

## **Cracks in the Del Mar Way**

John Kerridge, editor Emeritus Sandpiper | June 17

After four-plus hours of public testimony and city council discussion, spread over two meetings on consecutive weeks, the debate about outdoor restaurant extensions has been exhaustive, but still incomplete. Three major issues evaded direct confrontation, despite abundant rhetoric ostensibly addressing them.

First, although virtually no-one contested the idea that outdoor dining would provide a logical boost to Del Mar's downtown area, apparently the term "outdoor dining" means different things to different people. Those of us with memories of outdoor cafes in Europe, and their informal engagement with the passing crowds, while enthusiastic about introducing them to Del Mar, were unprepared for the fortress-like structures that have sprung up along 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Such barricades negate the whole concept of "outdoor dining", at least for those who have experienced the real thing.

Second, if one wanted to experiment with a "Californicated" version of European outdoor dining, it would have made sense to try it out in a less-sensitive location. Instead, this monstrosity has been inflicted on what one could reasonably describe as the heart and soul of Del Mar. The SW corner of 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Camino del Mar epitomizes the ambiance implicit now in the name Del Mar: Civilised living beside the ocean. The present project has destroyed that ambiance. This is exactly the situation in the fable of the Goose with the Golden Eggs.

What on earth was the council thinking? So sensitive a project must automatically have qualified for DRB, and/or Planning Commission, evaluation.

Finally, most of those who criticized the critics of the project seized the opportunity to bad-mouth the Del Mar regulatory ordinances, in general, and the DRO in particular. But they contrive to overlook two facts: One, that those ordinances were approved by two-thirds of Del Mar voters in a popular election and, two, that they have led to spectacular local improvements in both quality of life and also property values.

So, the "Del Mar way" is not broken, but future city councils must never again allow approval of such an inadequately evaluated project, and particularly not in such a vital setting.