

- Home
- Classifieds
- Coupons
- Contests
- Job Giant
- Page 9

- Calendar**
- Concerts / Videos
  - Events
  - Movies
  - Music
  - Restaurants
  - Theater

- Articles**
- Ask Saffron
  - Back When
  - Best Buys
  - Blog Diego
  - Blog World
  - City Lights
  - Cover Story
  - Crasher
  - Diary of a Diva
  - Driven
  - Extras
  - It's a Crime
  - Letters
  - Like Wow!
  - Matthew Alice
  - Obermeyer
  - Reading
  - Remote Control
  - Roam-O-Rama
  - Seen On DVD
  - Sheep and Goats
  - Sporting Box
  - T.G.I.F.

- Guides**
- Baja
  - Best Of
  - Health & Beauty
  - Legal
  - Tickets
  - Travel
  - Wedding

- Online Ads
- Contact Us

## City Lights

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### Breaking Stories: Aaron's Gold

By Matt Potter

The developer who's stirred controversy by building a high-rise office building smack in the flight path of Montgomery Field is a longtime veteran of local, state, and federal politics, funneling thousands of dollars to a variety of his favorite candidates. On April 21, 2005, campaign records show, **Aaron Feldman**, who's been doing business under the Sunroad banner for more than two decades, gave \$2100 to the campaign of GOP congressman **John Campbell** of Irvine, elected in a December 2005 special election. He replaced former representative **Chris Cox**, who had been appointed chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. That same year, Feldman contributed \$1000 to the Democratic congressional campaign of then assemblyman **Juan Vargas**, who lost to incumbent **Bob Filner** in the June 2006 primary. But Feldman had also backed the winner, giving Filner \$2100 in March 2005. The same year, Feldman's son **Uri** gave \$500 to Filner and \$250 to Vargas. In May 2006, Feldman, listed as president of Sunroad Enterprises, gave Vargas another \$1000; in the election cycle before that, Feldman gave Filner \$2000 on October 1, 2004.

Feldman was also a major financial backer of ex-San Diego mayor **Susan Golding's** political career, including her short-lived bid for U.S. Senate. In May 1997, records show, he kicked in \$1000; **Don Connors**, listed as a Sunroad employee, gave \$250. Golding was responsible for cutting the deal between General Dynamics and the City that resulted in creation of the office and commercial park where the sprawling aerospace factory used to be. On November 19, 1997, the Golding-led city council unanimously approved the 232-acre development, called New Century Center, clearing the way for General Dynamics to dispose of the land. It was sold to Lennar Partners for \$80 million in July 1998, and Lennar renamed the project San Diego Spectrum. Two years later, in December 2000, Sunroad bought 40 acres of the property from Lennar. That's where Feldman's infamous office tower is now rising.

Besides Feldman's political largesse, Sunroad employs a virtual army of lobbyists to make the rounds at city hall. According to the most recent disclosure reports, they include **Jeffrey Forrest**, **John Ponder**, and **Donna Jones** of the law firm of Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton; **Barbara Lichman** of the firm Chevalier, Allen & Lichman; and **Mitchell Berner**, a veteran of the local influence-peddling trade and top staffer to Golding when she was on the county board of supervisors in the 1980s. Other old Golding hands are now back in city government, thanks to the election of Mayor **Jerry Sanders**. Chief among them is **Fred Sainz**, the mayor's influential press aide, who was once one of Golding's top deputies.

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