

Turmoil turns to triumph for little town that could

By Steve Stein

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At the beginning of 1998, Mayor Scott Bradley and his wife, Kelly, never expected that they would sell their beloved Paigebrooke Farm for an estimated \$10 million and end the year living in a mobile home.

Nor did Scott Bradley imagine that a representative of Ross Perot Jr.'s Hillwood Development Corp., which engaged the town of 240 residents in legal disputes about the town's boundaries and utility districts, would suggest that one of Westlake's main thoroughfares be named after Bradley.

What happened in 1998 to create such a turnabout? Boston-based Fidelity Investments made it clear last summer that it wanted to build a regional headquarters on 314 acres of hills and woodlands that make up Paigebrooke Farm and a portion of Perot's Circle T Ranch. But there was one condition -- the company wanted legal entanglements concerning Circle T Ranch and Westlake settled, town officials have said.

Fidelity eventually succeeded in its quest to land the Westlake site, paying a total of about \$35 million for Perot's and Bradley's properties.

Resident David Brown said it was a stunning reversal for the greater Northeast Tarrant County town.

"In January, we weren't sure there was going to be a town here," he said. "Now we've got Fidelity here, and we've made peace with Perot."

In one of the most momentous years in Westlake history, Fidelity's decision to build 600,000 square feet of low-rise office buildings beginning next month tops the list of the town's most noteworthy events. Westlake, which once included the area that is now Trophy Club, was incorporated in 1956.

In addition to helping end the legal dispute with Hillwood Development, the town's legal staff won a courtroom battle that restored the Solana office complex to Westlake.

Southlake and Westlake battled much of the year about the legality of a lame-duck Westlake Board of Aldermen vote in May 1997 to disannex the Solana complex and give jurisdiction for it to Southlake. On Dec. 1 this year, state District Judge Fred Davis ruled that Solana, which provides 99 percent of Westlake's tax revenue, is in Westlake. Southlake vowed to appeal the ruling, but Westlake residents savored the victory. Late yesterday, district court officials said they had not seen an appeal of Davis' decision.

"That decision really put us in great shape, and we are ready to move ahead," Brown said.

But Bradley has another hurdle to clear. His right to serve as mayor could be at stake in a matter currently before the Texas Supreme Court. In a special session in September at Baylor University Law School in Waco, the court heard arguments focusing on whether Bradley was denied due process in April 1997 when four members of the Board of Aldermen voted to oust him from the mayor's seat on misconduct allegations. A few days later the board chose Dale White as mayor.

In early May 1997, newly elected aldermen returned Bradley to office, fueling the legal tussle. Bradley retained the mayorship in this year's election. But if he loses the Supreme Court case, he could be barred from office for two years.

Several legal observers said the Supreme Court may issue an opinion on the case in January.

"It has been a most challenging year, not only for me but also the town. But we've done well," Bradley said.

The Bradleys hired a contractor to move their historical house, designed by legendary North Texas architect Charles Dilbeck, to their new property at Dove and J.T. Ottinger roads. The process, which includes dismantling, moving and reassembling the house, is expected to take about 18 months. The Bradleys will live in a mobile home until then.

For Brown, 1998 stands out because of the unity demonstrated by most of the town's residents.

"There were no defeatists. I think, for better or worse, people were ready to see things through until the bitter end. And things turned out about as well as we could imagine, especially with Fidelity coming in," he said.
