

## **Early Decisions Pave Way for Sugar Land's Future Success**

Bill Little was elected mayor in 1961, just a few years after the City's incorporation on Dec. 29, 1959. He and his wife, Mary, came from Ohio looking for job opportunities in Sugar Land. He found one with Sugarland Industries. During those days, there weren't many new people in the company town; they were the new kids on the block, but they would have a lasting impact on the City's future.

In those days, Sugar Land was still a company town, with Sugarland Industries operating everything from a cotton gin to the John Deere Tractor agency, a super market, a western auto store, a home and furniture store, a drug store and all the other necessities of life. The company had one charge account and ran its own credit agency. There were no credit cards; debts were deducted from paychecks, and itemized statements were provided at the end of every month.

As Houston and surrounding areas grew, more and more stores opened in the city, prompting the company to sell its stores to major retailers. It marked the beginning of a gradual transition from company town to City governance.

Following incorporation, City Council asked Imperial Sugar for a building to turn into City Hall. The company provided a shoe store on Kempner Street that included one office and an additional room. The sugar company donated desks and chairs, and the local lion's club provided additional furniture for the council table. As the City grew and became financially stronger, land was purchased on Brooks Street for the second City Hall.

City growth was slow, but important early decisions laid the groundwork for future success. Little credits the first Council for its foresight to create a comprehensive plan that paved the way for zoning. The plan was the first of many that charted an orderly, planned and systematic development of the City. The document built on the business plan of the company town's founders, I.H. Kempner and W.T. Eldridge.

During the early 60s, City Council obtained an urban renewal project from the Federal Housing Administration. Loans backed by Imperial Sugar enabled the removal of rundown houses to clear the way for newer homes with indoor plumbing. Homeowners paid their mortgages through payroll deduction to the sugar company. The project led to the growth of areas like Mayfield Park.

The City gradually assumed responsibility for many of the services provided to residents. Lacking the equipment for street repair, Sugar Land paid for materials and contracted with the county to provide labor and equipment.

Trash service was another challenge. Residents of the company town had been accustomed to trash service five days per week, a service historically provided by the company. A reduction to twice per week was just part of the City's new service level provided to residents. The greater challenge was explaining to citizens that the City's new contractor would not enter homes to remove trash. Hence, the beginning of curbside trash collection.

City founders also had the foresight to provide park space. Lands donated by Imperial Sugar eventually become Baker Field Park – or just City Park. A pool was added in 1966, hence the beginning of City recreation in Sugar

Land. A lot has changed since then. Sugar Land now maintains 18 neighborhood and community parks totaling more than 770 acres.

Money Magazine and CNNmoney.com rank Sugar Land as one of America's Best Places to Live.  
2700 Town Center Blvd. North | Sugar Land, TX 77479-0110 | tel: (281) 275-2700 | fax: (281) 275-2318

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