

because of the town's isolation and the resulting transportation problems, and county officials anticipate that some sort of AEC subsidy will continue to be needed.

A similar subsidy arrangement exists for the town's school system, whose physical facilities were donated to the community by the AEC. The Los Alamos schools are among the best in the state, replete with open classrooms, team teaching, and other innovative techniques, and they send between 75 and 80 percent of their high school graduates on to college. For 3 years in a row, Los Alamos High School students have done exceedingly well in the international science fair, perhaps not surprisingly, but they have also done well in national French language competitions. Radical politics do not seem to have attracted much student attention here, and school officials cite with pride, and some relief, examples of student participation in more conventional political activities and in environmental causes.

Contemporary problems have come to Los Alamos, however, and heroin and other drugs are readily available. Drug use is a subject of some official concern, and both the county and the school system now have drug rehabilitation programs. But the use of hard drugs appears to be declining, and privately there is considerable tolerance, although not approval, of marijuana use and other aspects of youth's counter-cultural life-styles—the location of the town's drug “market,” for example, is common knowledge, even among adults.

Housing and zoning questions are also major issues in the community. There has never been enough housing to satisfy the demand, and much of the “temporary” wartime housing remained in use well into the 1960's. Even today there is something of a shortage, especially for those at the low end of the wage scale—many of whom are Mexican-Americans—who cannot afford to buy or rent in Los Alamos and who must commute from neighboring towns.

The scarcity of housing has been aggravated by an influx of residents who are not employed in Los Alamos—something that was not possible when the AEC controlled housing. Some of these “reverse commuters,” apparently attracted by the town's low crime rate and scenic qualities, work as far away as Santa Fe, 35 miles to the southeast. As the town ages, substantial numbers of laboratory employees are beginning

to retire but not to move away, thus making housing for their replacements at the laboratory hard to come by.

Housing is in fact at the root of a major dispute between the laboratory administration and many of the town's residents. The laboratory's recruiting and its plans for growth are feeling the housing pinch. Laboratory director Harold Agnew claims he could fill 300 houses immediately if they were available, and he has been at some pains to persuade (or, as some of his more vociferous critics would have it, to coerce) the county government to take action. There is, however, a substantial antigrowth faction within the town which adheres to the tradition that Los Alamos is “just the right size” and which fears that expansion would destroy the community's charm. In the most recent municipal elections, the pro-expansion faction appears to have gained the upper hand on the seven-member county council, although the town has little real control over its destiny, since nearly all of the surrounding land is controlled by the AEC. Several new ventures, including high-density apartments and the release of some federally held land for private housing, appear to be in the works.

#### Divergent Interests?

Some resident observers note a growing divergence of interest between the town's scientific professionals and those in service jobs or other nonsalaried occupations. The complaint seems to be that the nonprofessionals, occupied with Kiwanis and other activities, are no longer interested in the laboratory and its mission, with the result—according to some old-timers among the professional class—that the earlier idyll of a close-knit intellectual community has been spoiled. Although there is some evidence of a fission in the community—in the presidential primary George McGovern carried Los Alamos with George Wallace a close second—counterexamples also exist, and there does not seem to be any firm division along class lines. During the push to bring the laboratory's new meson physics facility on line, for example, scientists and technicians alike voluntarily worked weeks of double shifts and shared in the celebration afterward.

The social, cultural, and religious life of the community appears to be flourishing. Upward of 190 clubs and organizations are active, including some, such as the ski association and the recently

resuscitated foreign film society, that date back to the early years of the town. A new Arts Council is responsible for, among other things, coordinating a semiannual northern New Mexico arts fair held at Los Alamos.

Events such as the arts fair are evidence of better relations between Los Alamos and its neighbors. In the past there was a certain distance between Los Alamos and the people in the surrounding communities (largely Mexican-American and Indian), who have always resented its wealth and snobbishness; now the town seems less isolated socially and culturally, as more laboratory employees make their homes in Santa Fe or elsewhere in the valley, and the old fears and dislikes of “the hill” appear greatly abated. That these feelings have not entirely disappeared is shown by a recent dispute over the location of a community college in the area. Residents of Espanola and Santa Fe successfully contested plans to expand a University of New Mexico residential center at Los Alamos into a full-fledged college on the grounds that this would foreclose the possibility of a community college in the valley.

Perhaps the most noticeable trend in Los Alamos is the growing atmosphere of permanence. Ownership of property seems to have made a substantial difference in the attitudes of those who once lived here, in a manner of speaking, “at the pleasure of the government.” Residents no longer seem to feel such strong compulsions to “get off the hill,” and, while many people still drive to Santa Fe or the 100 miles to Albuquerque for major shopping trips or a night out, the business community in Los Alamos is doing considerably better and is making ambitious plans to compete more strongly in the future. Unlike the situation in most small towns, even a number of young people who grew up in Los Alamos are returning after college to settle and find jobs in the laboratory or in the town. The sense of transience that characterized the town for years—no graveyard was established until the early 1960's because of a conviction that “we didn't need one”—seems to have given way to the realization that Los Alamos is here to stay, that for many people it has become home, regardless of the laboratory's mission or its future.

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