San Jose Mercury-News

SAN JOSE, CALIF., SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 13, 1972

County's Women Planner A Strong Conservationist

By CHARLES BRICKER
Staff Writer

LOS ALTOS — A 47-year-old attorney with strong conservationist feelings is the first woman named to the Santa Clara County Planning Commission.

Mrs. Gerry Steinberg took her seat on the commission last week amid some curious but obviously traditionally polite male planners.

"One of the men — I won't say who — told me he doesn't always wear a tie to the commission meetings," Mrs. Steinberg confided.

"But he told me he was wearing one that day in my honor."

Mrs. Steinberg was Supervisor Victor Calvo's choice to replace Lawrence Anderson for a four-year term on the commission.

She has far more than just a passing interest in county planning.

A member of the Loma Prieta chapter of the Sierra Club and of the locally based Committee for Green Foothills, she has a commitment to preserving as much of the county's natural assets as possible.

She explained in detail how her sense of conservation has been keenly honed for the past 20 years.

That's the amount of time she and her well-known architect husband have lived in the shadow of the Permanente Cement Co. operation in the Monta Vista-Los Altos Hills area.

Sitting in the living room of her spacious new home, she pointed out the giant living room window to the green hillside.

"I've seen trees topple and literally seen that hill shrink because of the Permanente work," she said.

"I've seen the entire profile of that hill change in a week."

Gerry Steinberg endured the assault to her sensibilities for a long time.

Then, in 1970, she and other residents living near Highway 280 pooled their mental resources and began to badger county officials for some action.

They succeeded in getting some concessions from Permanente and, at the same time, Mrs. Steinberg obviously impressed Vic Calvo.

"He called me one afternoon just recently and asked me if I wanted to serve on

her time getting acquainted with issues she needs to know more about.

But her decisions will likely reflect her personal philosophies about planning.

"I'm concerned a lot about unplanned growth," the new commissioner said. "But I'd like to emphasize that I realize the importance of building construction industries.

"You have to be careful. If people can't make a living, they'll move away," she explained.

Her home in the foothills west of the freeway gives just that impression — that everyone has moved away.

Her husband fashioned a home with a liberal use of brick and wood and a flock of saplings on a giant lot.

It's the payoff to a lucrative business career for both herself and her husband, Goodwin B. Steinberg, of Steinberg Associates of San Jose.

Mrs. Steinberg was born in Chicago, grew up in Evanston, Ill. She earned a bachelor's degree at Vassar and entered the University of Illinois law school in 1946.

But she quit to raise a family of three children before taking her law degree.

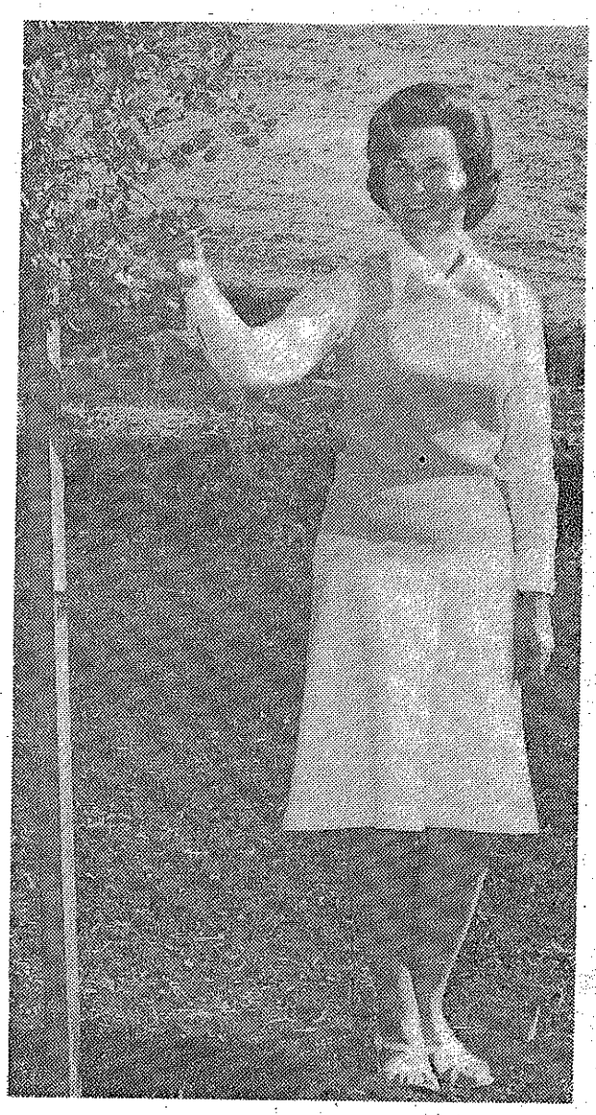
Persistent, she went back to law school at Stanford and finally got that law degree at the age of 38.

She then went to work for the County Counsel's office for two years.

Her day is now spent in community meetings and doing the incredible amount of homework necessary so that she doesn't walk into commission meetings "cold turkey."

"I think what the county really needs," she said, disclosing what apparently is one of her secret planning wishes, "is some countywide planning organization or commission with teeth.

"It would involve not only the unincorporated areas but the cities, all 15 cities, as well."



GERRY STEINBERG
. . . first woman commissioner

Copyrighted material reprinted with permission. For educational use only.