



Ken Phipps

It took him a while to figure it out, but Ken Phipps is a numbers guy.

Attractive real estate prices lured Ken and his wife to Temecula about a dozen years ago. The pair used to visit Old Town and the wine country on weekends. On a dare they started checking out home prices in the wake of the 2007 recession with the idea of acquiring a country getaway from Orange County, where they lived and worked.

In 2010 the Phipps found a fixer upper in the Glen Oaks area of Temecula. The 2,500-square-foot residence had been “surgically” stripped by its previous owner. No sinks. No cabinets. No light switches. No front door. No water heater. Despite 10 years of hard work and “indoor camping,” Ken said he liked the rural area just south of Wine Country and the fact it had an HOA.

“It’s all about location,” he said.

The numbers didn’t hurt either. Math always served Ken well. Growing up in Cherry Hill, N.J., Ken pursued a chemical engineering degree at Cornell. In addition to rowing on the freshman lightweight crew team, he discovered his love of math paid unexpected dividends off campus. Ken remembers an Ithaca hangout that lured college students in with a night of \$1 beer pitchers and \$1 pizzas.

Ken’s college career got sidetracked for a couple of years. In the interim he worked for a costume jewelry manufacturer, sold insurance, and eventually joined his brother in Southern California in 1984 working for a defense contractor that provided support for the Trident submarine launched missile program. He earned an applied mathematics degree after attending night school at Cal State Fullerton.

Seeking a secure future as a financial analyst, Ken went to work for the Orange County Transportation Authority, responsible for planning, funding, and delivering transportation improvement projects and public transit for all of Orange County.

Shortly after Ken joined OCTA, Orange County became the largest municipality in U.S. history ever to file for bankruptcy. Many blamed the county treasurer who appeared to be gambling with public money by making risky investments.

Ken got to see firsthand the cash crunch that followed. “We couldn’t even make payroll,” he remembers. Ironically, if the county treasurer had been allowed to continue on his investment course for a couple of months, the crisis would have been averted, Ken said. Instead, his agency stumbled along on a “bare bones” budget for nearly 4 years.

Although Ken had played “schoolyard” and country club golf growing up, he started playing regularly at OCTA in a Wednesday afternoon league.

This East Coast transplant heeded his father’s advice and adopted the game of golf with an open heart. His dad said “golf is more than just a sport. It can serve you well in life and in business.”

After nearly three decades trying to teach policy makers and politicians in Orange County the dollars and cents of transportation projects, Ken retired on Friday the 13th 2020. Luck, as it were, was not with him. A European trip he and his wife planned to visit relatives in the United Kingdom had to be postponed because of Covid.

He is still waiting for his first hole in one. But he vividly remembers a golf outing with his brother and their wives in Orange County where his brother aced a blind par 3. At first only the golfers in front of them reacted. When Ken and his brother started jumping up and down the wives couldn’t figure out what was the big deal. Ah, golf what a strange sport!