

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-\_\_\_\_\_**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF MERCED, CALIFORNIA,  
APPROVING THE SPAGHETTI ACRES  
HONORARY NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL  
HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION**

WHEREAS, in the early 1900s, the Pregno Brothers, John and Pietro, and their wives, Mary and Helen, first settled and farmed the area between Merced's 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Streets, and R Street and Bear Creek; and

WHEREAS, more, mainly immigrant families of Italian descent, including the Banterini, Bardini, Bernardi, Cerrato, Dalforno, Gonella, Mussotto, Pera, Pira, Rossi, Sandino, Sartori, Spinardi, Testa, and Vergano families, mostly newcomers to America, began to farm the area; and

WHEREAS, in 1927, the Pregno Brothers helped found the Merced Growers Packing Association, formed along with many area farmers; and

WHEREAS, in the late 1940s, this area that had come to be called "Spaghetti Acres," was developed, as roads were platted and infrastructure added; and

WHEREAS, on August 25, 2022, the Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association ("DNA") completed a survey of the Spaghetti Acres residents and obtained signatures of 84 residents in favor of the proposed honorary residential district designation; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Directors and the Historic Designation Committee of the DNA considered and approved the proposed honorary residential district designation for Spaghetti Acres, as shown on Exhibit A, attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference; and

WHEREAS, an honorary district designation is a means by which the City Council can recognize and call attention to a neighborhood that not only has a concentration of well-maintained older homes but also the conservation of their historic character.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MERCED DOES HEREBY RESOLVE, DETERMINE, FIND, AND ORDER AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The City Council approves the Spaghetti Acres Honorary Neighborhood Residential Historic District designation.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Council of the City of Merced at a regular meeting held on the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2023, by the following vote:

AYES: Council Members:

NOES: Council Members:

ABSENT: Council Members:

ABSTAIN: Council Members:

APPROVED:

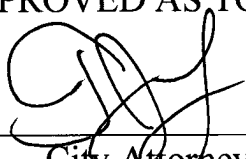
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

ATTEST:  
STEPHANIE R. DIETZ, CITY CLERK

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant/Deputy City Clerk

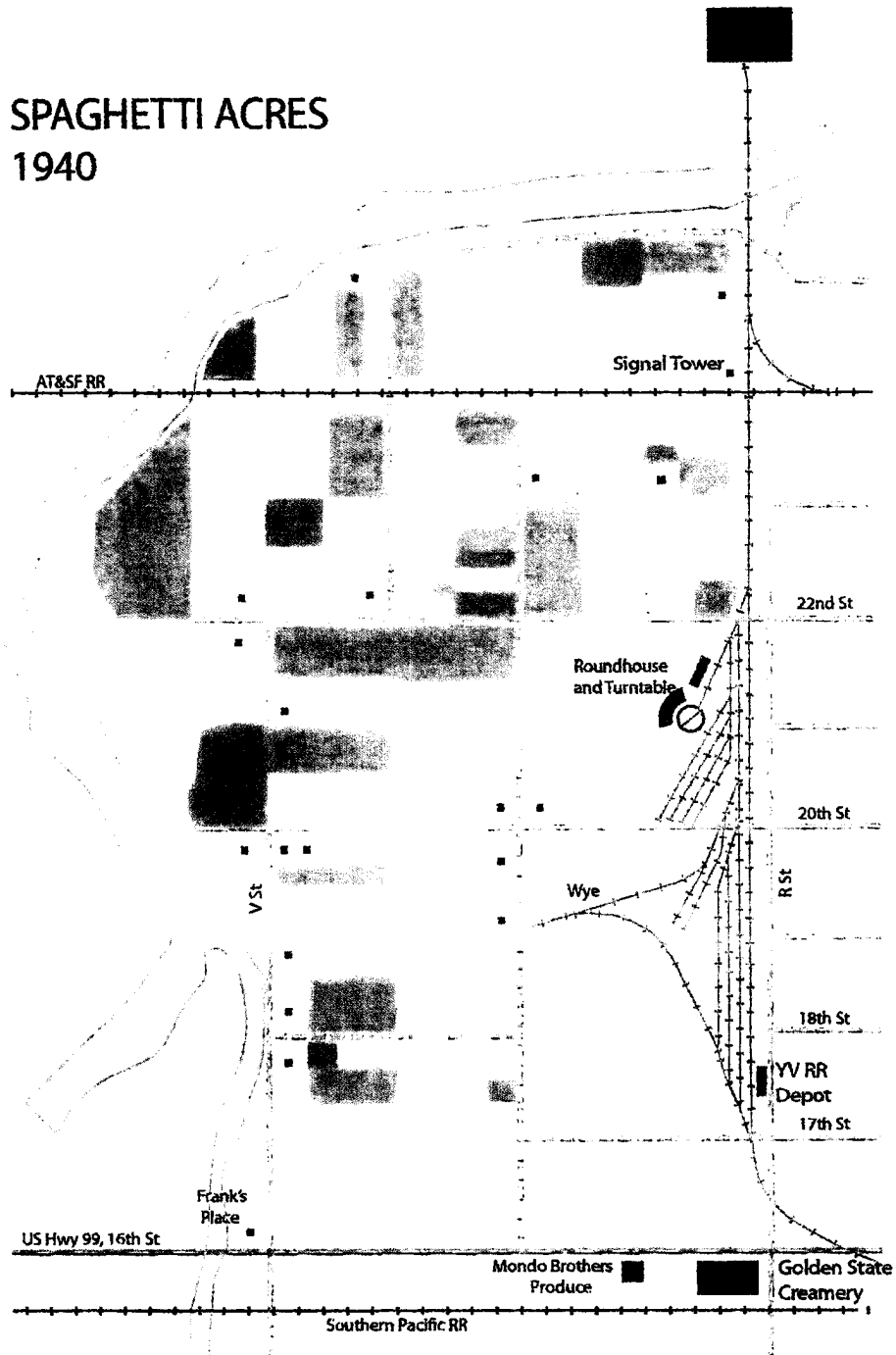
(SEAL)

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

 1.9.23  
\_\_\_\_\_  
City Attorney Date

1 (Map of Spaghetti Acres)

## SPAGHETTI ACRES 1940



# EXHIBIT A

# **Spaghetti Acres Honorary Historic Neighborhood District Designation Proposal**

**Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association**

**MercedDNA.com**



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**Appendix A: Historic Overview of Spaghetti Acres and FAQ**

Oct. 3, 2022

The Honorable Mayor and City Council of Merced  
Merced City Hall  
678 W. 18<sup>th</sup> Street  
Merced, CA 95340

Dear Mayor and Council Members:

### **SPAGHETTI ACRES HONORARY NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT DESIGNATION**

The Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) requests that the City Council approve the Spaghetti Acres Neighborhood as an Honorary Historic Neighborhood District. This designation would recognize the historic character of the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood, without placing special land use restrictions or requiring zoning changes.

To facilitate the City Council's consideration of this request, DNA has prepared this summary report, which includes background on the project and discussion of the neighborhood in relation to the proposal for Honorary Historic Neighborhood District status. Attached is supporting documentation, including a resolution for the City Council's consideration to designate the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood as an Honorary Historic Neighborhood District.

The materials and process outlined here are modeled on one undertaken in 2017 by the DNA in requesting the same designation for the Ragsdale neighborhood (which itself was based on one undertaken by the City of Woodland.)

### **Background**

In spring 2015, the Historic Designation Committee, a working group of DNA, initiated efforts to establish a process by which the City could recognize the historic nature of Merced's downtown neighborhoods. The Committee and DNA nominated the Ragsdale subdivision as the pilot neighborhood for this process.

The intention is to recognize residential historic districts in Merced using an "honorary" designation to acknowledge and make known the number of historic and well-maintained homes within downtown neighborhoods. A district designation will better identify these homes as a significant part of the community's rich past and stable future. An honorary designation does not result in zoning changes and will not place additional restrictions on homes in the district.

### **Discussion**

An honorary district is a geographically definable area with a significant concentration of buildings, structures, sites, spaces, or objects unified by past events, physical development,

architectural design, materials, etc. It includes contributing and non-contributing properties. Non-contributing properties are those properties that do not share the architectural, historical, or geographical characteristics of the district except for their physical presence in the district. New construction and those older buildings, altered so much that they are no longer recognizable as historic, are non-contributing properties. An honorary district designation is a means by which to recognize and call attention to a neighborhood that not only has a concentration of older well-maintained homes but also recognizes the conservation of the historic character. There are approximately 472 homes in the district now. In 1946, only a dozen structures stood in the area (according to historic aerials.) By 1958, however, close to 300 homes had been constructed. The DNA has prepared a *Spaghetti Acres Architectural Overview*, included as **Attachment 2**, to assist in identifying some of the styles of historic homes found in Spaghetti Acres. Please also see **Appendix A**, *Historic Overview of Spaghetti Acres* and *FAQs*.

The educational benefits of creating local districts are the same as those derived from any historic preservation effort. Districts help explain the development of a place, the source of inspiration and technological advances. They are a record of the neighborhood, the residents who lived there and of the distinct communities within Merced.

DNA recommends an honorary district as it will not involve property rights issues and would not involve special review or permits. However, an honorary designation will have a positive impact through the association of an identified district and will most likely have the effect of increasing property values, DNA hopes recognition will foster reinvestment consistent with historic preservation, and will result in continued preservation of neighborhood fabric and character.

### **Fiscal Impact**

Adoption of the resolution should have no fiscal impact beyond the utilization of staff time. The designation will not impose restrictions on the homeowners in the honorary district.

### **Public Outreach**

In August 2022, DNA volunteers hand-carried informational flyers to nearly every home in the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood and spoke to residents inviting them to attend an Aug. 25, 2022 public meeting. The flyer is included here as **Attachment 2**. At that time, DNA members obtained 84 signatures that are included here as **Attachment 3**. Also attached as **Attachment 3.A**, are photos of the Spaghetti Acres residents at that public meeting.

On Aug. 25, the DNA hosted said public outreach meeting for Spaghetti Acres residents at the Italo American Lodge to answer questions about the proposed neighborhood designation. Approximately 40 residents attended. There were questions pertaining to possible changes in property taxes, potential changes to land use designation, queries about enhanced code enforcement, concern about perceptions re: the name, and placement questions re: signage. The DNA addressed these questions to the satisfaction of the residents, and nearly everyone in

attendance ultimately expressed support by signing petitions. DNA board member Marc Medefind was also invited to speak at the monthly meeting of the Italian Catholic Federation at the Italo American Lodge to discuss the proposal for Spaghetti Acres. Approximately 35 ICF members were in attendance. During the Q/A portion, those attending were very positive about the designation. The Spaghetti Acres area is shown on **Attachment 4**.

A DNA-prepared resolution for the City Council's consideration to designate the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood as an Honorary Neighborhood District is included as **Attachment 5** along with a DNA Recommendation included as **Attachment 6**.

The Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association, its Board of Directors and Historic Designation Committee thank the Honorable Mayor and City Council of Merced for their consideration of this proposal and request its placement on the next City Council Meeting Agenda for formal consideration and approval.

Sincerely,

Diana Odom Gunn  
President, Merced DNA

#### **Index of Attachments**

1. Spaghetti Acres Architectural Overview/Points of Interest
2. Poster
3. Petition signatures + 3 A. Meeting pix
4. Map of proposed area of designation
5. Resolution
6. District Recommendation

Appendix A: Historic Overview of Spaghetti Acres and FAQs

## **Attachment 1**

### **ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW**

#### **Minimal Traditional Homes**

Minimal Traditional is a style of architecture that emerged in mid 20th century America which incorporated influences from earlier styles such as American Colonial, Colonial Revival, Spanish Revival, Tudor Revival, and American Craftsman while avoiding ornamentation.

The Minimal Traditional style evolved during the 1930s and was a dominant style in domestic architecture until the Ranch-style house emerged in the early 1950s. Descending in part from the bungalows, cottages, and foursquare houses of the early 20th century, Minimal Traditional houses represent a stripped-down version of the historic-eclectic styles popular in the 1920s. They are usually detached single-family houses that are on the smaller side and may retain simplified versions of the built-in cabinets that were popular features of the Craftsman era.

There are four main aspects of a Minimal Traditional home including: 1) Small scale; 2) Minimal decoration; 3) Simple windows, and 4) Simple rooflines. Typical features include hipped or gabled roofs without much in the way of eaves; cladding in locally popular materials such as wood, brick or stone; small porches; and an asymmetrical design with the front door set off center. Garages are usually offset or separated from the main house by a breezeway.

The Minimal Traditional house fulfilled aesthetic and social needs for affordable single-family housing and was used by the Federal Housing Administration as a prototype for a standard house that the majority of American wage earners could afford. Minimal Traditional houses have been tagged with some other names: FHA house, Depression-era cottage, Victory cottage, and American small house.

#### **Minimal Traditional Homes in Spaghetti Acres**

The majority of the 472 homes in Spaghetti Acres\* were built during the 12-year Post-World War II period from 1946 to 1958. Most (350, or 74%) were built in the Minimal Traditional architectural style which was very common at the time. During the Great Depression, the building industry struggled. From the Stock Market crash in 1929 until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, those Americans who could afford new houses moved toward increasingly simpler home styles. After World War II ended in 1945, G.I. soldiers returned to the U.S. to build families and live in the suburbs.

**\*For the purposes of this survey, the enumerated area includes that bordered by R Street, 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Streets, and Bear Creek.**



With the return of WWII vets in Merced, real estate developers raced to meet the rising demand for inexpensive housing. Mid-century homes from roughly 1930 until the 1950s were Minimal Traditionalist with just a few Cape Cod house styles scattered throughout the area.

These designs became the mainstays of the expanding suburbs which the suburban development in Levittown, NY made ubiquitous. Building trends became responsive to federal legislation—the GI Bill in 1944 helped build America's great suburbs and the creation of the interstate highway system by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 made it possible for people to not have to live where they worked.

While most houses in Spaghetti Acres fall into the Minimal Traditional category, as noted, there are other homes that would be appropriately filed under the Ranch designation. Of the 472 residences in Spaghetti Acres, 84 (18%) are Ranch style, and 19 homes (4%) fall into the “other” category (such as the Roman Pantheon and the Barn House plus others that have been remodeled utilizing various architectural styles, including the Spanish Revival, and Prairie styles, made famous by Frank Lloyd Wright.) There are also 19 apartment complexes, buildings and duplexes in the area, including the eye-catching “crescent” of apartments on 19<sup>th</sup> Street between U and V Streets.

Most of the homes between M and R Streets were built in the Craftsman style. R Street provides a boundary between the era of the Craftsman in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Minimal Traditional homes built after World War II. In addition, many homes that were once considered strictly Minimal Traditionalist in Spaghetti Acres have been enlarged and/or remodeled into Ranch or Cape Cod style structures.

Perhaps the best part of the Minimal Traditional design is the inclusion of the front porch. One can't walk through Spaghetti Acres in warmer seasons without being greeted by neighbors sitting on their front porches. This charming neighborliness is what makes Spaghetti Acres a special place in Merced. In fact, walking through these neighborhoods that are filled with modest, well-maintained homes is a delightful experience.

One Sunday last spring, this writer walked the heart of Spaghetti Acres and came across a home flying an Italian flag; another home that had Dr. Seuss-like artfully coiffed boxwood plants; a home dedicated to the SF 49ers (with a permanent 49ers flag and personalized 49er license plates on two cars); many homes with xeriscape (or waterwise) landscaping; a home across from Fremont School that sports a putting green; and three homes undergoing major renovations (new sod, a new driveway, and new waterwise landscaping.) Because of its proximity to Bear Creek, wildlife is everywhere. Every morning, one is sure to see and hear geese and ducks flying through the neighborhood. Raptors, such as red-tail hawks, great horned owls, barn owls, screech owls and even ospreys have been observed, and it's not unusual to see beavers and raccoons in and alongside the creek.

## **POINTS OF INTEREST**

**THE YVRR:** The Yosemite Valley Railroad had its roundhouse, turntable, buildings, and yards at what is now John C. Fremont Elementary School. The turntable's spur line, that allowed trains to back up and change direction, extended from the yards through the north side of 19<sup>th</sup> Street to T Street. The main line to Yosemite ran from the station between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets alongside present-day R Street. The Yosemite Valley Railroad was active from 1907 to 1945, taking tourists and supplies to El Portal on what was one of the most scenic train routes in the world — an 80-mile trek, mostly along the Merced River.

**23<sup>rd</sup> STREET POOL:** The largest neighborhood pool in Merced, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Pool (located where 23<sup>rd</sup> Street dead ends at Bear Creek), features a pool house, bathrooms, barbecue pits, a basketball court, horseshoe pits, picnic tables and open areas for sports like volleyball or badminton.

**ROMAN PANTHEON:** A private home along Bear Creek at 20<sup>th</sup> and W Streets represents a singular piece of architecture. With a Doric colonnade, portico and pronaos surrounding its perimeter and approximating the appearance of the Maison Carrée at Nîmes in France or the Roman Pantheon in Rome, the home looks like one of the best-preserved Roman temples, much like a mid-sized Augustan provincial temple of the Imperial cult. The house also features manicured boxwood on multilevel stonework gardens, a cobblestone entryway, and dozens of 30 to 60-foot Italian cypresses. The home was originally built by the late Miller Parker in the 1950s. Parker was an avid art collector who filled the home with art pieces from around the world.

**BARN HOUSE:** Next door to the Roman Pantheon at the end of West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, the Barn House is a rough-hewn private home that looks like it was plucked from the countryside and placed in Spaghetti Acres. Built in the early 1960s, the two-story Dutch Colonial home features a hayloft door, barn-like dormers, a double-sloped roof, and a four-sided cupola.

**TRESTLE AND PEDESTRIAN/BIKE BRIDGE**—Two adjacent bridges, a train trestle for the Amtrak Rail Line and a bike/pedestrian bridge cross Bear Creek at the Northwest corner of Spaghetti Acres. The train trestle was first built prior to the railroad opening in 1896. Built approximately 100 years later, the bike/pedestrian bridge was, perhaps, the single most expensive portion of Merced's extensive bike path network. The Bear Creek Bike Path/Bridges CMAQ Grant totaled more than \$1.6 million when it was first administered.

**ITALO-AMERICAN LODGE**—Located near the southern edge of Spaghetti Acres, at 18<sup>th</sup> and U Streets since 1949, the "Italo" (as it is usually dubbed) was established as a place of good food, fellowship and volunteerism. Community service efforts have supported scholarships to local high school graduates and the Honor Flight Program for veterans, among many other efforts.

The “Italo” is famous for its “Guest Nights” that feature polenta and chicken, risotto and chicken and pasta-to-go dinners.

**“CRESCENT” APARTMENT COMPLEX**—Perhaps one of the most unique older apartment complexes in Merced is located on 19<sup>th</sup> Street between U and V Streets. The crescent-shaped driveway and boxlike structures are unusual and appealing because of the parklike setting that fronts the 15 apartments and the fact most apartments have a backyard

## Attachment 2 (Poster)



## ***Let's Give Spaghetti Acres an Honorary Designation!***

**FOR RESIDENTS LIVING IN SPAGHETTI ACRES** (roughly the area between R and Bear Creek and 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> streets.)

**WHAT?** As Merced's Ragsdale area did a few years back, an effort is under way to give Spaghetti Acres an Honorary Historic Designation. It is a way for the city to recognize neighborhoods that have a concentration of older homes that are well-maintained with historic character conserved.

**WHEN?** NOW! We want to bring this before the Merced City Council ASAP!

**WHY?** Local historic districts encourage better design. Studies have shown that there is a greater sense of community, more innovation, and greater public appeal within historic districts than in areas without such designations.

**THE CATCH?** There's no catch. It costs homeowners nothing but the benefits are many. Property values generally increase in honorary districts and there are no regulatory restrictions nor are there obligations to restore or rehabilitate property.

**Please attend the Spaghetti Acres Honorary Historic  
Designation Community meeting on Thursday, Aug. 25,  
at 7 p.m., at the Italo American Lodge**

### Attachment 3 (Petition)



## DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

We, the undersigned, support an honorary historic district designation for the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood. Spaghetti Acres was established and developed principally in the 1920s through the 1950s. Spaghetti Acres has a significant concentration of buildings, structures unified by past events, physical development and architectural design. It is bounded on the west by Bear Creek, the east by R Street, on the north by 24<sup>th</sup> Street, and on the south by 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

**By recognizing Spaghetti Acres as a historically significant neighborhood, the City of Merced can foster a stronger sense of community. Therefore, we support Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association's efforts to obtain historic designation by the Merced City Council and the City of Merced at no cost to the city.**

We respectfully ask the City of Merced to establish the honorary historic designation forthwith so that the neighborhood and City can begin to realize the benefits.

[illegible]



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Name (print)	Address	Signature
Sally LaTorre	1320 El Portal Dr.	Sally LaTorre
MARY E. RETA	2812 McCOMBS DR.	M. E. Reta
Richard M. Moulton	1491 E. N. Bear Creek	Richard M. Moulton
Ruth Redondo	3101 El Capitan	Ruth Redondo
LORETA SIMES	2511 KIBBY RD	Loreta Simes
MICHAEL BELLUOMINI	2900 PARKWOOD CT.	Michael Belluomini
Sandra Del Real	4755 Fresno Rd	Sandra Del Real
Carol J. Selmer	120 E. 21st Street	Carol J. Selmer
Vincent Piro	336 W. 21st Street	Vincent Piro
Chris Martin	2409 Canal Dr	Chris Martin
Luciano Rae Porto	2948 El Camero Rd	Luciano Rae Porto
Buddy Milfello	3396 Stacey Ct.	Buddy Milfello
Lee Pava	3396 Stacey Ct	Lee Pava
Joe Pava	1292 Wildcat Dr.	Joe Pava
ESTRELLA S. DELGADILLO	1292 Wildcat Dr.	Estrella S. Delgadillo
Robert B Borges	627 W Donna Dr.	Robert B Borges
Anthony Martin	2409 Canal Dr Alvarado	Anthony Martin



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[illegible]



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Name (print)	Address	Signature
David Adam Medford	1555 W - 20 <sup>th</sup> St	[Signature]
Vigil & Bunning	1255 W 19 <sup>th</sup> St	[Signature]
ROBERT SMITH	1431 W 23 <sup>rd</sup> St	[Signature]
Judy Evans	1560 W. 23 <sup>rd</sup> St	[Signature]
Yanona Kersch	1535 W 23 <sup>rd</sup> St	[Signature]
Nellie Binning	1255 W - 19 St	[Signature]
Mark & Pat Henry	1660 Patricia Ln.	[Signature]
Cupc Padello	1545 N St	[Signature]
Clint & Laura Moore	1255 W. 21 <sup>st</sup>	[Signature]
Cheryl Deed	1351 W 19 <sup>th</sup>	[Signature]
John & Cheryl	1238 W 19 <sup>th</sup> St	[Signature]
Connie Butler & Bill	1100 Patricia Ln	[Signature]
Frank R. Darling	1227 W 19 <sup>th</sup>	[Signature]
Mart Medford	2031 W St, Merced	[Signature]
Michelle GABRIEL Dwyer	1218 W 23 <sup>rd</sup>	[Signature]
Michael Morgan	W 21 <sup>st</sup> St, Merced	[Signature]
Marc Medford	1555 W, 20 <sup>th</sup> St, Merced	[Signature]





By recognizing Spaghetti Acres as a historically significant neighborhood, the City of Merced can foster a stronger sense of community. Therefore, we support Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association's efforts to obtain historic designation by the Merced City Council and the City of Merced at no cost to the city. We respectfully ask the City of Merced to establish the honorary historic designation forthwith so that the neighborhood and City can begin to realize the benefits.

[illegible]



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[illegible]



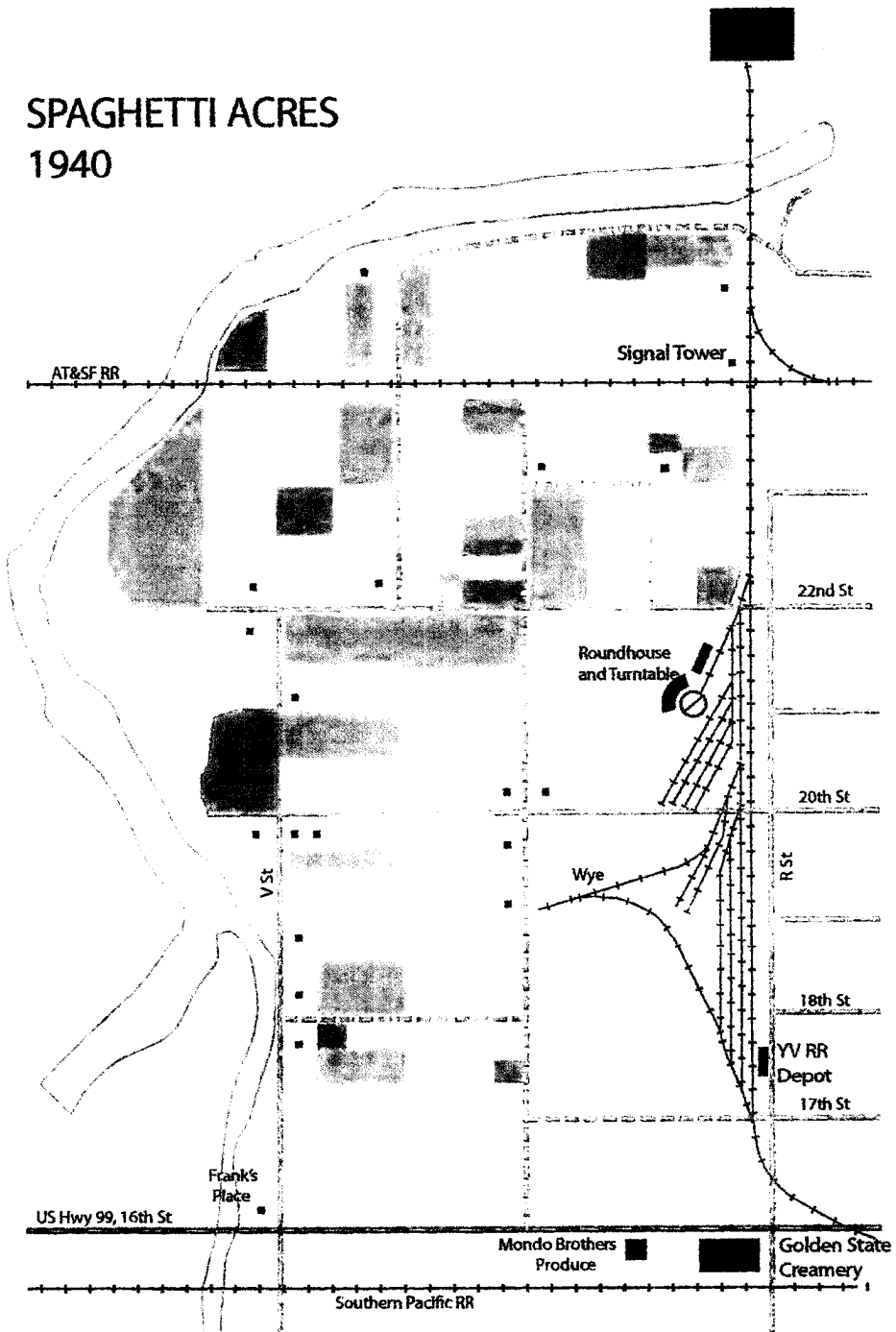


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[illegible]

## Attachment 4 (Map of Spaghetti Acres)

SPAGHETTI ACRES  
1940

Attachment 5

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MERCED, CALIFORNIA, ADOPTING THE****SPAGHETTI ACRES HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT**

The City Council of the City of Merced, California ("City Council") hereby finds, determines, resolves and orders as follows:

**WHEREAS**, in the early 1900s, the Pregno Brothers, John and Pietro, and their wives, Mary and Helen, first settled and farmed the area between Merced's 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Streets, and R Street and Bear Creek, and

**WHEREAS**, more, mainly immigrant families of Italian descent, including the Banterini, Bardini, Bernardi, Cerrato, Dalforno, Gonella, Mussotto, Pera, Pira, Rossi, Sandino, Sartori, Spinardi, Testa, and Vergano families, mostly newcomers to America, began to farm the area, and

**WHEREAS**, in 1927, the Pregno Brothers helped found the Merced Growers Packing Association, formed along with many area farmers, and

**WHEREAS**, in the late 1940s, this area that had come to be called "Spaghetti Acres," was developed, as roads were platted and infrastructure added, and

**WHEREAS**, on Aug. 25, 2022 the Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association ("DNA") completed a survey of the Spaghetti Acres residents and obtained signatures of 84 residents in favor of the District designation, and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Directors and the Historic Designation Committee of the DNA considered and approved the proposed honorary residential historic district for Spaghetti Acres as shown on the attached map identified as Exhibit A, and

**WHEREAS**, an honorary district designation is a means by which the City Council can recognize and call attention to a neighborhood that not only has a concentration of well-maintained older homes but also the conservation of its historic character.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, we the members of the Merced City Council hereby approve Spaghetti Acres as an Honorary Neighborhood Residential District.

**PASSED AND ADOPTED** by the City Council of the City of Merced on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2022, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:    ABSENT:    ABSTAINING:

**Attachment 6****Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association Recommendation  
Creating Spaghetti Acres as an Honorary Historic Neighborhood**

The Merced Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) recommends that the City Council of Merced recognize the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood as a residential historic district that will be “honorary” in nature to emphasize the neighborhood’s status as one of Merced’s first “cultural neighborhoods” and acknowledge the number of historic and well-maintained homes within the neighborhood. The district status will better identify these homes as a significant part of Merced’s history and recognize the area’s value to Merced’s future.

## Appendix A

### HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF SPAGHETTI ACRES

The summary that follows was written by Marc Medefind. It is drawn from *Grazie America! Volumes 1 and 2*, produced for the Merced Courthouse Museum's exhibit *Grazie America! From Italy to Merced County* (March-August 2017) by Sarah Lim. Maryellen Cullen Mazzei provided additional information.

In the early 1920s, brothers John and Peter Pregno established a farm in an area of Merced that would come to be called Spaghetti Acres. The farm was located at what is now 20<sup>th</sup> and T Streets, a few blocks west of the area where Fremont School would be built 30 years later. The area was part of the City of Merced when it was chartered in 1889.

When the Yosemite Valley Railroad built its line and Merced YVRR Station along R Street in 1907, the area became a world-famous embarkation point. Visitors arrived in Merced to take the 80-mile trip to El Portal that ran mostly along the Merced River. The YVRR station was located at R between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets. The railway construction yard and turntable were constructed where Fremont School is now located, on R Street between 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Streets. A rail spur, which allowed trains to change directions, extended to 20<sup>th</sup> and T where the Pregnos lived. The rich and famous, including foreign dignitaries and heads of state, rode the rails from Merced to El Portal, including Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, Crown Prince Gustaf Adolphus of Sweden, King Albert of Belgium, Sir Winston Churchill, and Prince Nokuhito Takamatsu of Japan (Emperor Hirohito's brother.)

After the YVRR closed in 1945, Gene Mondo, who founded Mondo Bros. Produce, and was broker and shipper for local farmers, purchased the YVRR property from R Street to Bear Creek. Mondo donated two blocks of this land to the Merced City School District. This became the site for Fremont School. Mondo also developed the Westgate Shopping Center on 17<sup>th</sup> Street between R and T Streets, now known as Merced's first "strip-mall." Gottschalk's, Newberry's, the Holland House, Thrifty Drugs and Purity Supermarket were Westgate's first tenants.

In 1927, the Pregno Brothers helped found the Merced Growers Packing Association that included many more Italian-American families who were attracted to the area to farm the rich soil that for centuries had been deposited by Bear Creek floods. The earliest map of the area shows a dozen farmhouses dotting the future Spaghetti Acres. Over the years, many of Spaghetti Acres' residents had names that would mark Merced's future history including: Banterini, Bardini, Bernardi, Cerrato, Dalforno, Gonella, Mussotto, Pera, Pira, Rossi, Sandino, Sartori, Spinardi, Testa, and Vergano.

Merced was booming, and farming in the area would soon be limited to backyard gardens when the land was subdivided in the 1940s. Newly-installed North-south streets S, T, U, V, and W were crossed by 18<sup>th</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets, which ran east-west. Patricia Lane was also



added to accommodate the geography necessitated by Bear Creek. Many of the same families that had farmed the land in Spaghetti Acres now chose to live there and their children attended the newly built John C. Fremont School at 1120 West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. By 1958, just half a dozen empty lots were left in the area. Today, the area is filled with neatly-maintained homes of the Minimal Traditional architectural style on broad streets lined with mature Modesto ash trees.

When Castle Air Force Base had its heyday, from WWII to the 1990s, Spaghetti Acres felt or, rather, *heard* the effects. Because Castle was the home of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Wing and served as a training base for the Strategic Air Command, all manner of military planes flew over Merced, including B-29s, B-17s, B-59s, B-50s, B-47s, and B-52s. Pilots used Bear Creek at Spaghetti Acres as a sightline before landing at Castle. Because military aircraft are not required to utilize noise buffers as are commercial jets, the sound of aircraft in the area was loud and consistent. At Fremont Elementary School, teachers remember halting instruction until the low-flying bombers had flown over. Castle AFB closed in September 1995.

Merced native Maryellen Cullen Mazzei, whose grandfather John Pregno first farmed the area with his brother, called Spaghetti Acres "My history, my heritage."

Mazzei's father and uncle, Jim and Tom KilCullen, immigrated from Ireland, changing their name to Cullen when they reached the U.S. They established the Cullen and Cullen General Contracting firm which built many of the homes in Spaghetti Acres. Jim Cullen married Mazzei's mother, Doris Pregno, and they started their family in the new neighborhood.

"We lived and breathed that area. We had a charmed life growing up there in the fifties and sixties," she said. "We were outside all the time because there were 40 kids living within a four-block radius. We always felt safe. If we needed something, we went to Grandma's and Grandpa's. . . We just never worried about anything." Mazzei noted that everyone's parents were everyone's mom and dad in those days, proving the axiom that it takes a village to raise a child.

Mazzei says that because it was a new neighborhood in the 1950s, nearly every family was living in their first home. She becomes wistful when remembering those days. "I loved playing with my friends, skim-boarding at (Miller) Parkers' house on Bear Creek, or getting a cookie from Mrs. Puglisevich, who always gave you a cookie, or taking the produce and eggs from my grandparent's garden to sell in the neighborhood, and especially sitting on the metal glider with my grandmother at her house."

Mazzei mourns the loss of such neighborhoods today. "If a family would take a walk, they might sit and visit awhile. Neighbors would drive by and would yell out, 'Hi! John and Mary. Going to the store, ya need anything?'. . . That was the life! They were so blessed in Spaghetti Acres to have such loving neighbors who built homes and raised their children and had a good life. It was a charmed life. . . I miss my neighborhood."

In the book *Grazie, America! From Italy to Merced County*, siblings Ken Testa and Becky Testa Williamson echoed Mazzei's sentiment when they wrote: "The Testa family in Merced County is rooted in the spirit of Spaghetti Acres, defined not only by its significant historical location, from R and 16<sup>th</sup> to the banks of Bear Creek,\* but by the strong foundation of the Testa family and other proud Italian families who lived there. Spaghetti Acres represented a place where strong relationships among family and friends carry on. It included rich soil from which families produced many delicious vegetables. It was a special place where many memories were created, from the love of hunting and fishing to the results of shared hard work of the Testas and other Italian families. The Testa family represented deep loyalty to family and friends which lasted a lifetime and has endured now from generation to generation."

In *Grazie America!*, Sarah Lim, Merced County Courthouse Museum director wrote, "As the Italian immigrants passed the torch of success to their American-born children and grandchildren, the later generations are building a community that is full of possibility. Italian arts and culture are woven into our American fabric. Many Italian Americans hold leadership positions in business, government, as well as civic organizations. Their story of struggle, perseverance, and triumph is a shared experience of the immigrants who show that America is the land of opportunity."

Walking through Spaghetti Acres today can still provide a glimpse of what life was like back when young families moved into their new homes in the 1950s. Today, mature Modesto Ash trees provide bowers over the streets that bisect the area; most homes have been well-maintained, remodeled or updated in style and technology; gardens and lawns are lovingly tended; and, best of all, neighbors still greet one another in a friendly manner. In a word, today's Spaghetti Acres remains charming.

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\* There are diverse opinions about the exact boundaries of Spaghetti Acres. All agree that Bear Creek is the western border. The broader view is that it is bordered by R and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets, 26<sup>th</sup> Street, and Bear Creek, mainly because of the many businesses on 16<sup>th</sup> Street owned by Italian-Americans. A more compact opinion has R and 18<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and Bear Creek as its borders. The most compact view is that it is bordered by S and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets, 24<sup>th</sup> Street, and Bear Creek. The upshot of all this is that the residents never hired surveyors to plat Spaghetti Acres. Instead, it depends upon one's personal perspective. Some would include Italian-owned business areas in addition to residential areas. Some would just stick with the residential areas. In the view of the DNA subcommittee, signage should indicate the widest area but should be erected in residential areas.

## ***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS***

### **1. What is an Honorary Historic Designation?**

An honorary district is a geographically definable area with a significant concentration of buildings, structures, sites, spaces or objects unified by past events, physical development, architectural design, materials, etc. It includes contributing and non-contributing properties (Non-contributing properties are those properties that do not share the architectural, historical or geographical characteristics of the district except for their physical presence in the district. New construction and those older buildings altered so much that they are no longer recognizable as historic are non-contributing properties.) An honorary district designation is a means by which to recognize and call attention to a neighborhood that has a concentration of older homes and recognizes the fact that many are well- maintained and the historic character conserved.

The educational benefits of creating local districts are the same as those derived from any historic preservation effort. Districts help explain the development of a place, the source of inspiration, and technological advances. They are a record of our communities and ourselves.

### **2. Will this create greater awareness of neighborhood character and quality?**

Local districts encourage better design. Comparative studies have shown that there is a greater sense of relatedness, more innovative use of materials, and greater public appeal within historic districts than in areas without historic designations.

One of the benefits of an honorary district designation is that it will provide greater awareness of the historic character of the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood, which in turn will encourage the maintenance and preservation of the character of the district and foster a sense of neighborhood stability. Designation will help encourage new construction and renovations that are complementary to the neighborhood.

Designation will also help assure clear identification of the features the residents and community value for the Spaghetti Acres neighborhood and expression of the expectations for the type and quality of future development.

### **3. What does it mean for me as a property owner?**

Recognition, stability, increased property value, neighborhood renewal and pride of ownership are benefits of designation. Local districts protect the investments of owners and residents. Buyers know that the aspects are protected that make a particular area attractive over time.

**4. Why is this being done for this neighborhood?**

The Spaghetti Acres neighborhood has special status as a cultural and historical area, with a significant concentration of the homes reflecting the architecture of Merced's development from the 1920s through the 1950s.

**5. Does everyone have to agree? What if some property owners disagree?**

No, not everyone has to agree in the case of an honorary district, because it does not impose regulatory restrictions. Homes within the boundaries of the original neighborhood will be included in the district. However, the designation as a historic landmark does require full ownership agreement.

**6. What effect will this have on property values?**

In general, being associated with a recognized "district" will most likely have the effect of increasing property values. This may be the result of recognition and pride of ownership. DNA hopes that recognition will foster reinvestment consistent with historic conservation, and will result in preservation of neighborhood fabric and character. Real estate agents in many cities use historic district status as a marketing tool to sell homes.

**7. Does this affect my ability to work on my home and make changes?**

If you want to alter, move or demolish a structure you will follow the same procedures of permit application as you would without the honorary district. There is no obligation to restore or rehabilitate your property.

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