For more than 50 years, Tickle Pink Inn has graced this enchanting oceanside setting in Carmel Highlands, drawing travelers from around the world. From the moment you arrive, we give you every excuse to never leave the room, with a complimentary bottle of champagne, a host of amenities, and stunning ocean views from 35 luxuriously appointed rooms or suites.
Carl Guardino, the 49-year-old chief executive of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, likes to say he “pedals what he preaches.” Guardino, a tireless proponent of public transportation, does his part to ease the Valley’s traffic woes by cycling to work. He rides from his Los Gatos home to SVLG’s San Jose headquarters and back—a 32-mile round trip—each day, rain or shine.

From a Spartan office at the edge of San Jose International Airport, Guardino heads an organization that today represents the shared interests of some 330 member companies—firms that account for one of every three private sector jobs here in Silicon Valley. David Packard started the SVLG—then called the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group—in 1977 to provide a political forum for South Bay business leaders that took advantage of their growing economic clout.

Under Guardino’s leadership, the non-profit hybrid—part community service, part business advocacy organization—has taken a decidedly progressive slant. It still advocates for tax and immigration policies favorable to Valley companies, but it does not endorse political candidates. Much of its work is conceiving of and carrying out projects that will better the lives of Silicon Valley workers, such as a program to improve math education in some of the Valley’s lowest-performing K-8 schools and establishing a trust to help lower-income families secure homes. Each project must obtain funding from one or more SVLG member companies before it moves forward. Then SVLG staff and volunteers carry out the work.

But before he hops onto his bike for his daily trek, Guardino, who rises at the unseemly hour of 4:30 a.m., reads four newspapers, answers e-mail, and prepares breakfast for daughters Jessica, 6, and Siena, 21 months. At 6:30, he hands the girls over to wife Leslee, freshly showered after an early morning run, and pedals to his office. Among his many accomplishments: being named a Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition Commuter of the Year.

Hard work comes naturally to Guardino, the son of a construction worker and a homemaker and the grandson of a Sicilian immigrant. Guardino and his three older brothers grew up in a San Jose far different

IRON FIST

VELVET GLOVE
ten, the teachers used to worry because if there was something he couldn’t do, he just wouldn’t stop trying,” she remembers. “He would tire himself out, but he wouldn’t quit.” His prowess as a hurdler earned him a Santa Clara County championship. At Blackford High School, he was a varsity wrestler for three straight years.

Joseph was a good student and was seen as being more serious than his three older brothers. Still, his father, Richard Guardino, known to family and friends as Dick, kept all four boys in line. “The boys stayed out of trouble because they didn’t want to face their father,” Barbara says with a chuckle. “Parents were stricter in those days.”

Two of the Guardino boys went to college, while the other two followed their father into the construction business. Carl enrolled at Bethany Bible College, a small school in Scotts Valley, with the intention of becoming a minister. After a year of soul searching, he decided he was better suited to a life in politics. He spent another year at Chico State before returning home to San Jose where he worked in construction while taking a full load of courses at San Jose State University.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in political science, Guardino took a job as a legislative aide to Democratic State Assemblyman Rusty Azevedo. From Azevedo, he learned the importance of allies. “I don’t think Rusty raised his voice once in the six years I worked for him,” Guardino remembers. “I learned the importance of treating people well.” In 1990, Guardino ran against Mike Honda for a seat on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, finishing a distant third. Today, Honda represents the 15th Congressional district encompassing much of south and central Santa Clara County. Guardino considers him a close friend and ally.

Guardino’s first two marriages failed, casualties of an almost slavish dedication to work. In 1995, he met Leslee Coleman, an activist for the homeless who is known for her intensity that matched his own. Leslee, who competed in triathlons in high school and college, encouraged Guardino to take up the sport to relieve stress. “I figured if I was going to catch this woman, I’d have to run,” he laughs. They married seven years later.

Guardino swims three to four times a week and runs with Leslee on weekends. “We have our best talks when we’re running,” Leslee says. In their spare time, the couple competes in shorter-distance triathlons, the abbreviated distances in those races being a rare concession to family life. Before kids, the Guardinos competed in Ironman triathlons.

Guardino suffered a deep blow in 2000 when his partner Dick and Barbara were diagnosed on the same day with cancer. Barbara survived, but Dick died two years later with his family gathered at his bedside. After the birth of their eldest daughter, Terri Jessica, the Guardinos discovered that they would be unable to have a second child. Their efforts to adopt a second child through an agency failed. In true Silicon Valley fashion, Leslee launched an Internet campaign appealing to birth mothers through social media websites. In May 2008, the couple welcomed daughter Siena into their family.

In their spare time, the couple competes in shorter-distance triathlons, the abbreviated distances in those races being a rare concession to family life. These changes have made a direct impact on Guardino’s lifestyle. Fifteen-hour days at the office are a relic of the past. Most nights he’s home for dinner with his wife and daughters. But after the girls are asleep, Guardino is back on his PC for a couple of hours before bedtime.

Guardino’s accomplishments include being a Bicycle commuter of the Year. “It’s a knowledge, indispensible sounding board for issues Carl is working on. Those closest to him call Guardino “an iron fist in a velvet glove,” a master at leveraging the talents while at the same time massaging the considerable egos of the chief executives upon whose patronage he depends. And no one is better at getting Valley executives, notoriously tight-fisted at least when it comes to philanthropy, to part with their money. “Carl is like a successful brand that people want to be associated with,” says

than the one that is today intersected by six-lane highways. His childhood home overlooked a prune orchard; the orchard is gone, paved over to make way for tract homes and a church. Now the sound of playing children is drowned out by the drone of a nearby highway.

Guardino sounds wistful as he describes his childhood. “It was the San Jose of prune and apricot orchards,” he recalls. “There wasn’t the traffic you have today. We rode our bikes everywhere. And there wasn’t the materialism that you see today. You could have a family vacation in Yosemite for $7 a night. We didn’t have much, but we never felt we wanted for anything.”

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A MODERN WHEELER-DEALER Knowing something about his background and dedication to physical fitness, it’s hard to imagine that the capo di tutti capi of Silicon Valley bears little resemblance to the cigar-chomping, back-room wheeler-dealers of yore. Boyishly handsome with the lean physique of a distance runner and an unruly crop of graying hair, Guardino comes across as warm, gracious and humble. He is the gentle giant of the minister he once aspired to be. But his casual demeanor masks a fierce determination and tenacity that have bred into the DNA of Dick, his wife and wife. As the director of government affairs for an envi

Projecting Success: A Look Inside the Silicon Valley Leadership Group

“When it works, it’s like a walk,” says Silicon Valley Leadership Group president and CEO Carl Guardino of the process by which his organization chooses its projects. SVLG is organized around 12 policy areas including transportation, housing, education and the environment. Volunteers are selected by CEOs from within the ranks of their companies. Most are senior managers, directors or vice presidents and are appointed to represent the views of the companies for which they work. Committees often are the source of potential projects, but Guardino says SVLG is not “shy about stealing good ideas.” From staff members, government officials or other members of the community at large.

“Success has many parents,” he says. Project ideas are presented before the SVLG’s board of directors led by Tom Werner, chief executive of SunPower Corp., the San Jose-based solar energy company.

Guardino has a 20/20 business bookshelf. He keeps $2.6 million, which covered salaries for its 19 staff members. Thirty percent of its budget is derived from dues from its member companies while the rest comes from fees for its events.

For projects to succeed, they must have secured patronage. “If not enough people are willing to reach into their pockets then they (projects) die,” Guardino explains.

One recent project, a program to train elementary and middle school teachers in mathematics, began as a “doodle on a napkin” when Guardino was on a long plane ride. “Middle school is when California students’ math skills weaken,” says Guardino. “One reason is that our teachers are only required to take one math class to receive the multiple subject credential they need to teach. They aren’t steeped in math content.”

Guardino thought if teachers had better math skills, then it should follow that they would become better at teaching the subject. Guardino handed his idea to SVLG’s education committee where it took shape. It found an enthusiastic patron in Intel Corp., which has long been involved in efforts to improve California’s K-12 public schools.

One hundred K-8 teachers from the Valley’s lowest-income schools were given 80 hours of intensive mathematics instruction before the course, the teachers scored, on average, 60 percent on a math test designed for eighth-graders. By the end of it, their scores improved to 87 percent.

SVLG’s membership has grown even in a down economy, although Guardino admits it can sometimes be difficult to raise money for its projects. “We have to be strategic and we have to be creative,” he says. For example, the winning campaign to raise money for its projects. “We have to be strategic and we have to be creative,” he says. For example, the winning campaign to raise money for its projects. “We have to be strategic and we have to

The Cubicle: Carl Guardino

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February/March 2011

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FLUNKING INTEGRITY 101

One of Valley Christian's veteran English teachers is well known for frequent talks to classes on the subject of integrity. Wessling adds. Students are reminded on a daily basis of her message by the motto posted on her podium at the head of the class: “Never lie, cheat or steal.”

Keys School, a K-8 school in Palo Alto, is centered on a holistic concept of child development, according to school counselor Tania Gil. As part of this school-wide program, “my class teaches an emotional/social literacy program called Self Science. This weekly class provides students with a forum to explore in depth such themes as self-knowledge, peer pressure, stress and problem solving. For example, fifth graders create pie charts to discuss overarching themes. Middle school students also take part in an advisory program that focuses on promoting self-reflection, core values and ethical behavior,” she adds.

The process, says Keys Admissions Director Jan Bruzzone, gives kids healthy tools for developing a sense of self and promote a conscious effort to be of service within the community. “Nurturing a child’s emotional and social intelligence has given our students more tools as they face a multicultural and fast-changing world,” she says.

One of the reasons Keys School stands out from the crowd is its strong commitment to rewarding positive behavior. “We have a program called the Paws for Progress, which are built around themes such as ‘Build Life Skills’ and ‘Be a Friend,’” adds Keys Student Ethics Advisor Sid Raspberry.

Just like any shrewd leader, Guardino has an instinct for picking SVLG projects that promise to have high impact and a better than average probability of success.

Like a Valley CEO, Guardino plays to win. One recent example springs to mind. Transportation has long been high on his agenda. For close to a decade he has been working with BART to extend the rail line from Millbrae to San Jose. Many people say that it is to be a leader."

While he believes that Valley Christian's religious teachings are most important, Wessling cites the “integrity commitment” to never cheat or plagiarize that each student signs at the beginning of the semester. Parents also sign the statement. At semester’s end, with a personal evaluation of their child’s work, parents sign it as well.

This is largely the reason government has achieved the required two-thirds majority of the Valley's homeless. Most of the money is given in the form of loans. At the time it was established, it was the only housing trust that received the majority of funding from the private sector. The trust awards money to renters and first-time homebuyers, and funds transitional housing for a group that historically has been left out of the system. In 10 years, the trust has helped 8,808 Valley families secure homes.

De Geus believes SVLG’s greatest accomplishment under Guardino is the passage of state Proposition 14, the so-called open primary, which opened the ballot last June. The law eliminates party primaries. "My board expects me to be a leader and make ethical decisions. The school also promotes a senior ethics class that has been started two decades earlier by the now-legendary Packard was underwriting a midlife crisis. Under its previous management, the SVLG—then still called the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group—reacted to lawmakers' agen\n\nFLUNKING INTEGRITY 101 (continued from page 59) and conflict resolution skills. The goal is to help students successfully manage their own behavior.

At Saint Francis High School, "teachers and students define, discuss and create integrity codes in their classrooms and are committed to following these codes," states Kloenenhuis. "We also offer education to each family in the area of ethics and making good decisions." For example, Saint Francis' sophomore students are offered a course entitled "Living the Life," which includes discussions on moral issues facing teens today. The school also promotes a senior ethics class that both parents and students that covers a number of issues on how to make good decisions, including such hot topics as dating, drugs, sex and money.

“The board expects me to be a leader and not an implementer. You don’t score points in this game by playing defense,” he says. Two days a week, Guardino checks in with Valley CEOs. "I ask a lot of questions and take lots of notes," he comments. "I have to remember that I can never get so far in front that our members think they’re leading me for me." The meetings serve as a forum for him to receive feedback as well as to set future direction. Guardino is proudest of SVLG’s role in establishing the $34 million Santa Clara County Housing Trust, a fund established with about 60 percent private donations to help working families secure homes. (The rest of the money comes from the county, state and federal governments. At the time it was established, it was the only housing trust that received the majority of its funding from the private sector.) The trust awards money to renters and first-time homebuyers, and funds transitional housing for a group that historically has been left out of the system. In 10 years, the trust has helped 8,808 Valley families secure homes.

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