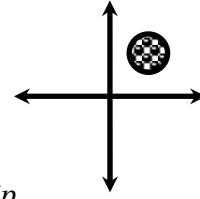


## RIOS DE ORO



Upper right quadrant combination:

Horizontal—*Positive External Influences*

Vertical—*More Cohesive Community, Regional Policy, Leadership*

*In “Rios de Oro”, the Sacramento Region is able to achieve the balance necessary to create a region that works. Investments on a variety of fronts are made in a coordinated, strategic plan to position the region for success on a global scale while meeting the needs of residents on a local and neighborhood scale.*

“I heard someone call you the architect of a regional economy. Why that title?” asked the young reporter.

“That’s a question I’ll be happy to answer,” responded John Singh, leaning back a bit, “But first, let me ask you one,”

“Sure, but I’m not much of a business mind. I just got assigned this story. I’m generally on sports,” the reporter responded.

The successful business leader stood up and walked to the open door. Everything in the small, pleasant room suggested a relaxed familiarity. Most visitors were surprised by the modest office of a man of this stature in a neighborhood that, until a handful of years ago, had been simply given up on by most. “Maria, could you please bring us copies of the 2024 annual report?” Stepping back to his chair, Mr. Singh continued, “This will just take a moment, and may help in our conversation.”

A young woman delivered two nicely bound documents.

“Thanks, Maria,” said John Singh, “Would you care to join us for the interview?”

“Sure,” she replied, sitting in the third of the three chairs set by the window around the small coffee table.

“Maria, I was just turning the tables on our reporter friend, as I was about to ask him a question,” Mr. Singh said, turning to the reporter, “What has been the most important success of our region over the past 25 years?”

With a nod to the reports, he stated with a rather assured voice, “The performance of your company-Rios de Oro—the largest private employer.”

Mr. Singh smiled and nodded, “I am flattered that you think so, and while I am proud of the enterprise we have created, there is another answer within the room.”

The reporter saw Maria smile in oblique acknowledgement. He wished that he had been somewhere far away when they needed the interview covered.

### **A SUCCESS LIKE MARIA**

“The most important success of the region in the last 25 years—or at least the evidence of one of them—is sitting in front of you: Maria Ly.

“Maria, perhaps you could tell John a little about yourself?” prompted the businessman.

With slightly flushed cheeks she laughed and began as if she had done this before, “Well, I’m not unusual. I’m 27 years old, I

live in Sacramento—just down the street actually—and like most of my friends, I was raised here. My parents left the Bay Area in 2003, as soon as my mother and father were both able to get jobs in the Sacramento area. I was five.

“Mom, as a teacher, got very involved in educational reform both locally and on the state level. Dad worked for an emerging biotech company so together they had lots of opinions on what role education should play in preparing for the future. As a result of their efforts in a very well publicized campaign, they successfully supported the partnership through which Sacramento State and UC Davis were able to jointly plan an international campus in Roseville to explore worldwide technology markets.

“Dad always said the fun part of his job was being the liaison between the company and other community groups. When he and Mom paired up on the connection between industry, education, and the community, watch out! Mom was always saying, ‘How can you help prepare grades K-12? They need to understand what the future will be like too. We have to coordinate systems to maximize the opportunities and experiences for our youth.’

“The campaign was driven by the image from The Sacramento Bee of me standing by my Mom’s side as she questioned the School Board. She asked ‘What career options are we preparing my daughter for?’ I went to the Roseville campus after finishing at McClatchy High.

“Now I coordinate much of the communication between our affiliated companies in the area and their global—especially Chinese—partners and customers, to whom many companies in the area export products such as fruits, nuts and rice. I came to work for John after meeting him

during the Games. He was very involved in the 2020 Olympic bid, and of course, he held the community chair on the Arena Joint Powers Authority.

“Are you an A’s fan?” Maria asked, somewhat abruptly.

“Sure,” the reporter responded, “that’s usually my beat, though I wish they’d get a new pitching staff after that last game.”

“Well, drawing them to Sacramento from Oakland was really his doing,” she said, pointing at Mr. Singh and then her watch. “I gotta run. It was nice meeting you,” she said as she left the room.

## **A REGION WORKING**

“Let me pick up where Maria left off,” Mr. Singh began. “First, it wasn’t my doing at all. It was the collaborative work of the jurisdictions that created the Arena JPA. They created the lure for a ball club by creating a welcoming environment—and the project paid its own way. Between that and other improved amenities collectively created as part of Olympic Games preparation, many tourism dollars from around the world have been attracted to the region.

“Maria has a bright career ahead of her because of the groundwork done by her parents. The region’s successes have all been connected in one way or another. Because of her preparation, the strong economy, and the quality of life in the region, Maria chose to stay here, despite unlimited opportunities in other parts of the country and world. This is not by accident. It was planned for. Each investment in the future flows into others and their confluence is a point of great opportunity. As a result, the sense of potential we experienced over the past two decades grew as large as that

created by those “Rivers of Gold” discovered by earlier settlers.

“Your paper played quite a role in creating that sense of opportunity. The Bee was filled with forward-looking articles-features on the possible consequences of different growth projections; stories about industrial development in places like Austin, Texas; editorials on transportation needs; op-ed pieces on residential in-fill. Simply by focusing on the future and framing the issues, it and other local media helped to raise public awareness about the coming boom, its opportunities for current residents, and the possible costs if mismanaged.

“The efforts got all of us—including elected officials, excited about what the region could be. The progress we have achieved has never been about one person or one idea, but about creating a plan that met the needs of many. There has been no one architect of this regional success, but hundreds.

“Because of the foundation set by the Sacramento Region Blueprint Transportation and Land Use Study, the region’s cities and counties agreed that with a lot of community discussion they could reach a regional consensus on questions like, what farmland and resources should be conserved? Where should the houses go? How could we improve air quality and transportation? The Mayors and the Chairmen of the Boards of the six counties achieved some important understandings on land use and investments in the region. ‘Nothing binding or official yet,’ they said on emerging from their first session. But clearly there had been some agreements that, with a lot more talk among relevant players, could lead to a historic regional consensus on issues ranging from transportation and housing to education, industrial development, the environment, and farmland preservation.

“And that thinking spread. In health care, the six counties around Sacramento were able to float the necessary bonds for a new medical research center, teaching hospital and nursing school, all organized around a vision for health care that de-emphasized high cost heroic medicine and re-emphasized prevention, timely intervention, and education for healthier lifestyles.

“Following months of public debate, and a series of seemingly endless meetings involving public officials, transportation planners, environmentalists, residential real estate developers, representatives of agricultural interests, citizens’ groups, business leaders, educators, transportation planners, representatives of different ethnic groups...and virtually anyone else who might later complain that they’d been left out of this ‘politics of inclusion,’ the Sacramento Region had a comprehensive plan for how it wanted to look in the year 2025.”

## **THE PAYOFF**

“Because Blueprint was so comprehensive, and the process that led to it so inclusive, the Sacramento Region was able to attract big chunks of federal dollars for its parks, for research in its hospitals and universities, and for its transportation infrastructure, which balanced transit and roads.

“By 2015, Sacramento’s light rail metro system linked to high-speed rail running north, south and west. The region was close to completing a beltway system that rivaled the best in the world. Businesses saw the benefits of locating in an area where energy was cheap, workers plentiful, and the quality of life superior.

“We have the talent that attracts capital. Maria’s success is not atypical. Because of

her parents' commitment to their low income neighborhood that had received such little public investment in the latter part of the last century, most of her friends are from much less affluent families. They too are successful and well-prepared. I've hired several of them.

"The miners and early settlers saw opportunity in the area and its rivers of gold—Rios de Oro. As we mature and

consider the tradeoffs—the costs and benefits—of our decisions, we are engaging in a grand experiment in balance."

John Singh paused, glanced at the clock and asked, "Now what was your question?"

The reporter looked up from his notebook, in which he had filled pages, took a breath, and responded with a smile, "I think you answered it."

## **WHAT DOES RIOS DE ORO MEAN?**

- We need to make all boats rise
- We must create the infrastructure needed to handle all this growth
- How can we balance the “natural conflicts” within the region?
- How can we bring together diverse perspectives into a shared vision for regional approach?
- How can we prevent quality of life from attracting so much growth that it imperils quality of life?
- How can we get beyond the “NIMBY mentality”?
- Reward local politicians for thinking and acting regionally
- How can we balance public vs. private interests appropriately?
- We need to achieve public goals with a government that is efficient and effective and does not get too big
- We need to improve schools
- How can we increase civic involvement and participation?
- How can we keep a shared vision for the future alive over time?

## **SOME POSSIBLE EARLY INDICATORS OF RIOS DE ORO**

- Increasing level of consensus and coordination among cities and counties on regional planning issues
- Declining number of lawsuits over land use issues
- Increasing regional effort to address housing needs
- For the first time, agency coordination on flood control and riverfront development
- California is the first state to take steps against greenhouse effect
- Bay Area smog check legislation
- Average commute times drop
- Increasing number of students going into high-level technical education
- Greater subsidies for affordable housing
- “Location sensitive” loan criteria adopted by financial institutions
- Fewer homeless people asking for emergency shelter
- New-wealth/Dot-com billionaire gives \$5M to support election of regionally-oriented candidates
- Increasing out-of-state migration into the region
- School test scores are at an all-time high

## **STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR RIOS DE ORO**

- Partnership of regional media (newspaper and television) for a year-long dialogue on the future of the region

- Major initiative to create a superb educational system, not only K-12, but also universities and community colleges; this would ensure that new jobs would be filled by local people
- Create new educational metrics: concrete, real-world measures of success
- New grassroots movement, “One Thousand Friends of the Sacramento Region” (as in Portland)
- Market the concept of regionalism to the public
- Financial incentives for regional collaboration
- Replace six counties with one single county—what would it be named? (with representative districts, not at-large, and change financing mechanisms to make them accountable)
- Attract more funding resources—private and public—to address regional issues
- Change current funding mechanisms to increase flexibility of distribution
- Change regional governance to increase efficiency and accountability and reduce complexity, costs, and overlap
- Take full ownership of the region’s natural resources
- Understand how the decisions made today will shape the area in 2025
- Make a connection between the choices of the individual and the future of the region