

## **THE POST-WWII YEARS**

By Jacquelyne Kious

SSF went through tremendous change in the post-WWII years. Returning war veterans and the baby boom, 3.5 million babies were born in 1946 alone, prompted a mass movement to the suburbs. Peninsula cities, like SSF, saw their farmlands suddenly disappear replaced by much needed housing. By the mid-1950s, SSF had transformed from its industrial roots to more architecturally appealing, light industrial buildings and landscaping.

In the early post-war years, the suburbs offered little in the way of activities. There simply wasn't much to do. It was difficult to get to the major cities as highway and transit systems didn't exist making cars and local entertainment in demand.

The popular entertainment of the day was listening to the radio and patronizing movie houses. The State Theatre on Linden Avenue, which opened in 1931, was SSF's movie house. Its popularity flourished through the 1950s. People would line-up down the block to get into the single-screen theatre which offered late shows for the factory workers and, as the population changed, matinees for school kids. Elementary schools sold sheets of tickets to last the entire summer. Moms would happily drop their kids off in the early afternoon for the daily double feature. The kids were happy as well as feeling a sense of independence while getting to eat candy and popcorn all afternoon. The State Theatre finally closed in the 1960s and was purchased by Robert Giorgi (Giorgi Brothers) in 1978.

A more family-friendly alternative to sitting in an often noisy theatre with limited seating was discovered in the Camden, New Jersey, driveway of Richard Hollingshead in 1932. Hollingshead nailed a screen to a tree, placed a radio behind the screen, and set a projector on the hood of his car. From that experiment the drive-in theatre was born.

SSF eventually had three drive-in theaters: Starlite, Spruce, and El Rancho. Drive-ins were extremely popular from the 1940s through the late 1970s. They began to disappear as land values increased. With popcorn, snacks, blankets, and pillows in hand, the whole family packed into the station wagon for a night of entertainment. The cost: 50 cents per car.

Starlite Drive-in opened in 1948 along Spruce and So. Canal. Commercial developers soon bought the land and closed the Starlite. Spruce Drive-in soon opened at Spruce & Railroad. El Rancho Drive-in opened in 1949 on Hickey Blvd between El Camino & Junipero Serra.