

Los Angeles Times
3-31-88

Labor Camp Is Making a Comeback in Piru Citrus Groves

By DONNA DOWLING, Times Staff Writer

The sweet smell of orange blossoms washes over the lime-green buildings nestled into the foothills. The air is clear, the graceful almond trees are budding and, for the first time in 17 years, the sounds of activity echo through what could be a fitting spot for a luxury hotel.

It's not exactly the Ritz. The 10 or so buildings known as *El Campo* will reopen Friday as a labor camp capable of housing 150 men and feeding them three meals a day, including box lunches for the citrus groves in which they toil.

Although field workers in the area have for years scratched to find a place to live, the camp's owner, the Fillmore-Piru Citrus Assn., was never enthusiastic about running it. It closed in 1971.

"We're not in that kind of business," said Lois Yates, a spokeswoman for the packers and shippers group. "We don't run housing for people."

But that kind of business was exactly what appealed to one of the camp's former residents.

Housing Needs

Ignacio Guevara, 56, the lessee of the revitalized Piru camp, is acutely aware of the housing needs of field workers. After all, he was one of them in 1951, when at age 20 he immigrated to the United States from San Luis Potosi, Mexico.

He came with high aspirations, along with thousands of other Mexicans, as part of the United States' *bracero* program. The

federal plan was started in 1943 to recruit workers for the fields when American men were at war. It ended in 1965.

Guevara's first job in this country was for the Fillmore-Piru Citrus Assn. His first home was at the company's Piru labor camp—the one he is hoping to make into a profitable pursuit.

"I came from Mexico," said the tan, gray-haired man as he plopped down on the same squeaky bed that he slept in during his stay in the early 1950s. "I thought I was going to be someone because I came to the United States. I was young. I thought I was going to make a lot of money."

But for years Guevara's dream went unrealized. He began working for the

company as a cook in the camp's mess hall and then as a maintenance worker at the company's plant in Piru. He left the company for a couple of years to work in a factory making aluminum parts for airplanes.

Maintenance Man

But he returned to Fillmore-Piru Citrus, a maintenance man still seeking a way to run his own business. He and his wife, Mary, now hold a 5-year lease on the old labor camp. They've spent the last few months sprucing up the place, and will manage it together.

Operating labor camps—there are six to 36 in the county, depending on which agency is keeping score—may not be

Please see CAMP, Page 3

Ignacio Guevara sits on bed that he slept in during stay in early 1950s at reborn labor camp in Piru.

CAMP: Citrus Workers to Get Housing

Continued from Page 1

particularly lucrative but can offer unique personal gratification, says an Oxnard camp manager.

"I can pay the rent, keep my car on the road and clothes on my back," said Raphael Ramos, manager of the Garden City Labor Camp, which houses more than 50 male farm workers. "It's not anything you can get filthy rich on, but it can provide a decent living."

"It may sound corny," Ramos said. "But it's kind of rewarding to be able to put a roof over someone's head and food in their stomachs. You get to know these guys. It's almost like a family situation."

ers have six. All have electrical outlets and a dresser for clothes but little else.

"My brother thinks I'm crazy," Ignacio Guevara said. "He tells me, 'I don't think you're going to make any money.' He says, 'Everything's so expensive.' You know what? I don't know if I'll be able to make it or not. The little amount that I charge for, it'll be hard to make it."

Tenants will receive three meals a day of both Mexican and American edibles. Breakfast—field hands' fare of bacon, eggs and pancakes—and dinner will be served on the bright yellow and green picnic tables in the mess hall.

Guevara warns. "And the lights are out by 10:30 p.m., because they have to go to work. This is like a labor camp. On weekends they can stay up late."

"Compared to the conditions in town," Mary Guevara said, "where they have 20 to 30 people living in the houses, or living in trailers or garages, you would think they'd like to live here. They can get off work, come eat, relax, take a shower."

They also can finally be at ease while living in an organized camp.

In the past, such camps have been easy targets for Immigration and Naturalization Service officials

This is the only camp that has opened up recently. It's certainly needed. There's a tremendous shortage of housing that's affordable to people," she said. "Maybe now the economics are such that it is profitable to run a labor camp."

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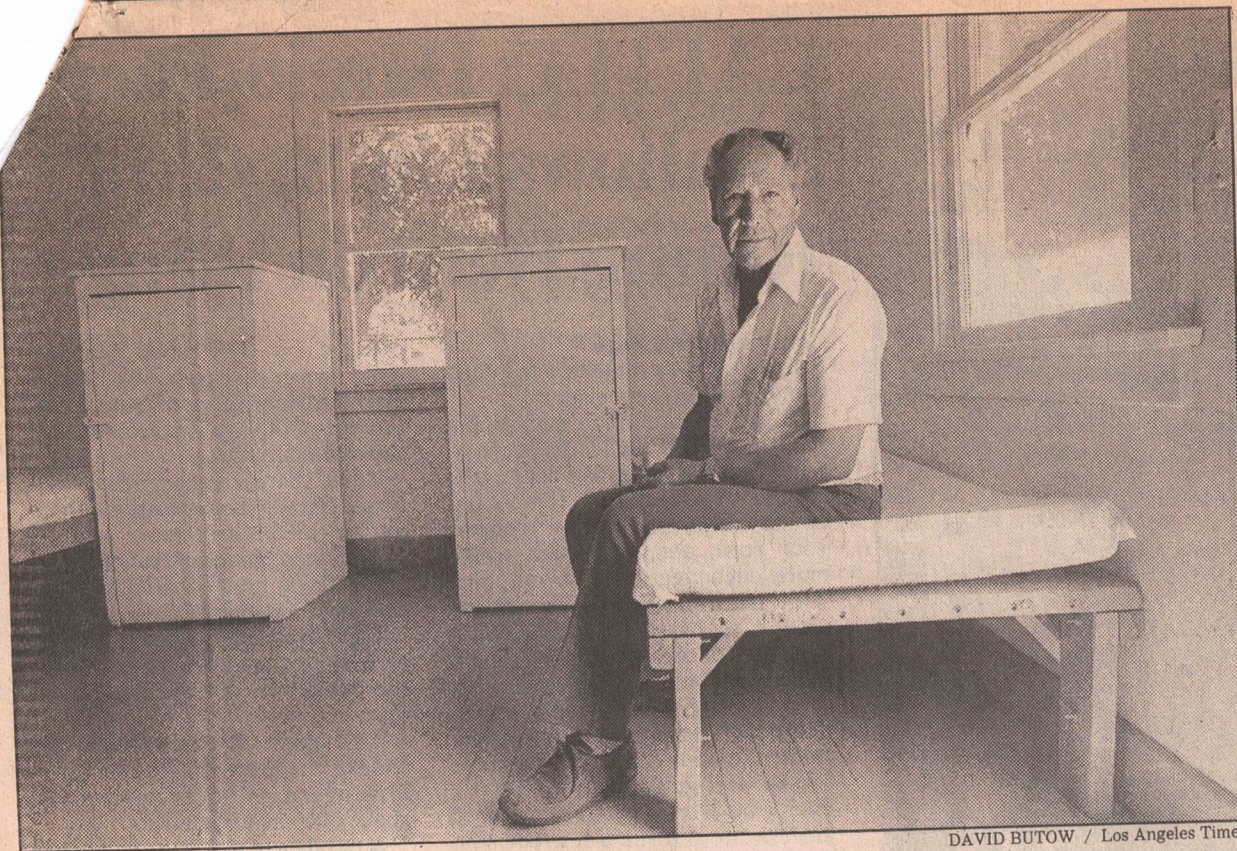
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DAVID BUTOW / Los Angeles Times

Ignacio Guevara sits on bed that he slept in during stay in early 1950s at reborn labor camp in Piru.

CAMP: Citrus Workers to Get Housing

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Right now, the availability of housing in Piru for male farm workers is scarce enough, the Guevaras said, that their camp should be an attractive alternative for single men. El Campo will offer lodging in barracks-style rooms. Some rooms have three beds, oth-

ers have six. All have electrical outlets and a dresser for clothes but little else.

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Tenants will receive three meals a day of both Mexican and American edibles. Breakfast—field hands' fare of bacon, eggs and pancakes—and dinner will be served on the bright yellow and green picnic tables in the mess hall. A bag lunch will be ready to take to the fields. The weekly tab is \$58. Showers and toilets are in a separate facility.

Most men searching for a place to live know that the camp operates with strict rules. "I don't want drugs here in the camp," Ignacio

Guevara warns. "And the lights are out by 10:30 p.m., because they have to go to work. This is like a labor camp. On weekends they can stay up late."

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They also can finally be at ease while living in an organized camp.

In the past, such camps have been easy targets for Immigration and Naturalization Service officials on the prowl for undocumented workers. Whenever the INS came, workers would scatter in fear of deportation. But now that so many farm workers have registered for the federal amnesty program, they should be less apprehensive about

clustering in camps, Ignacio Guevara said.

As part of his job for Piru Citrus, he helped more than 500 employees through the cumbersome registration process last year. "Now that they've got amnesty cards, they can come and can live anywhere without being scared of being caught."

Although the camp sees one solution to housing difficulties in the area, the Guevaras have been inundated by inquiries. In fact, only a few workers have heard that the camp is open.

"It's hard to say after years if the men would live over here," Mary Guevara said. "We'll have to wait and see."

Others will be watching.

"The trend had been for camps to shut down," said Flock, project manager of the brillo Economic Development Corporation, a nonprofit group that works to provide housing for workers.

"This is the only camp that opened up recently. It's needed. There's a tremendous shortage of housing that is available to people," she said. "Now the economics are so tight, it's not profitable to run a labor

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NEWS

Colleen Cason: Braceros planted deep roots in Ventura County

By Colleen Cason

Posted: Aug. 18, 2012

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It was Jose Pantoja's time on July 8. Maria de Jesus Leon Castro left this Earth on May 18. Ramiro Avila went to his eternal rest April 10.

Reading the long, loving obituaries of these Ventura County residents in this newspaper, it became apparent they had at least two things in common: All were born in Mexico and they toiled as Braceros.

Started 70 years ago this month, the Bracero Program brought Mexican laborers to the United States to farm the fields when Americans went off to fight on the battlefields of World War II.

Just as the Greatest Generation warriors are leaving us at a faster pace as time takes its toll, so are these former Braceros.

They have cultivated a legacy in Ventura County, which was once home to the largest Bracero camp in the country, said Jose Alamillo, associate professor of Chicano Studies at CSU Channel Islands.

Called the Buena Vista Labor Camp, it housed 5,000 of the agricultural workers. Although the Bracero Program ended in 1964, the Buena Vista dining hall survives to this day at Rose Avenue and Sixth Street in Oxnard.

Alamillo grew up listening to the stories of the Braceros. As a child in rural Mexico, he felt the long absences of his Bracero father and grandfather.

Alamillo is listening still. Two years ago, CSU Channel Islands teamed up with the Smithsonian National Museum of American History to document the Bracero generation. The fruits of that labor went on display at the Channel Islands campus two years ago.

A similar exhibit focusing on the Piru Labor Camp will open Sept. 29 at the dedication of the Valle Naranjal farmworker housing complex in Piru.

Described by some as a bittersweet harvest, the program took advantage of the cheap labor and in some cases subjected the workers to dangerous and demeaning practices, such as fumigation with DDT upon their arrival in the United States.

But it also gave the workers a path to U.S. citizenship and a better life for their families.

That is, if they were willing to work and work hard.

On a typical day, Alamillo said, the workers were awakened at 5 in the morning after a night sleeping on a wood plank, on a cot or on the floor.

Bracero translates to "strong arm" in Spanish. They also needed strong backs. Some growers equipped the crew with short-handled hoes that forced them to bend over deeper than they would with a longer handle. Growers believed with a short hoe the workers would be more careful in thinning the crops. That tool has since been outlawed.

Braceros worked six days a week. After a long day, said Alamillo, they returned to the barracks exhausted. It was "lights out" at 9 p.m.

"It was a lonely life. Some went back to Mexico out of homesickness," he said.

Others missed the food of their native land. Alamillo said most farmers in Ventura County made an effort to hire cooks who could prepare credible and edible Mexican fare.

With Mexico's economy in shambles, many Braceros sought to return to the United States after their contracts expired. Under the program, they

could get a green card if their previous employer sponsored them.

"That's how they became U.S. citizens," Alamillo said.

The 43-year-old professor believes a strong case can be made that Braceros helped the Allies win World War II.

"Without their efforts, we might not have been able to keep the soldiers fed," he said.

When I look back at those years, I am awed by the sacrifice made by so many. They rose above hardships because they believed the future of this nation and their families depended on it.

Ramiro Avila, whom I mentioned at the top of this column, was really no different. He had been born in Michoacan in 1916. He came with the first wave of the Braceros in 1942. He raised a big family and was married to his childhood sweetheart for 69 years.

None of it could have been that easy. Yet the final words of the obituary tell of his great achievement in this life. It said, "There are no words to describe how loved he was."

TIME FOR CONTEST

Know anyone else who loves hard work?

It's time for The Star's 10th annual Hardest Worker in Ventura County Contest. If you know an eager beaver or a busy bee, you have until 5 p.m. Thursday to submit a nomination.

Please limit your essay to 200 words and write in full sentences. Describe all that the nominee does on the job or jobs. Think action verbs. Also mention volunteer work or family obligations. Give an anecdote that shows the nominee's good attitude.

Include the nominee's name, city of residence and contact information. Give your name and telephone number, too. Attach a head-and-shoulders photo of the nominee, if you have one.

I select 10 finalists from the nominations. Then Star readers can go to VCStar.com and vote online for their favorite.

Email nominations to casonpoint101@gmail.com.



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NEWS

New farmworker complex in Piru has roots in Bracero program



An exhibit at a new farmworker housing community in Piru holds artifacts from the Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp, or "El Campo," which housed 250 farmworkers during the Bracero program after it was founded in 1950.

By Stephanie Snyder

Posted: **Oct. 03, 2012**

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Maria Ibarra is more than grateful that she and her husband no longer need to worry about whether they can afford to pay rent and buy food for their three children every month.

After she lost her job, they had to rely solely on her husband's earnings as a farmworker to support their children, ages 1, 4 and 6.

What eased her mind was moving into a new apartment complex where rent varies depending on family income and that is in a community deeply

rooted in understanding the life of a farmworker, as far back as the Bracero program.

Valle Naranjal, a new 66-unit low-income housing development exclusively for farmworkers and their families, was built on the same land that formerly housed the Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp, which was founded in 1950. About 250 Mexican farmworkers lived there during the Bracero program, which brought 4.6 million guest workers to the United States to overcome a labor shortage from 1942 to 1964.

Along with the two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments, Valle Naranjal ? orange grove valley ? features a community center that showcases the program by exhibiting original artifacts from the site, a replica of the Piru labor camp, a video documentary of the camp's history, news articles from the time period, farmworkers' contracts and a map of other labor camps in Ventura County.

The display shows the efforts and struggles of the farmworkers from the very beginning, Ibarra said. She wants her children to be aware of those struggles.

"It shows how proud we are of them," Ibarra, 30, said in Spanish. "The kids will grow from their example."

Cabrillo Economic Development Corp., which built Valle Naranjal, partnered with CSU Channel Islands to create the exhibit.

"We knew we had something special, especially for the little ones to know that this complex has come full circle," Cabrillo Project Manager Miguel Garcia said.

Garcia gave three CSUCI Chicano studies students creative freedom to develop the exhibit for class credit during the spring 2012 semester.

Maria Salas, one of the students who worked on the \$10,000 project, said she has known about Braceros since she was 4 years old ? when her father explained the work he had been doing in the fields since 1942. He noted that the food on their table was picked by farmworkers like him.

"I was so proud and ever since I've always had this thing about Braceros," Salas said, recalling the conversation with her father.

Salas said she even served as a farmworker for six months to fulfill her father's contract after he suffered a stroke in 1973. It meant dropping out of UC Santa Barbara to help support her family of nine siblings.

"It made me appreciate what my dad had to go through and the love that he had for us to do that kind of work," said Salas, who took her father's spot picking green beans in Oxnard.

CSUCI started archiving the Bracero program in 2008 when it partnered with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History to create exhibits documenting Bracero workers, including one at the Channel Islands campus that focuses on Ventura County.

"They went through a lot of humiliation," Salas said. "A lot of them did suffer, and that's why a lot of them were hesitant to speak. ... My dad didn't tell me the truth until he was about 92."

He passed away shortly afterward, she added.

Documenting Bracero workers remains an ongoing process that requires attention now that "they're dying out," Salas said. "It is a story that needs to be told."

And it is a story that CSUCI Chicano studies professor Jose Alamillo said he hopes more students will hear since Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law in August that allows junior high and high schools to teach about the guest worker program.

Alamillo said his goal is to declare each of the 18 Ventura County Bracero camps as historical landmarks and create specific exhibits for each one highlighting their local history like the new Piru exhibit.

The Valle Naranjal community center was dedicated to Ignacio "Nacho" Guevara and his wife, Mary, who ran the camp from 1988 until 2003. Nacho, who passed away in 2001, was contracted as an orange and lemon picker at the Piru Labor Camp in 1951 for 75 cents per hour and was later

hired as a cook. The camp was closed for 16 years until the Piru Citrus Association asked Guevara to reopen it in 1988.

Guevara was known to help farmworkers set up residency in the United States, open bank accounts and send money home to their families. His generosity is shown at the exhibit with his signature quote on the wall: "If I had won the lottery, I would've fixed the camp and had the workers living there for free."

Mary, who still lives in Piru, said all her husband wanted was to make sure the farmworkers and their families could live comfortably at the camp and support each other as a community.

"If he was alive, he would be so happy because it's one of his dreams coming true," she said.



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Ventura

Thursday, October 4, 2012

■ **AIDING TROU**
Nominated by their
are honored for the
young people in the
system in Ventura (

Case delayed for driver in fa

■ **Attorney cites
'exemplary service'
to community**

By **Raul Hernandez**
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805-437-0264

A Ventura school bus driver suspected of killing a 75-year-old pedestrian while under the influence appeared in court with

her attorney Wednesday and learned criminal charges hadn't been filed against her.

Ventura County Superior Court Judge Kevin McGee ordered Joanne Madaule, 54, to return to court Feb. 11 to find out whether the District Attorney's Office will file criminal charges.

In some criminal cases, charges aren't filed because of a "missing complaint." In those cases, a law enforcement investigation might be pending or prosecutors

might have sent a case back to a law enforcement agent for more information. After an investigation ends, the district attorney gets the case and determines whether to file charges.

In an interview outside the courtroom, Madaule's attorney, Ronald Richards, of Beverly Hills, said Madaule takes prescription drugs for a back injury and that the crash was an accident.

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PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE SNYDER/THE STAR

Maria Salas, one of three CSU Channel Islands students who created an exhibit highlighting the history of immigrant farmworkers in Piru, holds a photograph of her father, who was a farmworker in Ventura County through the Bracero Program.

Braceros' legacy

■ **Farmworker
complex traces
roots in Piru
through exhibit**

By **Stephanie Snyder**
stephanie.snyder@vcstar.com
805-437-0216

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After she lost her job, they had to rely solely on her husband's earnings as a farmworker to support their children, ages 1, 4 and 6.

What eased her mind was moving into a new apartment complex where rent varies depending on family income and that is in a community deeply rooted in understanding the life of a farmworker, as far back as the Bracero Program.

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PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE SNYDER/THE STAR

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LOCAL

BRACERO
from 1B

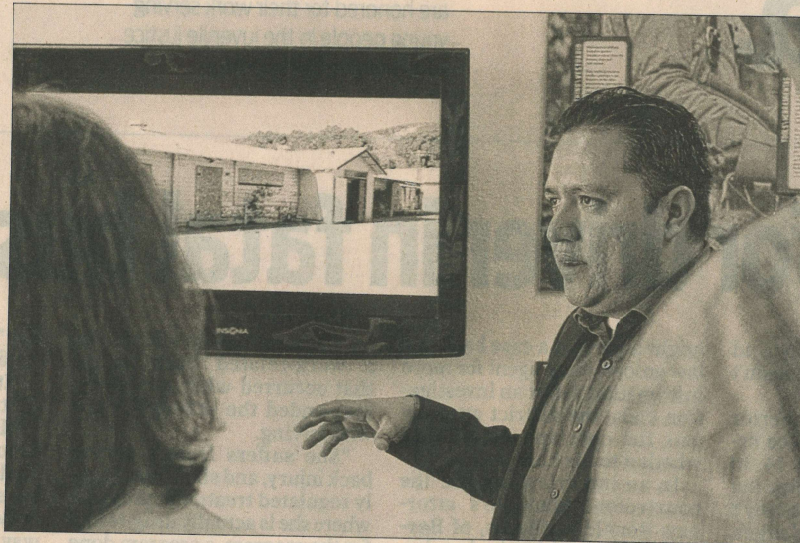
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STEPHANIE SNYDER/THE STAR

Miguel Garcia, project manager for Cabrillo Economic Development Corp.'s Valle Naranjal in Piru, explains what the 1950s-era Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp looked like.

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FILLMORE
from 1B

he was the one who leaked the information. Brooks proposed censuring Conaway.

A censure is the term for a council's discipline of one of its members. It can come with punishments such as excluding the censured member from closed hearings or taking away a travel budget.

Israel told the council a censure must be supported by a formal investigation and that the city would have to hire an outside attorney to conduct one. Brooks then changed his motion to an admonishment, a weaker form of disapproval that

doesn't require an investigation or come with any punishment. The council voted 3-1 to admonish Conaway, with Conaway abstaining from the vote. Sipes dissented, saying he still wanted to explore a censure.

"There's no question in my mind that he did it," Sipes said. "If he wanted to put this to rest, he could have answered the question and explained why he did it. ... We have to take the Brown Act seriously. This was a clear, intentional violation of the law."

The bids published in the Gazette range from \$150 to \$285 an hour for basic legal services. The city's former firm, Myers, Widders, Gibson & Jones, bid \$145 an hour with

a \$2,500 monthly retainer. The new firm, Aleshire & Wynder, bid \$150 an hour for the first 50 hours of every month and \$175 an hour after that. Both firms charge more for litigation and specialized services.

Conaway was the only council member to vote against soliciting bids to replace the old firm. Once the bidding ended, he voted to hire Aleshire & Wynder.

Though he declined to comment on whether he was the source of the leak, he said the information that got out wasn't that sensitive.

"It's not a big secret what municipal attorneys charge," Conaway said. "What this whole process has shown is the prices our old firm charged were ade-

quate and the new firm is pretty competitive, too."

The other council members say the leak hurt the city's bargaining position and its reputation.

"We had our finalists, and we were negotiating trying to lower their rates," Brooks said. "After they found out what everyone else was bidding, why would they lower their rates?"

Sipes said that when he attended the League of California Cities conference last month in San Diego, an attorney from one of the firms that bid on Fillmore's contract pulled him aside and took him to task over the leak.

"It was embarrassing, to be honest," Sipes said. "It was unfortunate that there is a percep-

tion that we don't conduct business in an ethical manner."

The admonishment follows other tiffs between Conaway and his colleagues. He's blamed them for aggravating the city's budget problems and making decisions that drive up Fillmore's legal bills. They say he's unwilling to work with them and that he misses too many council meetings. Most of his absences are because of his job with Southern California Edison.

Due in part to his disagreements with the rest of the council, Conaway isn't running for re-election this year.

"I haven't lost any sleep over this," Conaway said of the admonishment. "It's done with, and my seat's up in a month."