

### NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE: COURREGES RANCH

<b>Population</b>	
Total: 12,969 est.	6,465
1980-89 change:	-0.9%
Median age:	34.8
<b>Racial/ethnic mix:</b>	
White (non-Hispanic): 83%	Latin: 7%
Black: less than 1%	Other: 1%
<b>By sex and age:</b>	
11 neighborhoods	
<b>MALES</b>	<b>FEMALES</b>
Median age: 34.5 years	Median age: 35.1 years
<b>Income</b>	
Per capita:	\$16,019
Median household:	\$65,022
Average household:	\$61,779
<b>Income distribution:</b>	
Less than \$10,000:	8%
\$10,000-\$14,999:	9%
\$15,000-\$24,999:	25%
\$25,000-\$34,999:	20%
\$35,000 and over:	38%

The pump house on the Courreges Ranch is a welcome break among the condos and tract homes.

#### FOCUS

##### Courreges Family Pioneered Small-Town Life in Fountain Valley

The view from Hazel Courreges' kitchen window looks like an artist's canvas, with Saddleback peaking squarely in the middle. Clouds moving slowly across its peaks create a quiet meditative scene.

"It was her kitchen window, too," she says while showing a visitor a picture of her late husband's great-grandmother. "Her name was Magdalena."

Courreges lives in an old farmhouse in Fountain Valley built by Ruch Courreges, the son of wealthy Basque landowners. He set off alone for California in 1887, when he was just 16.

After an unsuccessful attempt to mine iron in the gold mines of Northern California, Ruch Courreges established a sheep ranch in 1878 on an 80-acre site known as "The Bluffs."

He married Magdalena Mager in 1880 and together they expanded the sheep ranch into a farming operation. They also founded several local businesses, including a bank, vegetable canner and a phone company, but none of them lasted long.

The original farmhouse, built in 1908, burned down when a spark from the fireplace ignited the roof. But Ruch Courreges built another, which still stands next to the original dump house. The structures are on a two-acre property near the intersection of Fabert Avenue and Newland Street, the remaining family-owned portion of the original ranch. They are a pleasant sight among the condos and tract homes.

"We started selling off parts of it when taxes got too high," Courreges said. She has lived on the ranch since 1941, when she married Joseph Courreges Jr., who took over the farming operation from his parents. They grew sugar beets, corn and potatoes.

As the new proprietors, Courreges, her husband and their four children ran a roadside produce stand that quickly became a nearby neighborhood gathering spot. "It was never a very profitable operation, but my husband enjoyed talking with all the people who stopped," she said. "He loved to tell stories about how it was in the early days, when he could stand on the bluff top and watch his father returning all the way from Anaheim in his horse and buggy," she recalled.

With its neatly painted signs still in place, the empty produce stand appears to be waiting for the next crop to ripen. But it closed in 1986, when Courreges' husband, a former Fountain Valley planning commissioner and city councilman, became ill. He died in 1987.

Pictures show that the old farmhouse looks remarkably as it did when the operation was in full swing, but the atmosphere, obviously, is just not the same. A favorite cat was killed on the busy street out front and now only wild feline inhabitants are left. They dart away from people to hide among old fruit boxes. "And just a few months ago," says Courreges, "a dog killed the rooster."

But Courreges keeps busy with her nine grandchildren and active in the local historical society. And even though her farmhouse has been surrounded by subdivisions for decades, she maintains much of the rural life style. She grows her own fruits and vegetables, and every year her home-canning tables first greet at the Orange County Fair.

On land once owned by Ruch Courreges stand housing tracts—Stardust, Greenbrook, Chateau Lane—built between 1963 and 1987. Nearly 600 children attend Ruch Courreges Elementary School, and a street and park in the area also bear the Courreges name.

Most homes in the neighborhood are large and elegant, selling for \$250,000 to \$300,000. The many boats, cars and motor homes parked in the driveways and street signs saying "Watch Out for Children" reveal an active, family-oriented life style.

"Most people like it here because Fountain Valley still has a small-community atmosphere," said Anna Prasad, who sells real estate in the area. "And it's closer for those who have to commute to work in Los Angeles."

James Dick, former president of the Fountain Valley Historical Society, became an original owner in the Stardust subdivision when he purchased a home on Nightingale Avenue in 1954.

For a few 15 years, Dick's house was surrounded by tomato, chili pepper and asparagus fields. He spent many evenings visiting Joseph and Hazel Courreges, watching the fireworks at Disneyland from their bluff-top home. "It's just a little aside, but at night you can see a long way. The lights in the valley look like a million jewels," he says. "It's nice to see Hazel's grandchildren playing outside now and then. The Courreges family pioneered this area, and I'm glad they're still around."

—JANICE L. JONES

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Sat, Sep 30, 2017