

Business

EDC's Botts, Fall have deep roots, broad

■ *Their task is to build up city of Banning*

BY LARRY RAND

RECORD GAZETTE

The two new members of Banning's Economic Development Committee have deep roots in Southern California, but strikingly different business experience and backgrounds.

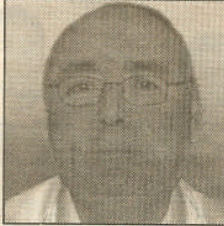
Robert Botts, a Sun Lakes resident, is Chief Financial Officer of Garner Holt Productions, a San Bernardino manufacturer of animatronics - lifelike robots used in theme parks, restaurants and museums - theatrical sets and special effects.

Jim Fall grew up on Banning's blue collar east side, worked as far away as Japan, and runs a home-based business which provides cosmetology services to those who can't leave home.

A lifelong Californian who looks younger than 65, Botts has a lot of experience in crunching numbers and working the interface between California's business and political systems.

He prepared himself for the task by majoring in business and minoring in political science at Cal State San Bernardino, the town where he and wife Ann grew up and attended high school together. Both worked in San Bernardino city government after serving on the staff of state senator Bill Coombs of Rialto - Botts in the marketing of San Bernardino to businesses and Ann as an elected City Council member.

Botts said on Wednesday



Jim Fall



Robert Botts

experience

that he wants to encourage Banning to market itself to the business sector and he worried that the city won't have enough of an industrial base to pay for its growing population.

"The houses are going to come, whether we like it or not," Botts said, "but they tend not to pay for themselves. Business, on the other hand, tends to need fewer services and almost always pays for itself."

Botts said he was surprised to discover that Banning has only 450 acres set aside for industry, and he said that he will urge the city to work hard for what he called "new dollars."

"Those are the dollars that come in from outside the existing community," he said. "If you open another restaurant and say it will create new jobs and new wealth, that's true only if the new restaurant attracts new customers instead of dividing up the existing restaurant customers."

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He continued: "Banning already has a restaurant row along 1-10 that's generating significant revenue. If we could approach a more upscale operation like Outback or Red Lobster and tell them, 'We have a pad for you all ready to go,' we would greatly increase our chances of getting them. They would attract customers from out of town: new dollars."

Botts said that the Hospitality Row of restaurants has proven to be an economic gold mine for San Bernardino at a time when it was in need.

Norton Air Force Base had closed down, followed closely by major businesses like Kaiser Steel and Rockwell International and smaller operations like the vacated Carrier warehouse that Botts' company calls home.

"That Hospitality row might have saved the city," he said.

Along with attracting new-business, Botts would like to see Banning form a "Red Team" to make sure local businesses don't leave town - "that's pretty much standard operating procedure in most cities," he said.

Unlike San Bernardino,

Banning hasn't been on fiscal life support, and Botts said that he expects the city's latest struggles with development to improve.

"In my experience, the staff and city manager take their cue from the City Council," he said. "I think we have a pretty good Council with a can-do attitude."

Botts' experience isn't purely with finance and the corporate world; he and Ann ran a children's department store in Santa Maria for four years after he spent 16 years in the savings and loan industry.

They sold Botts' Baby News Store to return to the Inland Empire when their parents' health began to decline.

Being a small business entrepreneur and long-time resident in the area are what link Botts and his new colleague Jim Fall.

{ While Botts was born in Los Angeles, Fall's birth took place a bit west: Fukuoka, Japan. His father was a US Air Force pilot in the Korean War who had married a Japanese woman, and being in a military family took young Jim around the world from Japan to Tripoli, Libya ("very beautiful before " Khaddafi") before the Falls

Florida; Burlington, New Jersey; Glendale, Arizona and a farm outside of Buffalo, Missouri before landing in Beaumont, where Jim graduated high school in 1971.

He moved to Banning and opted for the Air Force instead of college.

He spent four years as a cryptography specialist in Nkom Pnang, serving with Special Ops aviators flying intelligence missions over Laos, and returned to Banning.

He worked on Banning's east side at Freeway Transmissions, his father's company, until 1991, when he went to Japan to teach English (and tried to learn a little Japanese, which his mom

Betty had never taught him). There, like his dad who's also named Jim, Fall met his wife Miyuki, who's Japanese like his mother.

She's the licensed cosmetologist who provides hair, skin

(Continued)

and nail services to homebound customers, many of whom are elderly, while Jim handles the business side.

As a former east sider whose brother still lives there, Fall has a pet project: the extension of Ramsey Street east to Seminole Drive, which would link downtown Banning to the thriving Cabazon outlet malls and casino.

"It's exactly what the east side needs," Fall said in a recent interview at the Record Gazette.

He also wants the city to remember that one of Banning's great assets is "topography. We have the mountains and great natural beauty, and we need to be guardians of the area.

If we allow totally uncontrolled growth, our descendants will bemoan our decisions. Luckily, smart growth seems to be the path that the city is on."

He'd also like to see a formal encouraging of water conserva-

tion techniques like zeroescaping.

"Creating a huge green area in a near desert is the wrong way to go with our water," he said.

Public spaces are a place where Fall feels that a lot of greenery is appropriate and encourages civic pride. He said a Japanese import he'd like to see alongside the greenery in downtown Banning is mixed use - "people living over and next to businesses. I saw in Japan and in towns like Santa Monica how mixed use really injects life into the commercial part of a city, which otherwise is dead after dark."

The Economic Development Committee is ad hoc, which means that it has no regulatory power, but Botts and Fall will have plenty of chances to let city officials know what they've learned from a long time in California and a picaresque business history.