

THE VICENTE CANYON VOICE

The Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association Newsletter

Volume 4, Number 2

August 5, 2000



What We've Been Up To This Year. . . Plus a Few Ways to Get Involved in VCNA

by Ann Smulka

If Alvarado Road is part of your daily route, you might have noticed the small plot of city land alongside Willow Walk — the lovely greenspace traversed by a seasonal creek, studded with purple irises, willows and redwood trees. On Sunday mornings, and at various other times of the week, you also might have seen a few of your neighbors pulling weeds, trimming trees, nurturing seedlings, or checking on the health of polywogs planted in the small pond.

VCNA has “adopted” this public space. Inspired by Nora Smiriga, who graciously planted the irises and willow trees after the 1991 fire, and Bill McClung, a small group of neighbors is working to develop the small city space into an inviting “neighborhood green.” This is just one of the projects VCNA members have taken on this year. There are many others.

On Earth Day, neighbors continued VCNA’s annual tradition of cleaning up the weeds and debris along Willow Walk, Sunset and Eucalyptus Paths. They also weed-whacked and bundled the overgrown vegetation lining the steps between Vicente Place and West View and in Garber Park. (If you’d like to help us continue to reduce the overgrowth in Garber Park, there will be another clean-up day this fall.)

Several Association members have attended meetings on the Claremont Hotel expansion, the recent development of the Vicente Canyon watershed, the Oakland Storm Drain Task Force, zoning workshops for the North Hills area of Oakland, and the wildfire threat in the East Bay hills.

Save the Date! VCNA’s 4th Annual Neighborhood Potluck & Meeting

What: VCNA General Meeting & Potluck BBQ

When: Sunday, August 27

Time: 4:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Place: Home of Reeve Gould, 92 Gravatt, Oakland

VCNA’s fourth annual meeting and potluck will be held on Sunday, August 27, at the home of Reeve Gould, 92 Gravatt Drive, from 4:00-7:00 p.m. Come meet your neighbors, discuss issues of importance to the neighborhood, and share dinner and libations. All area residents are welcome and encouraged to attend.

Please bring a dish to share. Grills will be provided for those who wish to barbecue. Wine, beer, and soft drinks will also be provided. If you have any questions about the event, call Louise Miller at 848-5203.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Other members are planning first aid and CORE classes so that residents of our neighborhood can refresh their skills in emergency preparedness. You can read about these and more on the Web site recently created by Matt Morse (<http://homepage.mac.com/matt/VCNA>). The site contains links to more detailed information on the Claremont expansion, copies of correspondence between VCNA and our city governments, and information on upcoming events.

VCNA works to build community and to promote and maintain the safety of our neighborhood, which is faced with the threat of fires, earthquakes and other hazards. It is managed by a volunteer steering committee that meets monthly to discuss issues deemed important by the members.

The steering committee welcomes the participation of people from all parts of the neighborhood, so there is representation of the issues and concerns across the geographic boundaries of the Association. Alvarado Road, Vicente Road,

-- continued on page 2

Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association

The Vicente Canyon Voice is published by the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association (VCNA).

Founded in 1997, VCNA works to promote and maintain the safety of the neighborhood surrounding Vicente Canyon. It is managed by a volunteer steering committee, which meets monthly to discuss issues of importance to the neighborhood.

Steering Committee Members

Chris Johnson - President
(510) 848-4580
corganj@ix.netcom.com

Louise Miller - Vice President
(510) 848-5203
lmiller460@aol.com

Jeannie Cecka (Alvarado Rd.)
David Kessler (Vicente Rd.)
Deborah Lesser (Vicente Rd.)
Bill McClung (Alvarado Rd.)
Susan Mattmann (Eucalyptus Path)
Barry Miller (Alvarado Rd.)
Matt Morse (Eucalyptus Path)
Mark Seligman (Westview Dr.)
Ann Smulka (Alvarado Rd.)
Georgia Wright (Vicente Rd.)

Get Involved in VCNA (cont'd from page 1)

Westview Drive, and Eucalyptus Path are well represented. The Association would benefit from the additional participation of residents of Slater and Evergreen Lanes, and Gravatt and Grandview Drives.

If you would like to become a part of the steering committee, or to volunteer in some other capacity, contact Chris Johnson at 848-4580.

Neighborhood History Corner

by Stanley Dickover, Jr.

The Berkeley Tennis club in the late 1930's was the hub of the tennis world. National matches were played there, and great tennis players such as Don Budge and Helen Wills (1905-1998) were well known on the grounds.

Sometime in '38 or '39, when I was in John Muir Grammar School, I was approached by one of the more "unsavory" of my schoolmates. (Unsavory to *adults*. Such boys usually were smarter than the norm.) He came to me because he had a scheme, and I had a little red wagon.

My friend had discovered a hole in a fence which would allow us to get underneath the south wooden bleachers at the main court of the Berkeley Tennis Club, where the most important matches were played. There we found a treasure trove of old Coke bottles (worth two cents each!). They had fallen or been kicked there over the years. We would fill my little red wagon with bottles and pull it down to the store a block away, sell the bottles, and split the loot. We were rich! (Don't forget, movies only cost us 10 cents back then).

It did not take long to clean up what must have been some years' accumulation of bottles. We realized that most bottles left behind by spectators were picked up by surface clean-up crews. Only a few fell through the cracks to rest beneath the stands.

After a while, we would go back during matches and wait for bottles to fall. Then we realized that we could climb up the bleacher supports, reach through openings and grab empty bottles before they fell or were taken by someone else. Next we decided to grab bottles with only an inch or so of Coke remaining. (We figured it was warm and no good by then, anyway.) Growing bolder, we started grabbing bottles with two inches, then three inches — and then, one day, even *full* bottles set down by unsuspecting tennis enthusiasts. That day was our undoing.

I remember quite a stir above us — cries of "Get them!", "Call the cops!," etc. I remember a fearsome, long-armed adult male reaching through the cracks, teeth bared, roaring in rage. There was even a whiney, thirsty woman.

We fled in terror. Our pursuers had a long way to go to reach our fence hole, so we got away cleanly. I even saved my little red wagon. Within days, the fence hole was firmly repaired and the rich bonanza was over.

Today the Berkeley Tennis Club hosts only minor events and fundraisers. Its crowd capacity is too small for these days of big money tennis. The south bleachers (capacity less than 500) are still there just as they were in the 1930s, but now a firm fence plus barbed wire prevents entry to the area underneath. Planks have been nailed across the backside, so nothing can fall under the stands, and no greedy little hands can reach for bottles.

Did we learn from this? Well, neither of us has ever been arrested for more than a traffic violation. So, perhaps we did.

Developments at the Claremont Hotel

What is Planned, What You Can Do

by Matt Morse

As you may have noticed, construction work is under way at the Claremont Hotel. What you may not know is that the current work is just the tip of the iceberg, if the new owners of the hotel succeed in their plans.

What is Planned

Twice this year, KSL (the new owner of the Claremont Hotel), talked to representatives of the nearby neighborhoods and discussed the planned work at the Hotel. VCNA has been present at both of these meetings. Here's a summary of what we've heard about those plans. Please keep in mind that this information is preliminary and may not be entirely accurate or complete. To learn more about developments at the Claremont and how you can register your concerns, see "What You Can Do" below.

The new work can be grouped under three headings: remodeling the current structure, adding 90 new rooms, and adding 75 condominiums or time-share units.

Remodeling

This work is already underway. It involves remodeling the lower floors of the existing hotel to accommodate the spa, which will be moved from its current location near the pool. This work includes the seismic upgrade of some of the hotel's structure and foundation.

Adding 90 Rooms

This entails the removal of the pine grove just downhill from the main entrance of the hotel, excavation of that hillside, and the construction of a new building that would provide 90 additional hotel rooms.

Adding 75 Longer-term Units

If approved, this phase would see the construction of 75 condominium or time-share units along the side of the Claremont property that borders Claremont Avenue, directly across from Avalon Avenue. A new entrance, opposite Avalon, would take residents to a multistory parking structure, which may or may not be sunken into the ground to reduce its visual impact. Other plans include the addition of a new swimming pool where the redwood arbor currently stands, construction of additional tennis courts, and upgrading the Chabot Golf Course to make the Claremont Hotel and Resort more attractive as a golf destination.

Possible Consequences to our Neighborhood

Obviously, developments at the Claremont on the scale of those outlined above will have significant impact on our neighborhood. Here are some consequences to consider:

- Additional traffic congestion in the already saturated Ashby-Tunnel Road-Claremont Avenue area. Along with the additional traffic will come more air pollution, more noise, and more danger to the pedestrian or bicyclist.
- Additional buildings bring additional noisy air-conditioning plants. The ones on the existing hotel are quite audible to nearby neighbors.
- Additional buildings also will increase the number of commercial deliveries and garbage trucks — another noise factor for nearby neighbors.
- Cutting down mature groves of trees and replacing them with buildings will alter the nature-to-concrete balance at the Claremont, reducing habitat for birds and other animals and greatly diminishing the park-like setting that makes the hotel so beautiful.
- Several years of construction noise and debris.

Your neighborhood organization recently sent a letter to Ted Axe, the Claremont's vice president and general manager, outlining our feelings about the Claremont as a neighborhood institution and expressing concerns about the planned work. (You can read the text of the letter on the VCNA Web site — see the address below.)

What You Can Do

The VCNA has asked KSL to keep it informed of plans concerning the Claremont Hotel. Besides the letter to Ted Axe, we are in touch with other neighborhood organizations that are tracking this matter as well as with city council members in both Oakland and Berkeley. We will pass along information as we get it.

To stay informed about this project, check the VCNA Web site (<http://homepage.mac.com/matt/VCNA>) for current news and links to other related Web sites. Make sure we have your current e-mail address so that we can alert you to meetings and other news concerning this project (update your information using the form enclosed with this newsletter). Come to VCNA steering committee meetings and volunteer to help represent it at meetings with KSL and the cities of Berkeley and Oakland.

**Interested in past issues of the Vicente Canyon Voice?
Visit our Web site at
<http://homepage.mac.com/matt/VCNA>.**

Storm Drain Wrap-up

by David Kessler
(Member, Storm Drain Task Force)

We have learned that overdoing vegetation management can result in equally disastrous erosion and landslide vulnerability. We currently see many new homes being built as well, which will increase the amount of runoff and change flow patterns. The ability of our cities to help manage storm runoff under these conditions is of especially vital concern. Failure of city systems to handle runoff once it leaves private property can result in great damage to homes and roadways, as well as pollute our creeks and the Bay.

The Oakland Storm Drain Task Force worked for two years and presented a report (including a strategy to address Oakland's drainage needs and a proposed service fee to finance it) to the City Council. The Council accepted the report and, following the dictates of Prop. 218, submitted the program to a "majority protest" procedure. At the public hearing held to consider adoption of the program, much opposition was manifested to both the fee structure proposed, and to the "majority protest" process, which was further compromised by the absence of return envelopes. None of the criticism was directed at the program of repairs, however, and numerous speakers underlined the need to repair the system and clean up Oakland's runoff.

The Council decided that it would find money in the General Fund to finance the development of a master plan for drainage, which was a priority of the Task Force report. They further decided that financing of new equipment, and dedication of a revenue stream for maintenance, were also appropriately financed from the General Fund. Public Works and CEDA staff were asked to study possible sources of revenue to help pay for drainage needs. After hearing about those possibilities, the Council will consider various strategies to finance the \$40+ million in needed improvements, and perhaps further expenses determined by the new master plan.

What is most important from our point of view is that the City Council has recognized that storm drainage is an important City responsibility and, after decades of neglect, we are finally going to do something about the badly deteriorated system. We can help our neighborhood avoid washed out roads, landslides and endangered homes by supporting the City Council's resolution to use our tax dollars for these essential needs. We must also make sure that the recommendations of the Task Force to spend money to keep our creeks healthy and to ensure Oakland's storm water discharge meets Federal Clean Water standards (and thereby keep San Francisco Bay healthy) are not forgotten.

Forming a Vicente Canyon Watershed Committee

by Bill McClung

I am interested to try to organize a Watershed Committee within VCNA to see if a group of neighbors can develop and sustain expertise on the open land vegetation in Vicente Canyon. We have a history of major vegetation fires in 1946, 1970, and 1991 in the Canyon. We have recent concerns about the impact of new construction on the creek and upper watershed. It is unlikely that more than 50 percent of our canyon will ever be developed.

My idea is that a Watershed Committee would study and think about the land and vegetation in the canyon that is not under the direct management of homeowners. It would not be concerned with residential landscaping, but rather with the open land vegetation as it affects wildfire safety, water runoff issues, animal and plant habitats, and beauty.

These are complex topics and it would be helpful if committee members brought some relevant expertise to our

work, or at least a real interest in going out onto the steep, poison oak- covered slopes to evaluate the issues as they arise.

I envision this committee working with field trips combined with e-mail exchanges and reporting to the VCNA Steering Committee and membership as appropriate.

If you are interested in joining this committee, please e-mail me at wmcclung@dnai.com or call 841-8447.

Information Updates Needed

Help us help you. Each year, VCNA updates its resident information database. If you are new to the neighborhood, the Association, have made e-mail or phone number changes since you last submitted a form, or have never submitted a contact information sheet to us, we encourage you to complete and submit the form included with this newsletter.