.

This year, tours through the old house are expected to bring in about \$12,000 in revenue, the foundation’s annual report said.

But it costs thousands of dollars a month to maintain the property. Water bills alone amount to more than \$1,300 a month. Lawn care adds another \$1,500 a month to expenses, Daly said.

“That’s where people get confused,” he said. “They think it’s all money coming from the city when it’s not. The agreement between the foundation and the city is, the foundation takes care of the day-to-day operations of the ranch; the city is responsible for any major external repairs.”

In 2008, for example, the city paid \$643,000 to move and renovate the barn built by Adolfo Camarillo in 1905. This past fall, the city paid \$12,000 to fumigate the ranch house for termites. The city is also adding about 4,000 square feet of paved parking to front of the property, along with security lighting.

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The foundation's goal is to eventually be fully self-sustaining, Daly said.

"We're building up our reserves so that in the future we'll be able to help pay for some of those major projects," he said.

Going forward, the foundation wants to focus more on the ranch's history, he said. In the next month or so, the nonprofit will launch a website where online visitors can look up old documents, photos and records, as well as all of the foundation's financial records since the group formed in 2000.

"We really haven't touched on the museum aspects," Daly said. "To me, the ranch is a beautiful legacy of Adolfo Camarillo's contributions to the city."

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