

Spring Home & Garden



Wildfire season is approaching — Are you protected?

As a new wildfire season approaches Southern California, residents of Rancho Santa Fe are more sensitive to the safety of their homes and families since the recent effects from the October 2007 wildfires. While many homeowners are still working to rebuild and clean up the aftermath, it has become increasingly important to secure homeowners insurance with appropriate coverage limits. Another hot issue these days is the importance of the fire retardant systems that many high-end insurance companies are employing for their policyholders.

Recently, Chubb Insurance introduced Wildfire Defense Solutions for their policyholders, which includes both a new policy coverage and access to Wildfire Defense Systems, Inc., one of the most experienced companies in the wildfire-fighting industry. Wildfire Defense Systems uses professional firefighting equipment and employs certified firefighters with decades of frontline experience. WDS works in conjunction with the federal government and local municipal response teams to maximize effectiveness. Chubb offers their service free of charge or the client can use a company of their choice and get up to a \$5,000 reimbursement.

"We insure a \$700,000 home in Northern Escondido which is enrolled in Chubb's Wildfire Defense System," said Vanessa Snodgrass, vice president of marketing at Rancho Santa Fe Insurance. "All of our Chubb clients are eligible, no matter how much premium they pay or how big their home is."

Fireman's Fund Insurance Company also introduced an aggressive, comprehensive, prevention-focused program for policyholders throughout the state in August of 2008. Developed in collaboration with fire departments and wildfire defense companies, highlights of the program include a wildfire susceptibility assessment, defensible space/fuels



Are you protected?

management, fire service visits and evacuation assistance. Additionally, Fireman's Fund will pay up to \$2,500 for costs incurred to policyholders who hire independent companies to apply a chemical fire retardant during a wildfire event. It is surmised that deploying private crews to selected homes might ease the strain on local fire departments. Fireman's Fund has collaborated with firefighters since the company was founded in 1863 with a mission to support the families of firefighters. That commitment continues today with the Fireman's Fund Heritage Program, which has provided over \$5 million in training and equipment grants to California fire departments and agencies-over \$20 million nationwide.

In 2005, AIG Private Client Group partnered with FireBreak Systems, Inc. to establish a Wildfire Protection Unit exclusively for AIG Private Client Group policyholders. Despite much misconception regarding this service in the national media, the service is complimentary and available to all AIG Private Client Group policyholders. Customers can have Phos-Chek sprayed on brush surrounding their homes before each fire season. During a wildfire, the trucks are automatically deployed via a high-tech GPS navigation system to the homes of enrolled customers to help defend their home from an encroaching wildfire.

While these fire protection services offer an additional level of protection and peace of mind, there is no substitute for defensible space around your home and adequate wildfire preparation. It is also important to review your Homeowners Insurance policy annually with a local agent to ensure that your policy provides appropriate replacement cost coverage. According to the California Department of Insurance, as many as 40 percent of homeowners statewide lack enough insurance to cover their home-replacement costs, and most realize the problem only when it is too late. It is also important that your insurance company perform an on-site inspection of your home to calculate appropriate replacement cost limits on your policy based on current costs to rebuild.

•Rancho Santa Fe Insurance: (858) 756-4444; www.rsfire.com

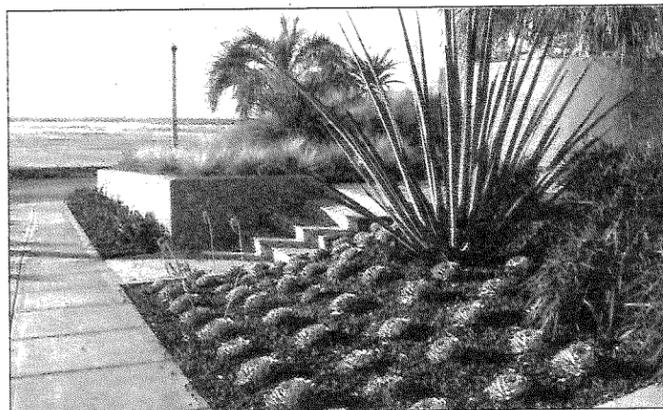
•Rancho Santa Fe Fire Dept. (858) 756-5971; www.rsf-fire.org

Environs offers expertise and tools to meet water use restrictions

Beginning in June/July, 2009, the Santa Fe Irrigation District is anticipating the implementation of Stage 2 of the existing Urban Water Management Plan that will require a 20 percent mandatory reduction in water consumption. This is in response to the reduction of water deliveries from the San Diego County Water Authority. Recent studies have identified that Rancho Santa Fe residents are the third highest water consumers per capita in the state of California, with an average daily use of 570 gallons per day — three times the state average.

Have you verified your water consumption and water bill recently? The restrictions mandated by the district include limiting irrigation to three days per week between June — October and only one day per week between November — May. This will affect many landscapes and lawn areas.

If your irrigation system is more than five years old, new irrigation products and features can greatly increase the efficiency of your system and reduce consump-



Environs has a team of professionals to help you with your landscaping.

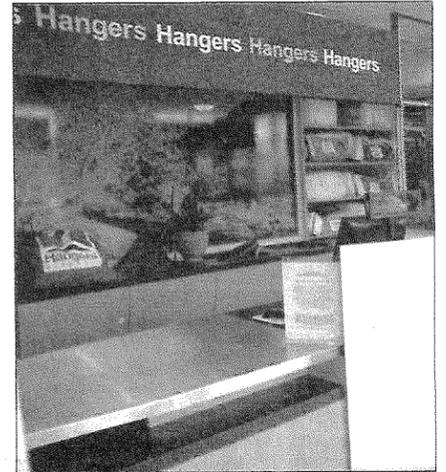
tion. Additionally, the evaluation and assessment of your existing landscape can determine if reducing lawn areas and the inclusion of "regionally appropriate" plant materials will further reduce water use.

Environs has a team of professionals that have been involved in designing published and award-winning landscapes for over 20 years and we have the expertise and tools to provide a complete evaluation of any property to determine what steps need to be taken to assure that compliance with these new restrictions are met. Contact us to find out how we can assist you in taking the necessary steps to conserve water and to improve the efficiency of your irrigation system and the quality of your property and landscape. Environs can be reached at 619-232-7007; www.environs.us.

—Advertising submissions

Hangers Cleaners' unique process helps to keep everything in your home clean and like new

Hangers Cleaners offers up solutions to the new issues we all face in today's trying times. Their new Drycleaning Stimulus Plan, which began in January for all existing Hangers customers continues for all neighborhood residents. With the new budget issues we all face there is a renewed sense of all things "home," as well as a need to keeping existing things like new. "Our entire Hangers Team has been overwhelmed by the response to the Stimulus Plan, which offers substantial savings on Hangers' unique, patented, cool process Liquid Carbon Dioxide drycleaning. As folks spend more time at home, it is natural to want make sure home is really clean. Plus it is more important than ever to keep the work wardrobe looking, feeling, and smelling like new," said Gordon Shaw, the owner of Hangers Cleaners.



Hangers Cleaners provides San Diego's first truly 'Green' drycleaning service to keep everything in your home clean and like new.

With locations in Torrey Hills, Santaluz, as well as Mission Valley and Downtown San Diego, Hangers Cleaners has become a leader, both locally and nationally for providing truly earth friendly drycleaning. No place else in California offers as convenient and plentiful access to this unique Liquid Carbon Dioxide drycleaning technology. They use CO₂ in a liquid form, the same beverage carbonation product we all drink daily. No other technology drycleans in a substance you can consume. Clothes are cleaned at about 60 degrees, which eliminates the setting of stains and prevents the breakdown of fibers. In short, the process does not cause clothes to wear out. Distillation in the system is accomplished using very low temperatures compared to other systems, which is the reason there is the lack of the funky drycleaning smells one often encounters. Clothes, and comforters are cleaned at fairly high pressures which coupled with the depressurization kills all germs, bacteria, and dust mites. This solves many problems for people with allergies, chemical sensitivities, or those who dislike germs and dust mites. Liquid CO₂ is much less aggressive as well, so your favorite clothes don't fade.

Eight years after opening the first 100 percent all natural liquid CO₂ drycleaners on the West Coast, Gordon Shaw, a 30-year San Diego drycleaning veteran, is proud to have cleaned over 320,000 garments last year at the four Hangers Cleaners in San Diego. Since opening in 2001 Hangers Cleaners has processed over 2,000,000 pieces of customers' fine clothes in a totally environmentally benign manner, using only Liquid CO₂ or water. Over the years, Hangers has garnered numerous commendations and awards, including the San Diego County Clean Air Award in 2001, and Consumer Report's "best results" rating in a February 2003 product test. All stores are quality oriented, designed for convenience, friendliness, and superior customer service. But what really sets Hangers Cleaners apart from other drycleaners in their revolutionary CO₂ technology. Developed in the mid '90s, CO₂ drycleaning uses the same safe stuff that's responsible for the bubbles in champagne. It's colorless, odorless and, most importantly, environmentally safe. There is no residual chemicals in your clothes, it cannot contaminate soil, and is not harmful to people. Additionally it is far more gentle on your clothes, which means no fading, no shrinkage, and no wearing of the fabric. Hangers complements its high-tech process with old-fashioned customer service. All employees are dedicated to taking the best care of customers and their clothes. Be sure to check out Hangers huge, vault like machine at the Torrey Hills plant, where it is spot lighted, and positioned behind glass resembling a micro brewery. It is the very same scene used in a two-page spread in Newsweek and in a four part story on MSNBC.com. You can see what actually happens to your clothes rather than the mystery of the back room most commonly found. For more information, please call Hangers Cleaners in Torrey Hills 858-259-7150 or in Santaluz 858-759-7011.

Calling all gardeners to 'A Morning in the Garden' at RSF Garden Club

Gardeners, both novice and expert, are invited to attend "A Morning in the Garden" at the Rancho Santa Fe Garden Club, Wednesday, March 25, from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

Guest speaker Mia Carville of Cedros Gardens will have a "show & tell" on the newest plants coming to the nursery this spring and how to plant "water-wise in your garden." Carville will also have the plants from her nursery for sale.

Also speaking will be Jason Levin, owner of Dos Gringos "A Flower Company Different by Design." Levin will share tips on growing cut flowers in your garden that can be used in floral arrangements and keeping flowers fresh. Levin also has a unique story to tell about his very successful company and the state-of-the-art headquarters in Vista. Both speakers will inspire you and help you to get a head start on your spring garden, while instilling a new confidence in your gardening efforts. Come join us for a fun and enlightening morning. Everyone is welcome. A \$10 fee will be charged for non-members. Coffee and goodies will be served. No reservation is required. For more information, call 858-756-1554.

RANCHO SANTA FE NEWS

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THISWEEK

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CANNES DO

A former Torrey Pines High School student's movie was screened at Cannes in 2008 and now his career is off and running **5**

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ONE LUCKY DOG

Escondido resident Briana Heck and Buddy compete in the Child's Cutest Dog contest during the 14th annual Ugly Dog Contest held March 8 at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. As promised, the contest featured a few fairly ugly pooches, but their attractive canine counterparts were encouraged to participate as well. Dogs competed in various categories, including Adult's Cutest Dog, Dog Who Looks Most Like its Owner, Best Trick, Best Mutt, and Most Unusual Markings. Chomper, a drooling mutt with a two-tone tongue, took the Ugly Dog grand prize. *Photo by Daniel Knighton*

Retail renaissance takes place in the village

By David Wiemers

RANCHO SANTA FE — Retailers are stirring things up in the Ranch with sidewalk sales, businesses playing musical chairs and new retail outlets springing up. What's going on?

The sidewalk sale that took place Feb. 27 was the brainchild of Courtney McDonald, owner of Plume Fine Stationery. "I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun if we all put our stuff outside and had a sidewalk sale?'" McDonald said.

The idea was intriguing and supported by fellow retailers, but nothing comes easy in the Ranch, a town known for its restrictions, rules and regulations. Permissions were necessary to pull it off. But McDonald knocked on doors, made calls and made it happen.

The idea was also a good opportunity to meet new neighbors such as Jakki's Closet and Daniela Boutique, both stores located on La Granada at Paseo Delicias. McDonald introduced herself to the owners of both stores and asked them to participate in the sidewalk sale, which they were glad to do. "I wish we could do it more often," said Jakki Hill, owner of Jakki's Closet. Both Jakki's Closet and Daniela Boutique opened their doors last October.



SIDEWALK SALE Jakki Hill brings some of Jakki's Closet outside during the Feb. 27 sidewalk sale in the village. *Photo by David Wiemers*

"Fridays are usually pretty quiet, so this helped stir up interest," Hill said. "It drew people inside."

Organizing the sidewalk sale was just one of the projects McDonald is juggling. She recently moved her store from a small space behind Willis Allen to a more prominent position on Paseo Delicias, formerly home to Gracie's. McDonald

did a complete renovation of the store, top to bottom, and opened the door March 2. "I'm planning a Grand Opening in April," McDonald said. The new store offers fine stationery, as well as clothing and giftware. "It's been fun putting it together," McDonald said. Renovations are taking place outside, too. In a courtyard behind Plume Fine

Stationary and adjacent to The Pantry, a fountain is being built along with benches, beautiful flowers and potted plants. "It will be beautiful," McDonald said. Meanwhile, on April 1, Marilyn Mulloy Estate and Fine Jewelry will move from its present location to the premises behind Willis

TURN TO **RETAIL** ON 17

New school moves forward

By David Wiemers

RANCHO SANTA FE — Board members for the R. Roger Rowe School are learning a few tough lessons themselves. Despite their best efforts to build the proposed new school on time and on budget, they're learning it's not an easy task to accomplish given the current economic uncertainty.

Katy Wright and Tim Ireland, both of Gafcon, Inc., the construction management team hired for the school renovation project, gave board members updates on scheduling and budget milestones, a design path and state funding at the March 5 meeting. "We have a critical timing issue," Ireland said. "We need to get started on the interim housing." The problem, according to Wright and Ireland, is that moving forward with many of these projects is dependent upon

TURN TO **SCHOOL** ON 17

Board looks to collect late assessments

By David Wiemers

RANCHO SANTA FE — Chief Financial Officer Steve Comstock received approval March 5 from the Association to record Notice of Delinquent Assessments against members who have yet to pay the first and second installments for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Liens will be placed against the members' properties should payment not be met.

According to Comstock, there are 12 properties in arrears, up substantially from the four or five properties from years past. Comstock noted that the recording of a Notice of Delinquent Assessment followed a series of reminders and nudges from the Association, including letters and phone calls. "I suspect that once we record the notice, several will step forward and make their payments," Comstock said.

Comstock also presented the board of directors with the Budget Preparation Schedule for the fiscal year

TURN TO **ASSESSMENTS** ON 21

Rev up with new top auto picks

By the Editors of Consumer Reports

Consumer Reports named its Top Picks for 2009 in its Annual Auto Issue, which include two new models — the Toyota Highlander and the Chevrolet Avalanche, as top choices for midsize SUVs and pickups.

Having proven reliable in its first year since a major redesign, the top-rated Toyota Highlander dethroned the Hyundai Santa Fe, last year's winner in the midsize SUVs category, while the improved reliability of the new Chevrolet Avalanche helped it to replace the Chevrolet Silverado as top pickup.

Despite the arrival of more gas/electric hybrids, the Toyota Prius remains Top Pick in the "green" car category for the sixth straight year. The Prius's 44 overall mpg is the best CR measured in any five-passenger car.

CR's Top Picks are the best all-around models in their categories and must meet stringent road test, reliability and safety requirements. Each Top Pick scores at or near the top of its category among more than 300 vehicles CR tested at its Auto Test Center; has average or better predicted reliability (based on the problems subscribers reported on more than 1.4 million vehicles in CR's Annual Auto Survey), and performed adequately in overall safety if tested by the government or insurance industry. In addition, to be a Top Pick, each model must offer electronic stability control (ESC), a proven lifesaving safety feature, as standard equipment or as a readily available option.

Consumer Reports' testing procedures are the most comprehensive of any U.S. publication or Web site. More than 50 individual tests are performed on every vehicle,

including evaluations of braking, handling, comfort, convenience, safety and fuel economy.

Here, by category, are CR's 2009 Top Picks:

— **Small Sedan:** Hyundai Elantra SE. The Elantra SE (\$18,695) is a comfortable, roomy small car that provides good fuel economy, at 27 mpg overall, a quiet and nicely finished interior and plenty of features for the money.

— **Midsize SUV:** Toyota Highlander. The Highlander (\$26,000 to \$41,000) is a very refined and versatile vehicle. It provides a comfortable and quiet ride and decent fuel economy, at 18 mpg overall, for its class. The Highlander Hybrid's fuel economy, 24 mpg overall, is among the best of any SUV in CR's Ratings.

— **Pickup Truck:** Chevrolet Avalanche. The Chevrolet Avalanche full-sized crew cab (\$36,000 to \$47,000) is one of the most versatile and

comfortable pickups that CR has tested. It gets 13 mpg overall.

— **Best Overall Vehicle:** Lexus LS 460. With a road test score of 99 out of 100, the Lexus LS 460 (\$64,000 to \$77,000) is CR's highest-scoring vehicle. It provides a luxurious, uncompromising driving environment and gets 21 mpg overall.

— **Family Sedan:** Honda Accord. The Honda Accord (\$21,000 to \$31,000) is a roomy, well-rounded sedan that's easy to live with and enjoyable to drive. The four-cylinder engine gets 23 mpg overall.

— **Upscale Sedan:** Infiniti G37. One of the highest-rated sedans tested, the G37 (33,000 to \$36,000, formerly G35) combines sportiness and luxury in a very appealing package. It gets 21 mpg overall.

— **Fun To Drive:** Mazda MX-5 Miata. The Miata (\$22,000 to \$29,000) is a true

TURN TO CONSUMER REPORTS ON 21

RETAIL

CONTINUED FROM 1

Allen that used to house Plume Fine Stationery. What will occupy the space that is currently Marilyn Mulloy's?

"We hope to have an announcement next week," property owner Susan Woolley said. "We're still in negotiations."

Woolley and her husband Roger are longtime members of the community who have seen many changes in retail in the Ranch.

"These ladies are a treasure," Woolley said of McDonald and Mulloy. "Courtney has put in a high-end, Fifth Avenue-

style store, yet her prices are very reasonable. And Marilyn has been in retail in the Ranch for the past 28 years. She has done so many great things. She takes care of everybody. Where else can you get that kind of service? I hope the community supports them."

Woolley continues to investigate new ideas and opportunities in retail for the Ranch.

With new shops opening, some businesses expanding, some shrinking, some find it comforting to know that, despite these economically challenging times, retailers and service providers are still looking forward.

SCHOOL

CONTINUED FROM 1

approval by the Division of the State Architect, or DSA. With state cutbacks and offices being closed one or more days per month, it is causing delays in projects getting approved. Delays up to four months could be expected. "We're hoping that's not the case," Wright said. "But that's what we're dealing with."

The board was also hoping to do upgrades and implement designs to the new school with money it is entitled to receive from the state. That, too, is on hold until the state sells bonds and distributes those monies to the school. But, the irony is, only schools that have been approved by the DSA will receive money.

Equally frustrating for Superintendent Lindy Delaney is her attempt to prepare a budget for the coming year. "Changes from the state come hourly," she reported to the school board. The governor signed a California State Education recently, but Delaney said there will be a May revision. "Still, we're very fortunate. We'll be OK." Delaney said she anticipates a slight decline in enrollment next year, due to the construction of the new school, based on data collected via interviews with local families.

Early in the meeting, school board members were treated to a video by Global Literacy Students. Under the supervision of teacher Stacey Halboth, participating students collaborated on the video made using Voicethread, a computer

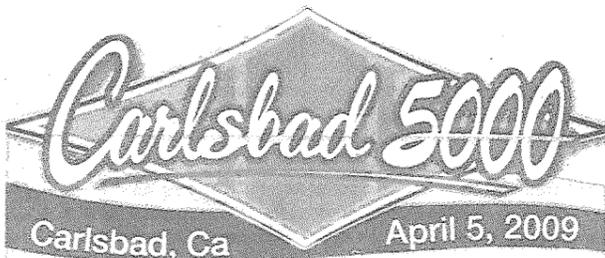
program. Teachers Gina Mirizzi and Kristin Woodard also presented two digital stories, similar to PowerPoint presentations, compiled by students. Chad Clerke and Griffin McComb presented their collaboration, a digital story about explorer Coronado. Dylan Cunningham and Adam Harris worked together to compile a digital story about explorer

Henry Hudson. "It's been a wonderful opportunity for the students to collaborate and work together," Halboth said. "It was very interactive."

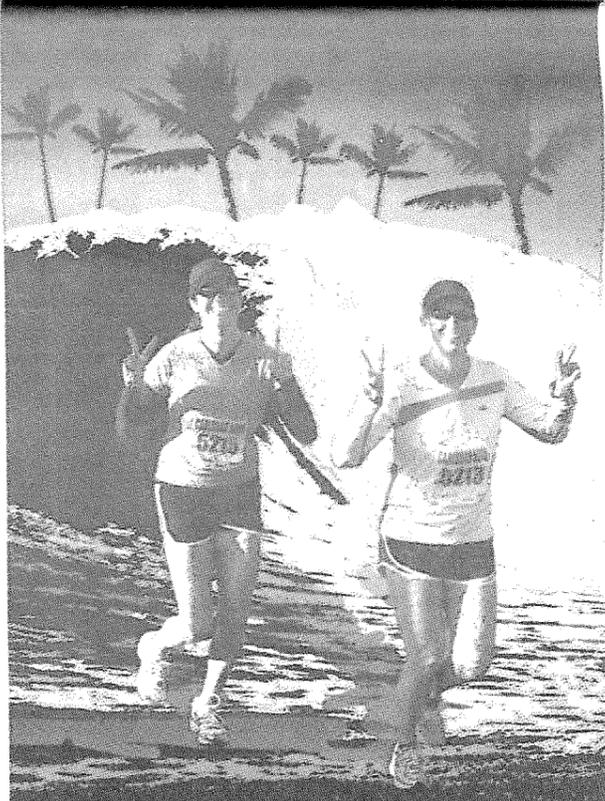
After the presentations, students came forward and shook hands with school board members. Students being honored included Summer Isaac, Jasmine Luck, Carly Newman, Christopher Ramphal, Anissa

Riviere, Elli Sawada, Michelle Wakeman, Chad Clerke and Griffin McComb. Students also being honored, but unable to attend, included Bailey Cunningham, Braeden Kammergard, Maddy Kerr, Garrett Moon and Harrison Schneider.

The next school board meeting is scheduled for April 2.



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TIME: 6:00-8:00 p.m.

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PLACE: San Marcos Community Hall
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"Understanding Kidney Disease"

Dr. Andrew King, Medical Director of Home Dialysis Therapies of San Diego and Head of Nephrology, Scripps Clinic, presents an educational Town Hall meeting

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Building in the line of fire

You've heard it many times before. Residing in the backcountry puts your home at risk with wildfires. You're on the front line, staring down dry, desert chaparral, drought, and a sea of residential units. The stakes are high. So why do you keep building out there?

Government agencies packaged the concept of backcountry living into a neat three-letter acronym: WUI, short for Wildland-Urban Interface. This, as the name implies, describes the imagined boundary between the backcountry and urban development. Oftentimes these areas are likely to experience their fair share of wildfires. To build there is an act of arrogance. Yet, your big house goes up, your sweeping panoramic views are created, and, time and again, your big house burns to the ground.

Sun up. Sun down.

Houses are constructed in areas throughout the state where intense Santa Ana winds are funneled over hill-tops and through canyons. Wind speeds have been known to match those of the strongest hurricane. It happened during the recent round of fires in L.A., during what many deemed the worst fire in city history.

Like us, the woods require a house cleaning to feel rejuvenated. We choose to deny nature her right to burn; to clean around the edges. Because of our failed fire suppression methodology, wildfires are now historically bigger and more intense than they've ever been.

I'm assuming you know this. Your insurance agent mentioned something about the WUI and wildfires, right?

I'm supposed to feel sorry for you when your backcountry, fire-prone house burns down, but I don't. I know you lost your dream pad way out there. Your family is temporarily displaced. Your possessions are gone. There you were, helpless and dependent on Hot Shots and elite firefighters from around the county.



ERIC MURTAUGH

Outside Perspective

Losing it all is difficult to grasp.

But you built your house out there in the first place. You knew better. You didn't heed the numerous warnings. You didn't properly prepare your property. I liken it to living in a well-documented flood plain. When the fire levy bursts, all hell breaks loose.

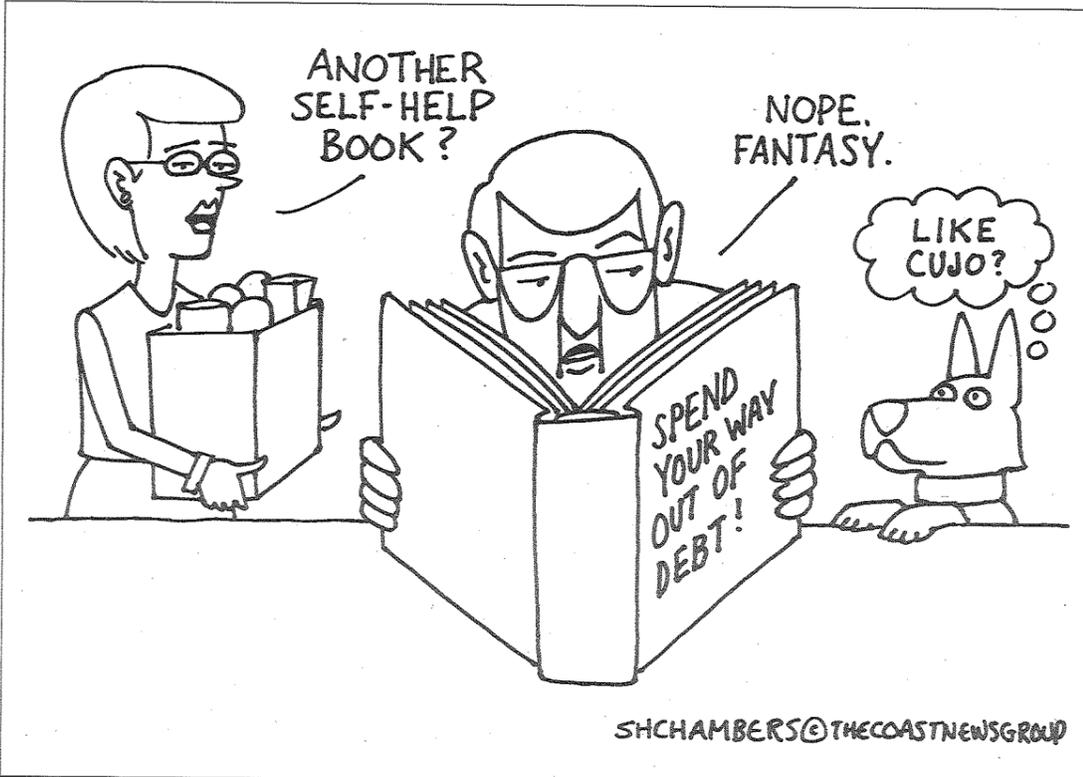
Let's make certain one thing is absolutely clear: I am not insensitive to the plight of fire victims. All humans deserve a roof over their head. What I'm calling for is a total re-evaluation of our relationship with fire and rampant development.

People are shocked and appalled when the woods go up in flames. I'm shocked and appalled when the state drains already ailing coffers fighting wildfires that simply wish to burn. Billions of dollars are wasted because people feel the need to develop the backcountry. They feel entitled to superior wildfire protection. The government is fighting fires that don't need to be fought, for people who don't need to live in the WUI. In reality, the War on Drugs is more effective than the War on Wildfires, and that speaks volumes.

The solution? Basically, you are to fend for yourself out there. Sure, if your house goes up because of a faulty electrical circuit, phone the nearest fire crew. But why should taxpayers in a failing state economy foot the bill to save your house ... again?

The scenario is all too common. Firefighters douse the flame, as they always seem to do after a long, hard-fought battle. Then what? Following the futile media-fueled victory

TURN TO PERSPECTIVE ON 21



Constitutional convention likely soon

Some good after all

The recent budget fiasco produced one shining light. The clamor for a constitutional convention became louder and more widespread. Unlike some events where there are free eats, lottsa booze and all sorts of entertainment, there will be none of that. Delegates will gather to review the state constitution, which has been untouched since 1878. There's no denying it needs to be looked at line by line. Folks are in the mood to do so right now as the new taxes and fees start to roll in. Success of the convention will depend on participating delegates. It has to be a cross-section of the population devoid of self-interests if that's possible. Otherwise, what is in place now may be pretty good.

Tax by the mile DOA

The idea of paying a tax on miles driven instead of adding on to a gallon of gas had a short life during the long budget session. It was dead on arrival. Not new, it has been mentioned as a national alternative for paying road construction. Last time the tax on gas was raised was a coppla decades ago and there's no deny-

ing wages and cost of materials have risen dramatically so a coppla pennies added to a gallon of gas won't be that hurtful. If you don't drive you won't be paying for something you don't use.

New concept

San Dieguito Heritage Museum has announced a new concept for its 21st annual barbecue set for May 16. The pit beef has been replaced by Brett's Santa Maria-style Bar-b-Que and will include tri-tip beef, chicken, macaroni & cheese, beans, cole slaw, tortillas, pan and cookies. Cost of beverages will be additional. Entertainment at 2:30 p.m. will feature the Tierra Caliente Ballet Folklorico. Great outing for families and friends. Missing though will be the zesty lima beans.

Beware of road scam

O'side P.D. recently reported drivers, particularly seniors, are being scammed by a ruse that can be costly. Some characters pull up to a driver, usually at a stop sign, and claim there is a lotta smoke or sparks emitting from the back of the car and offer to fix the problem. The real problem is their fee after they finish messing around under the hood. Solution: Ignore the allegation and drive to your favorite certified mechanic for a second opinion. Likely you will be advised that everything is hunky dory.

Ay, Chihuahua!

The Chihuahua talking pooch that usta tell TV viewers "Yo quiero Taco Bell," its sponsor, is now singing a different tune. Its creator sued the taco eatery for \$42 mil. for breach of contract. The mini-pooch can now sing "Yo quiero \$42 million pesos."

For the artisans

A performing arts center may become a reality this year at San Dieguito Academy. The project has been under discussion for several years and the San Dieguito Union High School District has been saving \$1.8 mil. toward its construction. In addition, the foundation has raised another \$1 million. District officials are hopeful the Governor will kick in a few bux from state education stash. Currently, student musicians and actors have no place to advance their talent.

Fair adds to grandstand entertainment

Four well-known attractions have been added to the grandstand shows during this summer's San Diego County Fair. These include The Guess Who, classic rock/pop, and Mitchell Ryder & The Detroit Wheels, June 23; The B-52's, pop, June 25; Switchfoot, alternative rock, June 26; and Joan Jett & the Blackhearts, classic rock/punk, July 3. Previously announced: Creedence Clearwater Revisited, June 30; and The Music of Abba, July 2. Fair dates are June 12 through July 5.

Ballot measures

Five ballot measures likely

TURN TO EYE ON THE COAST ON 21

RANCHO SANTA FE NEWS

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Housing project in hot seat again



Merriam Mountains plan raises wildfire concerns

By [Pat Sherman](#)

2:00 a.m. March 19, 2009



Bruce Tebbs of the Deer Springs Fire Protection District Board believes the Merriam Mountains project would leave residents trapped during a fire. (Charlie Neuman / U-T) -

DETAILS

MERRIAM MOUNTAINS DEVELOPMENT

What: Plans call for 2,700 homes and a shopping center on 2,327 acres west of Interstate 15 at Deer Springs Road, just north of Escondido.

Open space: About 1,192 acres would be preserved, including 37 parks and 18.3 miles of hiking trails.

Debate: Critics questions whether residents would have time to evacuate during a major wildfire. The developer and supporters said an access road would be widened and fire-safe building materials and landscaping would protect the project.

Online: A revised environmental impact report has been released. It is online at sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/ceqa_public_review.html

Pro: merriammountains.com

Con: llcfire.com

The public will again have a chance to weigh in on a controversial housing development proposed for Merriam Mountains just north of Escondido.

A revised environmental impact report for Stonegate Development's project has been released. If it is approved by the county this year, work will begin at the end of 2011, said Stonegate Vice President Joe Perring.

Critics of the 2,700-home project say it will create traffic congestion and that, during a major wildfire, residents would be in danger because they would not have time to evacuate. Defenders say it will use the latest fire-safe techniques that would allow it to survive a major wildfire.

Dry brush in canyons surrounding the project, which will be preserved as open space, hasn't burned in four decades. When Santa Ana winds blow, residents would have only 15 minutes to get out safely, said Deer Springs Fire Protection District board member Bruce Tebbs.

"It's surrounded by the most deep and dense woodlands you can imagine," Tebbs said. "It's a giant box of kindling."

The project is being designed with two main entrances, which both empty onto Deer Springs Road. During a fire, Tebbs said, the road would quickly become clogged.

"I don't think they'll even get 1,000 people out," he said.

"It would work if there were fewer homes, but they keep saying, 'No, we want this dense cluster of housing.' They won't talk about anything else."

Robert Frey, president of the Deer Springs fire board, belongs to a group advising the county Department of Planning and Land Use about the project. He said the area is zoned for only about 400 homes.

"I'm sure that through the process with the county there will be negotiations along the way," Frey said.

Stonegate's Perring said there are no plans to reduce the number of homes. In response to comments from the public, as well as from local advisory groups and the Deer Springs fire board, the developer proposed changes that could make the project safer, such as widening Deer Springs Road from two lanes to four.

Stonegate plans to spend about \$3.5 million to build a fire station at the base of Merriam Mountains, off Interstate 15. It will be staffed, at least part time, by Deer Springs Fire Protection District personnel, said Gig Conaughton, spokesman for the Department of Planning and Land Use.

The development would create a new tax base, some of which would be used to staff the fire station, he said.

Perring said the development would have 225-foot-wide fire buffer zones to the north and east. "Those will be developed similarly to the way that the shelter-in-place communities in the Rancho Santa Fe

district have been built, except ours are bigger,” he said.

The issue of so-called “shelter-in-place” or “stay and defend” was raised last month during wildfires that raged through Australia. The concept, which has been used for decades in Australia, involves residents either evacuating early or staying to defend the houses from flames and new fires ignited by flying embers.

Australian fire investigators are in the process of determining whether shelter-in-place practices were a factor in the deaths of more than two dozen people in massive fires last month.

The Merriam Mountains project will incorporate fire-resistant building materials such as concrete tile roofs, stucco exteriors and dual-paned windows, as well as indoor fire sprinklers and fire-resistant landscaping, Perring said.

“We worked with the county fire staff as well as our consultant team to really exceed every fire regulation that is in place today,” he said. “The ambition here is not to just follow the code but to pay attention and create a state-of-the-art, fire-safe community.”

Though neither the developer nor the county is calling the project shelter-in-place, Perring said it was designed to exceed fire safety elements in the Rancho Santa Fe fire district, which has the county's only designated shelter-in-place communities. Homes there sustained only minor damage during the October 2007 wildfires.

“We think our community will be safe and the people that choose to leave will be able to leave,” Perring said.

Tebbs said that in discussions about the project there is a tacit implication that people will be safe if they choose to stay. In Australia, the people who stay behind have received proper training, Tebbs said.

“I don't know if their firefighting skills are honed to the degree that Cal Fire's are, but they are trained firefighters,” he said.

One of the greatest dangers to people who stay behind would be smoke inhalation, Tebbs said. In Australia, he said, “All the elderly, all the people with emphysema or lung problems, all babies, are evacuated well in advance of the fire.”

Escondido resident and fire expert Rick Halsey, director of fire ecology for The California Chaparral Institute, said he believes shelter-in-place is a viable option, provided residents are properly trained.

“It works, with the caveat that there's got to be a consistent, coordinated education effort, and the community's got to be properly prepared,” Halsey said. “If you don't have those things, you're looking for trouble.”

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