

NEIGHBORHOOD



Ojai's beauty tucked into mountains

By Maggie Hood

Ojai is home of Lake Casitas, Libby Bowl, Villanova Preparatory School, St. Thomas Aquinas College, the Punch-bowls and more. A tiny enclave with a population of just about 8,000, tucked away 12 miles from the ocean and surrounded by the Topa Topa Mountains Range in the Los Padres National Forest – that's Ojai.

Home to movie stars and artists, holistic healers and well-known inns and spas. The quaint downtown area gained fame decades ago when filmed for the movie, "The Lost Horizon" to represent Shangri-La. Today, its

beauty is never more evident than in the early evening, when the sunset off the Topa Topa peaks give off a glow, known to locals as the "Pink Moment."

Like most cities in Ventura County, the Chumash Indians were the first known inhabitants. The valley was called "Ojai" which some say comes from their word "A'hwai," meaning "moon." To many, Ojai is known as "The Valley of the Moon."

Then, in the 1800s, the Ojai Valley became part of several large Mexican land grants, followed by many other sales until 1864, when exploration for oil began. Oil was never a success, but soon many people came to Ojai as a result of a writer from New York by the name of Charles Nordhoff, who wrote articles about how beautiful the West was. Though he had been in California while in the

Navy, he apparently never lived in Ojai.

The coming of Edward Drummond Libbey in 1908, however, changed everything. He came from Ohio to visit a friend and fell in love with the town. Thanks to his vision, the present downtown arcade that houses the shops on Main Street was developed, along with the pergola at the entrance to Libbey Park, named after him. In addition, nearly every aspect of the town today is the way he envisioned it in 1914. In 1917, the town was officially renamed from Nordoff to Ojai. Libbey declined to have it named after him.

Libbey Park, in the heart of downtown, is the site of many cultural events, and many musical events, such as the Ojai Music Festival, are held in Libbey Bowl, the outdoor amphitheater towards the back of the park.

The Ojai Valley is only ten miles long and three miles wide. This unique setting is conducive to many outdoor activities. Hiking trails through the Los Padres National Forest abound, and if you can find them, there are waterfalls and swimming holes. The Ojai Valley bike trail now stretches from the ocean all the way through town, with a parallel path for horses, and horseback riding is a favorite pastime. Lake Casitas is a world-class fishing lake, and there are more than 400 camping sites.

STATS

OJAI (statistics as of 2000 Census)

Population: 7862

Male: 47%

Female: 53%

Families: 1,985

Population distribution:

Under 18: 24.9%

18-24: 6.5%

25-44: 23.9%

45-64: 26.8%

65+: 17.9%

Income:

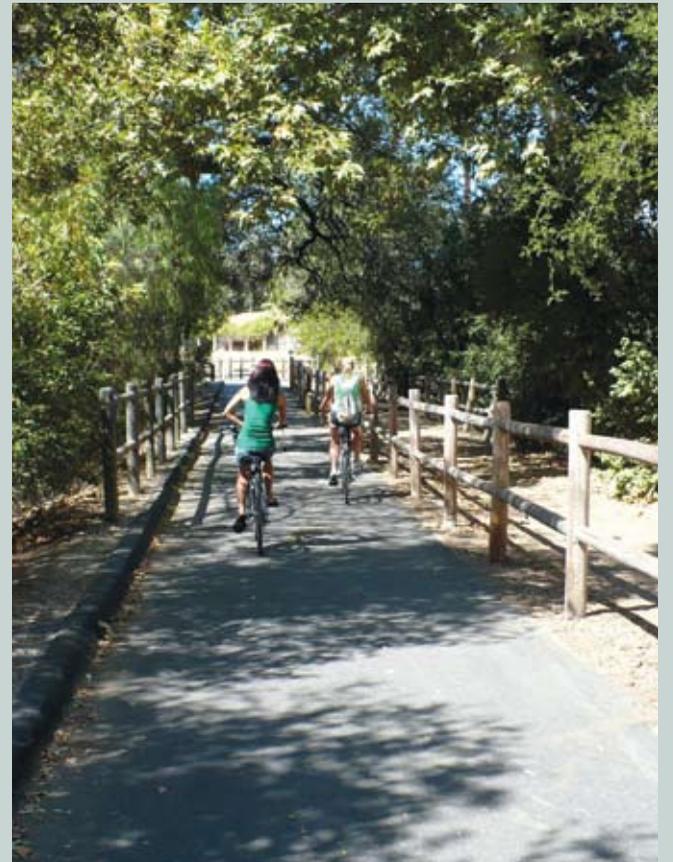
Median income: \$44,593

Median income/family: \$52,917

Median income/males: \$40,919

Median income/females: \$30,821

31.6% of the population has bachelor's degree or higher



SELECTED OJAI EVENTS

- Ojai Wine Festival
- Pirate Festival
- Medieval Festival