

# OPINION

## Be proud to be called 'quirky'

At long last, Bakersfield is working on improving its image. As an extension of the Vision 2020 project, a research company was hired; attitudes inside and outside the city were tested; and a marketing scheme was hatched.

With fanfare, the fruits of the effort were unveiled recently. The best part is that it produced a new logo and slogan: "Bakersfield: Life as it should be." (Bakersfield is in script lettering with a little green leaf dotting the "i".)

That certainly beats the heck out of the old logo — an EKG squiggle. If it was accompanied by a slogan, I missed it. The last slogan I can remember is "Sun, Fun, Play, Stay" — four words on a gaudy, but lovable sign that loomed over the city's Highway 99 entrance for decades.

"Life as it should be" seems to have more promise.

I am a real fan of Bakersfield. With or without a spruced-up logo, slogan and image, life in Bakersfield is as it should be for me.

But not so for a lot of folks — newcomers as well as old-timers — who bristle at the Bakersfield jokes and steam when "outsiders" question their sanity at living in our little spot of heaven.

The stated Vision 2020 goal for developing a new logo, slogan and image for Bakersfield is to highlight the community's many and varied attributes; to provide the tools to entice to Bakersfield new businesses and residents — retirees, tourists and young professional families.

Anyone who has been stuck with the job of recruiting professionals to Bakersfield has felt the sting of applicants not willing to even give the city a chance — too hot, too remote, too hick, too whatever.

I'll confess. When my husband discussed moving to Bakersfield from Hanford 20 years ago, I nearly flipped. For me, Bakersfield was Denny's at White Lane and 99. And when we stopped there for a fast bite and relief, I was hot and tired.

It didn't take long for me to fall in love with Bakersfield. Maybe you have to live in a small town, like Hanford, for 10 years to feel that way. But I believe it is because Bakersfield has a lot to love. And for me, that includes the jokes and other stuff.

I was somewhat familiar with most of the descriptions the Vision 2020 marketers



### What's quirky

Bakersfield "quirky"? Who wudda thunk? What "quirky" Bakersfield feature is your favorite? A weird street sign? Billboard? Business? A neighbor? A speciality product like My Husband's Nuts?

We want to know. Send your letters to Opinion Section, The Bakersfield Californian, P.O. Bin 440, Bakersfield 93302; or by fax to 395-7380; or by e-mail to [opinion@bakersfield.com](mailto:opinion@bakersfield.com).

Please keep them short — no more than 50 words. This is supposed to be funny. Include your name, address and telephone number so we know who to blame. If you are really inspired, send "Quirky Bakersfield" photos by e-mail to [opinion@bakersfield.com](mailto:opinion@bakersfield.com).

Who knows what we are going to do with this stuff. Depends on what you send.

placed in the "toolbox" to help sell Bakersfield's new image — attainable quality of lifestyle (you can afford to live here); open generous spirit; proximity/mobility (that's the "centrally located" shtick); natural abundance (trees, oil, agriculture) and prosperity (OK, a stretch with the area's double digit unemployment rate.)

But what did they mean by "quirky sophistication?" The marketers cobbled together the international experiences of Bakersfield residents, with the city's unique businesses, theater and arts programs and restaurants.

I'm not sure the marketers would include my take on "quirky sophistication." Likely they would run from some of the "quirky" (OK, weird) attributes that for me make Bakersfield the best darn place to call home.

Here's a few:

- People fuss about Bakersfield's random "references" in movies. Hollywood

murderers make pit stops in Bakersfield. Monsters rise from our soil. Did you notice the port-a-potty that washed ashore to rescue Tom Hanks from his deserted island in "Cast Away" was from Bakersfield? Now that's branding.

- There's nothing better than sending in-laws in La Jolla a bottle of Red Neck Red, wine allegedly from Oildale, where grapes are "strategically planted between pumping oil wells and oil sumps." The label boasts that the wine's taste is from a blend of oil and tar-tainted soil.

- If wine doesn't fancy the folks in La Jolla, send them Dos Okies beer. Don't forget to include a bag of My Husband's Nuts. (You can find them in the produce section at the Green Frog.)

- While I'm not Basque, I should be from the many visitors I have hosted at the Noriega Hotel. For music and drinks afterwards, there's Buck's Crystal Palace.

- If your guests are going to stay overnight, you can take them shooting up at 5 Dogs, or drench them in the Kern River on a one-hour "lickety split" rafting trip.

- If your budget is tight, just drive around town and look at weird stuff. There's the sign on Chester Avenue as you leave Oildale asking: "Need teeth?" (I confess. I laugh at Oildale jokes.) There's a muffler shop sign at the Garces Circle that uses "muff" and "tuff" creatively. (Go see yourself. I'm not writing it.)

And I smile when I see the big statute of the Indian looming over Alfred Harrell Highway next to the Old Corral Café. (Politically incorrect, but a conversation piece sure to scar visitors.)

Some time ago, I really ticked off a guy with something I wrote.

"It's obvious there are some in Kern County who lack 'vision' or are not forward thinking enough in their mediocre lives — content to 'pick and grin in the streets of Bakersfield,'" he wrote to me, adding that I was "the poster child for Bakersfield's perpetual 'hick town' image to the outside world."

Well, that may be. But I can't say that I'm sorry about it.

I just hope that with all this image shining there still will be room left to laugh at ourselves, profess that "it's a dry heat" when our guests are sweating, and rejoice in our deep, rich heritage that comes with Texas and Okie twangs.