

THE SOBRATO FAMILY

Builds Buildings & Futures

The Sobratos struck it rich. So now the family, whose real estate development business has flourished in Santa Clara Valley for 45 years, pours its money into local organizations that help those who are less fortunate achieve their economic and educational goals.

Community involvement spans generations in this family — the late Ann Sobrato, who first entered the family into the real estate business in the 1940s, volunteered as a pink lady at a hospital in the 1950s. Since then, she, her son, John A., his wife, Sue, and their three children, John Michael Sobrato, Lisa Sobrato Sonsini and Sheri Sobrato — who now have families of their own — have given money to and participat-

ed in various community organizations. In fact, the family has given more than \$18 million in the last six years.

In 1996, the family extended its com-

munity involvement even

further with the formation of the Sobrato Family Foundation, which awarded more than 500 grants and invested more than \$10 million in nonprofits before 2002.

John A. Sobrato says that he and his mother started the foundation because they felt it was “incumbent” upon them to give back to the community.

The Sobratos know about hard work. During World War II, the family had difficulty obtain-

ing produce, which was rationed, for Ann’s husband’s restaurant business in San Francisco. Ann invested in property in Atherton so that the family could

grow its own produce. After Ann’s husband passed away in 1952 and she sold the restaurant and proper-

ty, John A. saw how profitable selling the land was and founded Midtown Realty in Palo Alto at age 21. Ann, who had developed the first “tilt-up”-style building in Redwood City in

1955, joined him in the venture.

John A. ran Midtown Realty until the mid-1970s, when he sold it and created Sobrato Development Companies to concentrate on real estate development. The new company, which John Michael later joined, has developed and built facilities for high tech companies and owned thousands of apartment units.

However, community members are more likely to associate the Sobrato name with generosity. In 2000, the family donated 124 acres of land to the Morgan Hill Unified School District for its new high school, which is named in Ann’s honor.

The family also introduced a multi-million dollar revolving loan fund in 2001 to help local nonprofit housing developers create affordable and transitional housing. **SJM** Rebecca Ray



John Sobrato, Jr., John Sobrato, Sr. and Ann Sobrato in 1951.

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Left to right: Robert Jones, executive director of East Palo Alto Community Alliance Development Organization; John A. Sobrato; Sue Sobrato; Sheri Sobrato; John Michael Sobrato; and Lisa Sobrato Sonsini and her son Michael.