

Diridons Related to CA's First Female Mayor

By Carolyn Schuk

We all know that Santa Clara's City Clerk Rod Diridon is the son of the legendary Santa Clara County Supervisor of the same name. But almost no one knows that the Diridons are related to California's first female mayor, Sunnyvale Mayor Edwina Benner.

Even the Diridons didn't know about the connection until a cousin doing genealogical research found it through Benner's cousin Alice Middleton Covert, born in 1888 in Santa Clara's Lawrence Station area.

"We knew that our family had come from the Bay Area, but had no idea [the connection] was so close to home," says Rod Diridon, Jr. "There are so many long standing families in the area, it's interesting to consider that our ancestors may have known each other."

Covert's daughter Rhoda married

a young Italian immigrant named Claudius Diridoni. Facing anti-immigrant prejudice, Diridoni changed his name to Claude Diridon in order to find work during the hard years of the Great Depression. Claude and Rhoda's oldest son was Rodney John Diridon, Sr.

Diridon Sr. isn't surprised that the family tree holds a political pioneer. In addition to being the first woman to run a California city, in 1920 Benner was also the first woman elected to the Sunnyvale City Council — the same year the 19th amendment passed, giving women the right to vote.

"My mother Rhoda was a proud, vocal advocate for civil rights far before it was popular to do so," he says. "I suppose we now know a little bit more now about her family and where she learned her sense of morality."

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