

## **Historical background:**

The Ethiopian community in San Jose, Silicon Valley area started growing in early 1980s as immigrants started arriving. Since the new arriving immigrants have economical, language, cultural, and other challenges it became necessary to form a community organization.

Prior to 1980, there were seven to ten Ethiopians in San Jose and the surrounding. In 1984 Ethiopian Community organization was formed. Some new immigrants felt that the organization does not represent them and asked the city council of San Jose to intervene.

The city council called the meeting and run election. New community leaders were elected, but these new leaders did not satisfy the whole community. These who are dissatisfied with the new leaders asked the city council to intervene again. The city council of San Jose decided not to refund the organization until the Ethiopian community solve their internal problem. The Ethiopian community dissolved.

For a couple of years, some Ethiopians rented an office and made it a gathering place. Tutoring, driving lesson and Amharic language classes were being conducted. After a few years people came with an idea of an organization which run with board. The community get the service but exclude electing the board members.

In 1991 Ethiopian Community Services was (ECS) was formed. Due to internal cultural and language conflicts, ECS was not able to be all inclusive organization. Because of fear of those who want to weaken the organization, ECS created by-laws which is owned and operated by few board members only. Even though it was unable to show significant results, ECS was able to provide basic services with help from San Jose city government and other institutions. Later when the fund from governmental institutions dried up, ECS was unable to continue its basic services. After some of the board executives abandoned the organization, ECS became almost non-existent.

Those board members who did not give hope, invited others to join the board to guarantee it's continuity. It was during this period when the founding members of Silicon Valley Ethiopian Community Association (SVECA) were also invited and joined the ECS board.

Immediately after joining the board, the members learned that one of the original board members was trying to transform ECS to members owned instead of board members owned organization. Reviewing the by-laws and cross checking other Ethiopian communities, some of the new board members joined the effort for transformation. But some were not convinced or had doubt. As a result, the debate continued for years. Majority of the board members preferred to focus on cultural and social events instead of working on the transformation to member owned organization. Even after the board approved to transform it to membership, it was not given high priority. It was pushed aside giving other issues higher priority. But those who were determined to transform it did not give up instead they kept reminding and pushing towards implementation even though patching the by-laws which had structural flaws would not make it a complete one. At that time, the hope of the SVECA founders was, once it is transformed into membership based, the by-laws can be re-written by members approval.

But some were terminated from continuing to second term. And their years of struggle was dashed. Then these members got together and reviewed what transpired and finally concluded that the best solution is to form new community service which addresses not only the membership issue but also other matters such as securing the continuity of the organization.

After studying several Ethiopian community by-laws and interviewing various community leaders throughout the US and Canada, the founding members were able to draft SVECA's well-crafted by-laws. Currently SVECA is incorporated as a non-profit social benefit organization with the California Department of Corporation.

**Our Vision:**

To have a vibrant all-inclusive Ethiopian Community center which brings various sectors of the community together addressing the community challenges and wishes.

**Our Mission:**

By creating an all-inclusive strong organization which works with its community members, community institutions, governmental institutions, and others to create continued growth towards achieving our vision.

**Our ask to community members:**

We encourage everyone to become a member and help our community to grow. The more people join us the more we can achieve. Feel free to share your views or ask questions. Strength of a community is determined by the participation of its community members.