

Wingspread The developer's own view of the project

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STAFF WRITER

Ryland Kelley, a lanky man wearing a button-down shirt and a loosely knotted tie, sat down to meet the press. He had a touch of the collegiate look he must have possessed in the Forties as a political science and journalism major at Stanford University.

Though he just turned 60, his hand-raked hair, deep-blue eyes and freckles give him a boyish look.

Kelley was seated in his office off Soquel Drive, explaining in his gravelly voice why he believed the development he wants to erect on the Porter Sesnon property would be good not just for him, but for the people of Santa Cruz County. That development, known as Wingspread Beach, has been the subject of bitter controversy since it was first proposed back in 1978.

And Kelley, head of the Palo Alto firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley, has been painted by some of the foes of the Wingspread proposal as just another greedy out-of-town developer who wants to despoil one of the last potential park sites on the Santa Cruz County coast.

Kelley, whose firm developed \$50 million worth of projects in Northern California last year, prefers to leave the day-to-day

work of promoting Wingspread Beach to the officials of Conference Associates, the Hare, Brewer and Kelley subsidiary that was formed to develop the Wingspread project.

But Kelley spoke to reporters last Wednesday because he wanted to present his side of the Wingspread story personally.

The Wingspread Beach proposals, which have been winding through the county planning process since the late 1970s, finally came before the county Board of Supervisors two weeks ago.

The supervisors summarily rejected the smallest of three alternative plans, known as Plan A, and are scheduled to hold at least one more hearing on Plan B and the newest variation, known as Plan C, or Plan B-1.

Both surviving plans propose a conference center, more than 500 rental units, a three-hall performing arts center and public playing fields on the 66-acre parcel adjacent to New Brighton State Beach. The major difference is that Plan B-1 (or C) calls for the county to purchase Kelley's 99-year lease on the property, then lease it back to Kelley, who would proceed to build the project.

From the beginning, Kelley's plans have met with fierce opposition from neighbors of the Porter Sesnon property, who

object to increased traffic and other infringements on their semi-rural neighborhood, and from environmentalists, who oppose any development of the property other than as a public park.

Foes of Wingspread insist that all the proposals would violate the regulations governing the use of the Porter Sesnon property. In the county's General Plan, and the Local Coastal Plan, the "preferred use" of the land is as a state park.

On the other hand, Wingspread Plan B has gained the strong backing of sports and cultural enthusiasts, who would run the performing arts center and sports facilities through local foundations under special contracts with Kelley.

Over the years, the debate over Wingspread has become so emotional and personalized, Kelley said, that he has had to endure "a lot of very derogative, unsupportable statements made by Bruce Bratton and other minor elements of the press." (Bratton is a columnist for the weekly Santa Cruz Express.)

Kelley said that "there's an impression which is carried along continuously that what we have been proposing for the property is grossly inappropriate ... it's been alluded to we've tried to buy a zoning change."

Kelley denied all those charges, insisting Wingspread is consistent with the county's cultural and economic interests. He defended the soundness of the Wingspread proposals and the integrity of his firm, and pointed to Pajaro Dunes, built 20 years ago, as one of his proud accomplishments.

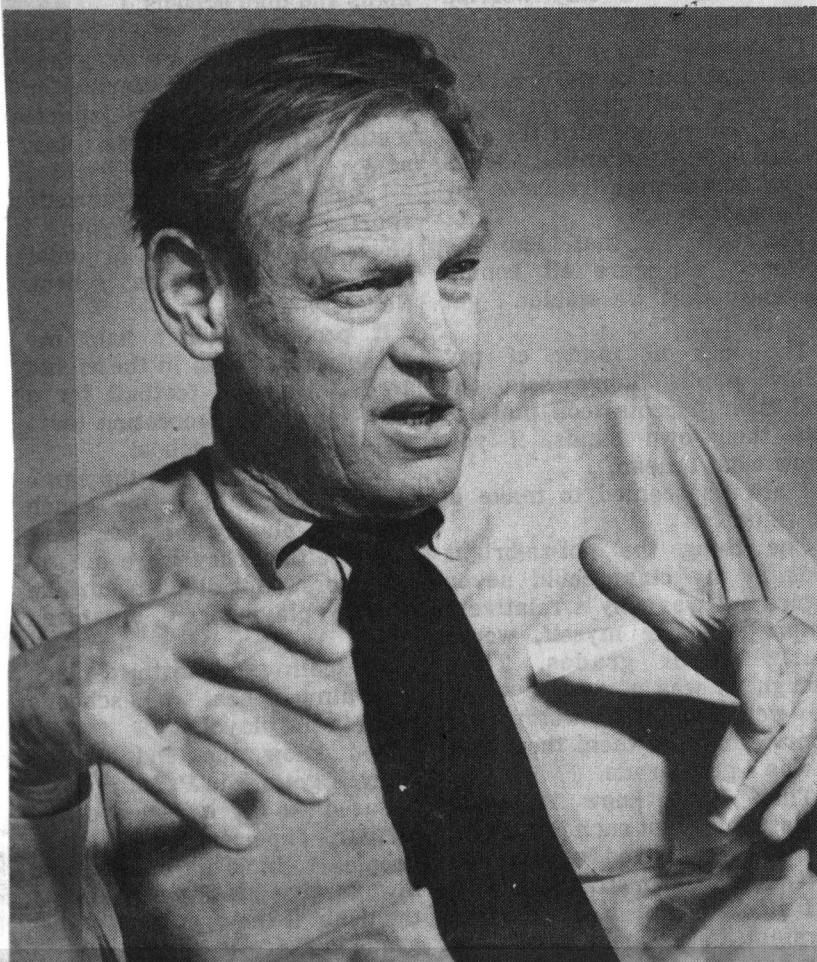
"I've used the word 'euthenics,'" Kelley said. "Euthenics is the art of improving mankind through improving man's environment. It implies you're creating an environment that's uplifting to man. I can think of no greater project (than Wingspread) for euthenics success."

Opponents, said Kelley, sometimes resorting to "McCarthyist techniques," have accused him of "all sorts of career infidelities."

But, he said, "All you have at the end of a career is a reputation, which I brought into the county intact."

Hare, Brewer and Kelley does most of its work in Northern California counties and cities, such as Santa Cruz and Santa Clara, that require stringent project review.

To develop in these areas, said Kelley, "You have to really believe in what you want



Ryland Kelley — Creating an 'uplifting' environment.

Sam Vestal

REFERENCE

to do. If you just wanted to develop to make money you wouldn't go to those places; you'd go to some place like New Mexico or Orange County where it's a walk-on."

Kelley has surprised many foes and friends alike by the tenacity with which he has held onto his Wingspread dream in the face of such time-consuming and frequently strident opposition.

"You bet I have," he said. "When you run into opposition, you try to mitigate it, you try to work with it. The kind of opposition we have had isn't interested in the shape, size, or nuances of the project."

Kelley said he's had no other choice but to tough it out: "The alternatives are to take a multi-million-dollar bath and leave" — which he said he wouldn't do, "not when there's so much support."

"My job is a little bit like Christo's" he said, referring to the maverick avant-garde artist whose work involves wrapping or running enormous pieces of material around buildings, bridges, canyons and other natural features.

In the mid-'70s Christo endured more than 200 public hearings to gain permission to construct a temporary "running fence" of fabric along Northern California coastlands.

Nevertheless, Kelley said that in his view the time for recriminations has passed. He said he feels many critics of the plan must not fully understand it. He also said he holds no bitterness against the county, even though the lengthy delay of the project has cost him enormously and added fuel to the controversy surrounding it.

Kelley said he is now seeking the unanimous approval of Wingspread from the supervisors. He said he hopes even Gary Patton, the most outspoken opponent of the plan on the county board, will support it once he considers all the facts.

"Obviously," Kelley said, "the board is under pressure from people who are very aggressive advocates for open space. They don't want any development there. It's not going to remain open space so a handful of people can run their dogs there."