

# Vista Irrigation District



**Celebrating a Century of  
Service and Stewardship**

*1923*

*100  
years*

*2023*



Vista landscape, Oceanview Dr looking northwest 1912



The Vista Inn, 1912 - from "A History of Vista," Doyle, 1983



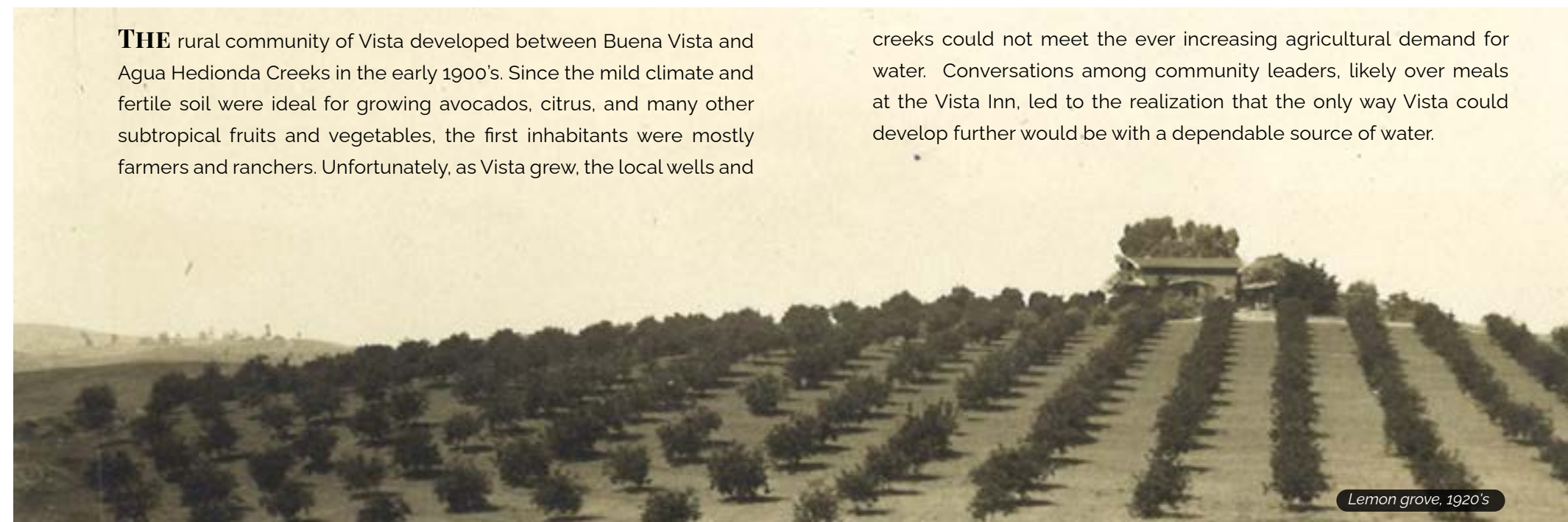
Avocados, 1920's

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**IMAGINE** standing on the corner of East Vista Way and Santa Fe Avenue surrounded by gently rolling hills with small avocado orchards, scattered ranch houses, a winery, and a water tank filled by Buena Creek at the high point in the distance. The view in front of you lacks asphalt and sidewalks, but a few cars and a train ramble along a dirt road and tracks. Behind you stands The Vista Inn, a wooden two-story structure, the center of social life in the 1920's, and the beginnings of **THE VISTA IRRIGATION DISTRICT.**

**THE** rural community of Vista developed between Buena Vista and Agua Hedionda Creeks in the early 1900's. Since the mild climate and fertile soil were ideal for growing avocados, citrus, and many other subtropical fruits and vegetables, the first inhabitants were mostly farmers and ranchers. Unfortunately, as Vista grew, the local wells and

creeks could not meet the ever increasing agricultural demand for water. Conversations among community leaders, likely over meals at the Vista Inn, led to the realization that the only way Vista could develop further would be with a dependable source of water.



Lemon grove, 1920's





Construction of Henshaw Dam, 1922



Dam construction, 1922

**I**n response to the county's agricultural demand, the San Diego County Water Company surveyed the area in search of prospective locations for dams and reservoirs. After nearly 30 years of exploration and planning, construction of Henshaw Dam

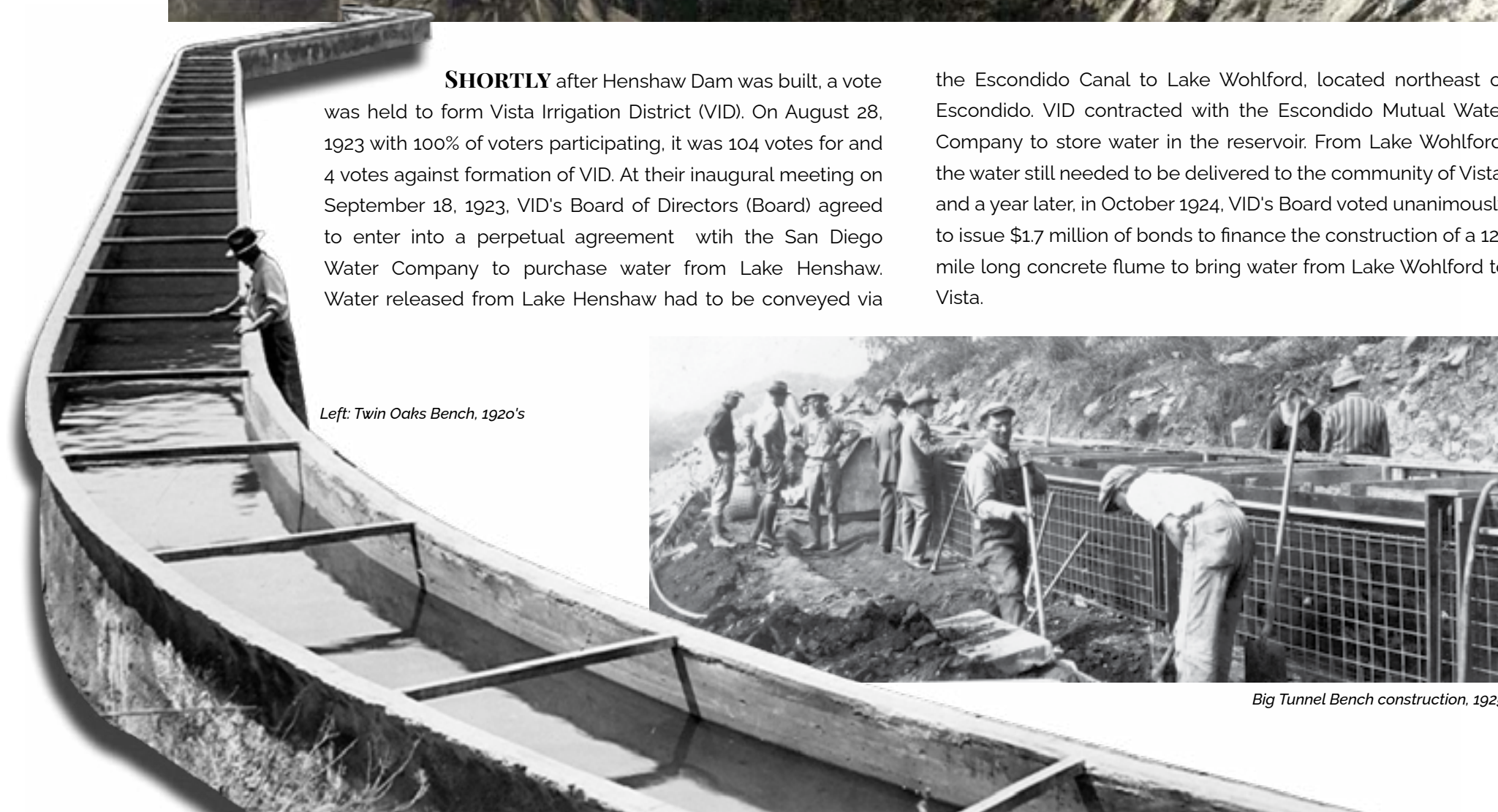
began in May 1922 on the upper San Luis Rey River. All of the raw materials used to construct the dam - clay, soil, and rock - were quarried on site. Despite the fact that minimal power equipment was used, the entire dam was built in a remarkable seven months.



Henshaw Dam, 1922 - from UCSD Library Archives



Escondido Canal looking southwest



**S**HORTLY after Henshaw Dam was built, a vote was held to form Vista Irrigation District (VID). On August 28, 1923 with 100% of voters participating, it was 104 votes for and 4 votes against formation of VID. At their inaugural meeting on September 18, 1923, VID's Board of Directors (Board) agreed to enter into a perpetual agreement with the San Diego Water Company to purchase water from Lake Henshaw. Water released from Lake Henshaw had to be conveyed via

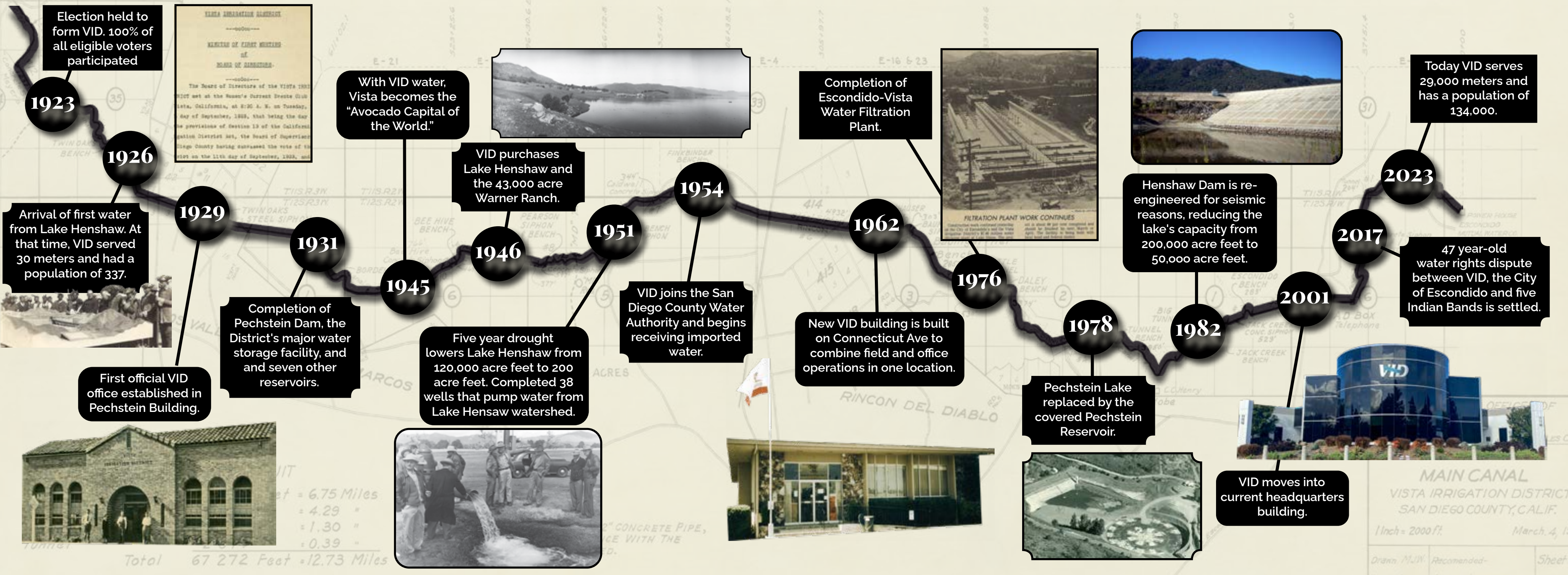
the Escondido Canal to Lake Wohlford, located northeast of Escondido. VID contracted with the Escondido Mutual Water Company to store water in the reservoir. From Lake Wohlford, the water still needed to be delivered to the community of Vista, and a year later, in October 1924, VID's Board voted unanimously to issue \$1.7 million of bonds to finance the construction of a 12-mile long concrete flume to bring water from Lake Wohlford to Vista.

Left: Twin Oaks Bench, 1920's



Big Tunnel Bench construction, 1925







IN 1925 construction began on not only the flume, but Pechstein Dam, five concrete reservoirs, and major pipelines that would make up the foundation of VID's water distribution network. The first water was delivered through VID's new facilities on February 27, 1926, and people came from miles around to celebrate its arrival.

This celebration coincided with extraordinary growth in the Vista area, as the population doubled in size from 1927 to 1928. Citrus and avocado groves flourished throughout the local hills and by the mid-1940's the Vista area was known as the "Avocado Capital of the World." Bringing water to Vista allowed the area to become an agricultural wonderland that continued to encourage growth and development



Flume installation, 1926



First Water celebration at Indiana Ave and Broadway, 1926



Celebration speeches, 1926



Replacing outlet valve at Henshaw Dam, 1959

IN 1946, after years of negotiation, the San Diego County Water Company agreed to sell Lake Henshaw and the surrounding 43,000-acre Warner Ranch to the District. Purchase of these facilities was purely economic, in that, it was a result of a search for cheaper water for VID. Unfortunately, the following four years saw severe drought, reducing Lake Henshaw's storage level from 120,000 acre feet to less than 200 acre feet, and rationing was imposed for a short time. VID's Board authorized the immediate drilling of a series of wells to pump groundwater stored in the Henshaw basin. By 1951, 38 wells were actively pumping water into Lake Henshaw to replenish lake levels.

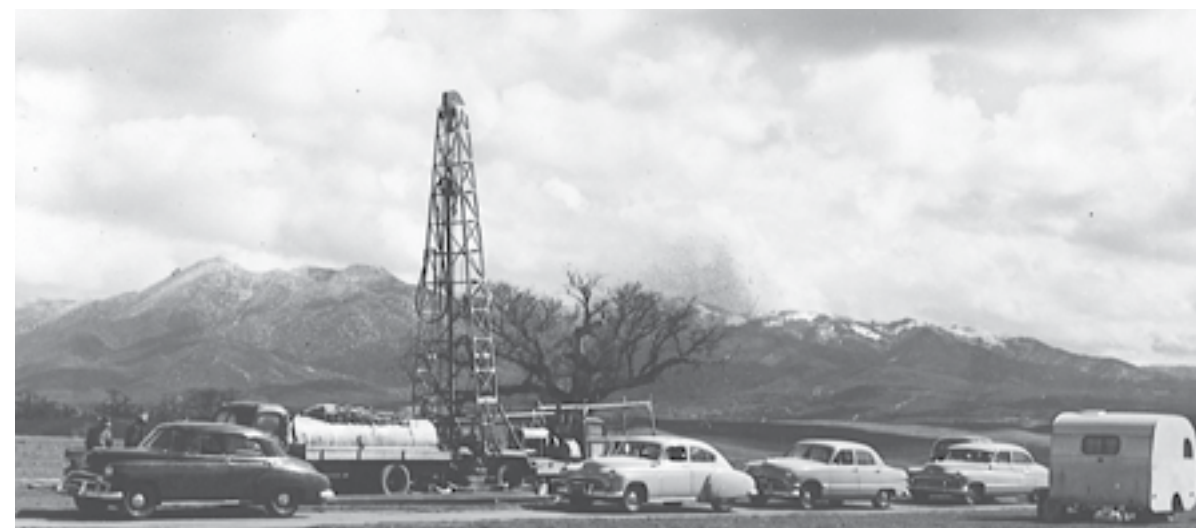
Drought conditions and population growth eventually caused VID to look for other sources of water. On February 16, 1954, VID became a member of the San Diego County Water Authority to take advantage of water imported from the Colorado River and Northern California.



VID covered seven miles of open flume from 1947 to 1955



Headline about VID joining SDCWA on Feb 18, 1954



Drilling wells at Henshaw, 1951



Pump setting rig and VID trucks, 1953





From groves...

**FROM** the 1950s to the 1970s, Vista's agricultural land gave way to suburban development. The year 1955 saw a breakthrough in this agricultural community, when the first mass-built subdivisions were started. The year 1955 also was the beginning of the decline of Vista as an avocado producing and packing center, due primarily to the collapse of the price and drought, which would continue well into the 1960's. Many groves were split into smaller parcels and the building of homes on these parcels and subdivisions continued throughout this period.



... to homes

In order to supply enough high quality water to meet the demands of this rapid suburban growth, VID constructed a number of substantial infrastructure projects, replacing more than 50 miles of pipeline in the 1950's and constructing three covered reservoirs in the 1960's and 1970's. The Escondido-Vista Water Treatment Plant, jointly owned by the City of Escondido and VID, was constructed in 1976.

**WHILE** there is still some agriculture in existence today, since the 1970s, urbanization has overwhelmingly remained the main driver of water delivery in VID's service area. Current and future upgrades to VID's infrastructure include mainline replacements, new reservoir construction and rehabilitations, and replacing the nearly 100 year-old, 12-mile long flume. Investment in these substantial infrastructure projects will allow VID to continue to deliver a reliable supply of high quality water to current and future generations.

The vote of the people in 1923 revolutionized this small rural settlement inhibited by the lack of water. VID's century of service and stewardship has transformed this community from cattle grazing and dry farming to an agricultural wonderland and now into what it is today: a thriving community with a substantial business park, a professional theater production, a burgeoning micro-brew industry, and a revitalized downtown. VID has demonstrated its ability to adapt with this ever-changing landscape over time. VID is proud of its track record over the last century and looks forward to many more successful years of service.



Vista, 2023 - Photo by Danny Dambach



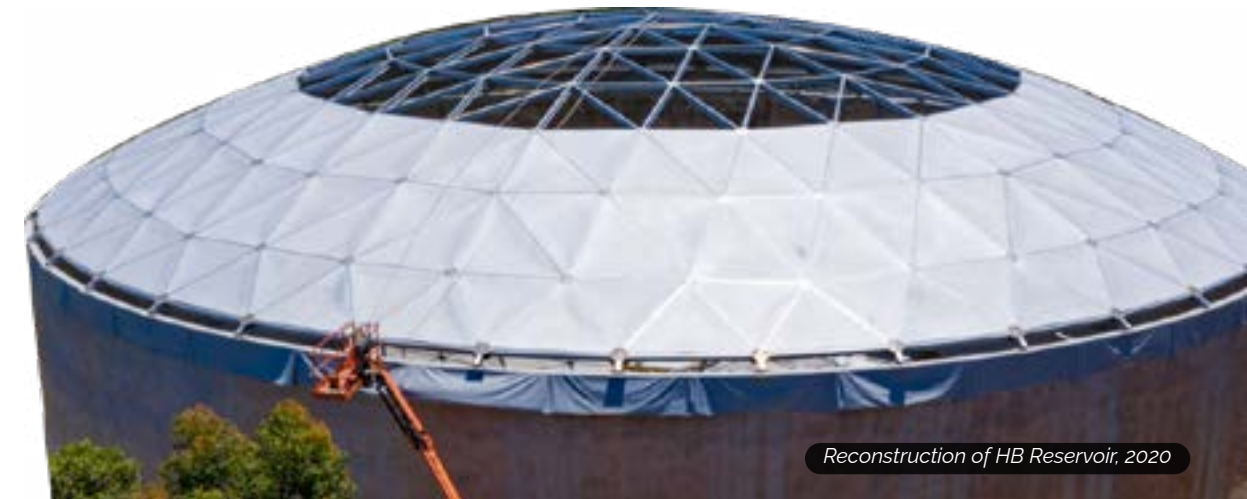
Concreting roof of HB Reservoir, 1964



Mainline pipe installation, 1963



Mainline pipe replacement, 2022



Reconstruction of HB Reservoir, 2020



# Proudly Serving Our Customers Since 1923



1923 - 1965



1965 - 1982



1982 - 1998



1998 - present



2023

## Board of Directors

*Div. 1 Marty Miller*

*Div. 2 Richard L. Vásquez*

*Div. 3 Peter Kuchinsky II*

*Div. 4 Patrick H. Sanchez*

*Div. 5 Jo MacKenzie, President*