



# viewpoints

Fall 2013

Volume 44 Issue 1

A Community Newsletter from the Grossmont – Mt. Helix Improvement Association

## Hold Onto Your Checkbook!

### *Helix Water District Increases Approved*

**W**e are unhappy to announce that Helix Water District customers will see their bills rise. The newly approved two-year budget incorporates a 6% rate increase for year one, and an up to 8% increase for Tier 3 rate-payers for year two. This is on top of the over 60% (78% when compounded) increases we have experienced since 2007, an average of over 10% per year.

If you've ever traveled in a third world country, you know how critical clean water (or lack of it) is to wellbeing of a community. Here in the United States, we are fortunate to have this resource readily available. Just turn on the tap, and out comes clean, fresh, drinkable water.

As citizens, we expect water quality to be excellent and here in the Grossmont-Mt. Helix community it is—thanks to the fine work of the Helix Water District. GMIA appreciates the District's commitment to ensuring uninterrupted delivery of this vital supply.

While we appreciate the excellent service Helix Water District staff and Board provides, we believe this public agency is in need of greater financial oversight. As educated consumers, we understand the rising wholesale costs of water, the imperative need to conserve, and the importance of retaining valued employees with adequate compensation packages. We recognize that all these factors influence the price we pay for water.

When our GMIA Water Rate Committee studied the budget approved for 2014/15, we found four areas of concern. We sent a letter to the District detailing these four issues; you may read the complete letter at our website [www.gmia.net](http://www.gmia.net). Here is a brief outline of our points:

1. We noted that Helix Water District has one of the largest "spreads" from Tier 1 to Tier 3, and one of lowest cost Tier 1's – compared to other Water Districts. This is in part due to the decision to subsidize Tier 1 users at below cost by Tier 3 users. Rather than a flat percentage increase to the Tiers in domestic water rates this year, we suggested the Tier 1 rate be moved to from 80% of cost to 90% of cost. We believe the

See **WATER** on page 7



## Ice Cream Social

### *Simple Pleasures*

### Your Invitation to a Free Member Event

Join us to celebrate our unique neighborhood and simple pleasures of life in our community. Meet your neighbors, enjoy the beautiful Mt. Helix Park amphitheater, and indulge in a scoop of ice cream or a root beer float.

You are invited to a Family-Friendly, Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social on Sunday afternoon, September 22 from 2:00 – 4:30. We'll meet at the parking lot at the Fire Station at 10105 Vivera.

From there, take a shuttle to the summit or stroll the approximately 2/3 mile distance to the top. The shuttle will run continuously throughout the event.

Please RSVP by returning the enclosed form. You can also RSVP by email at [YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com). Be sure to let us know how many family members will be attending. This is a complimentary event, but an rsvp is required to attend. We want to be sure to have enough ice cream!

We'd love some extra help scooping, so if you'd like to lend a hand contact chair Holly Yarris at [YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com). 



GROSSMONT-MT. HELIX  
IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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**Viewpoints is a community newsletter published by the Grossmont – Mt. Helix Improvement Association. Letters to the Editor should be sent to P. O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943-2751.**

*This newsletter reflects the efforts of your entire Board of Directors.*

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**www.gmia.net**

### MISSION

GMIA is a 75+ year old nonprofit 501(c)4 public benefit membership organization. Our mission is to preserve and enhance the character and quality of the community and foster pride in the area. We do not employ a paid staff and are served by an all-volunteer board.

## Message from the President

At GMIA, we try hard to blend fun-filled activities that build community with serious work to preserve and enhance our region. When you participate in one of our social events—getting to know your neighbors, or step up to help us advocate about issues facing our community—you are making our common home a better place. Thank you!

We want to say hooray for our residents whose tidy front yards promote community character! Thank you to our members who contribute to fire safety by clearing dead trees and weeds from their properties. Your efforts help us all and are so appreciated.

Would you like to do a little more? If you would like to take the next step and be part of our larger community, this newsletter features articles with some ideas for you to consider. Here is a quick recap of our suggestions:



### Six Ways to Help Our Neighborhood

- ◆ Attend our Ice Cream Social (it's free!)
- ◆ Contact your Helix Water District Board representative to voice your concerns
- ◆ Volunteer to help maintain our GMIA Park & Ride Improvement Project
- ◆ Help stop "bandit" real estate signs – file a complaint online or in person
- ◆ Attend our Safety & Crime Prevention Community Forum (it's free!)
- ◆ Encourage a neighbor to join GMIA

Your vital support ensures that GMIA can be a force for good in our community. Thank you so much for caring about this place we call home. 🌱

*Susan Nichols*

## Thank You Donors!

Thanks to the following donors who have made gifts to GMIA of \$25 or more in excess of their annual dues in the past three months:

Dean & Judith Allen	Mary Gilligan	Paul & Janel Pehau
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## Helix Water Board Votes Divided – Again

As has become standard, our elected Helix Water District board representatives split their vote at the Public Hearing on August 21<sup>st</sup>. Despite requests to vote "no" or table the proposed increases made by those in attendance and in writing, the five member board voted three-to-two approving a budget with rate-payer increases.

Here is how our area's representatives voted:

- ◆ voting "no" to rate increases for an unprecedented two years was Director Kathleen Hedberg
- ◆ voting "yes" to increasing our rates for two years was Director De Ana Verbeke

Both board members represent neighborhoods in our geographic Grossmont-Mt. Helix community. As a public agency, the Helix Water District is staffed by employees and governed by a Board of Directors elected to four-year terms. The District is divided into five geographic areas, and voters elect only the candidate who represents their specific neighborhood.

The role of the Helix Water District Board of Directors is to govern the organization and represent the voters who elected them to office. As is stated in the District's Policy Manual, "Board Members remain objective and responsive to the needs of the public they serve."

Prior to this important vote, your representatives from GMIA met independently with Directors Hedberg and Verbeke to voice our concerns. At the request of Director Verbeke, we also met with Helix Water District General Manager Carlos Lugo and Operations Manager Lisa Irvine.

At our meeting with General Manager Lugo, Manager Irvine, and Director Verbeke, chief among our concerns was the District's decision to avoid a Public Hearing next year by pre-approving a second year of increases for their budget. When we asked if Helix Water District has ever in their history had a two year increase before, we were told only that "other districts do this." When we hypothesized that this might be a tactic to avoid public scrutiny in an election year (2014), we were assured that was not the case.

Really? 🏔️

## Mark Your Calendar!

### Safety and Crime Prevention Community Forum

October 21<sup>st</sup> at 7:00 pm  
Murdock Elementary School

#### Did you know?

- ◆ Most burglars are young, male, and poor. They are not motivated, career oriented individuals. Their burglaries are conducted to fulfill an immediate need for cash, usually to support a drug habit.
- ◆ 87% of burglars purchased drugs with the proceeds of their crime.
- ◆ 62% of burglars extensively survey their target before the crime.\*

Alarmed about crime in our community? Worried about home burglaries, mail theft or car break-ins? Before you build a barbed-wire enclosure around your castle, join us for our Safety and Crime Prevention Community Forum at Murdock Elementary School, 4354 Conrad Drive, La Mesa, October 21st at 7:00 p.m.

GMIA has heard from a lot of neighbors with concerns. Everyone seems to know someone on their street or in our immediate area who has been the victim of a crime. We're not sure if this is a rising trend or better reporting, but crime in our community is on everyone's mind.

GMIA has invited a panel of expert speakers from various law enforcement agencies and other organizations to provide us with the latest information and answer our questions. The Forum will also mark the launch of a community-wide Neighborhood Watch program. Begun in the 1970's, Neighborhood Watch programs repeatedly show that ordinary people working together and in cooperation with law enforcement can make a difference.

Please invite your neighbors. This is a free event GMIA is providing as a public service and is open to the public. All are welcome. 🏔️

\*Statistics from interviews with burglars published in *Burglars On The Job: Streetlife and Residential Break-ins*, by Richard T. Wright, Scott H. Decker, Gilbert Geis.

## The Signs Are Everywhere!

by Allison Henderson

You can tell the weekend is approaching in Mt. Helix because, on Friday afternoon, the major intersections and high visibility corners start sprouting a multitude of signs. Some are simple, handcrafted signs and banners advertising garage and yard sales, lost dogs and cats. The more conscientious homeowners take these down after their event.

The majority of signage in our area that causes controversy is the real estate signs. San Diego Association of Realtors governmental affairs department representative Jordan Mark sent me this information from their website regarding signs:

- ◆ On- and off-premise (open house) signs can only be placed on private property (not public right of way or on road medians) and require permission of the property owner.
- ◆ Off-Premise Directional Signs: No more than 1 on each parcel with the permission of the property owner, or 2 on a corner lot, not allowed in the public right-of-way, no larger than 4 square feet, daylight hours only.

San Diego County has regulations that are parallel to those outlined above, and additional regulations requiring that “Open House” signs shall be limited to the name and phone number of the person or agency offering the property for sale, the address or direction of the property and a directional arrow. Signs must be related to an individual dwelling that is offered for resale only.

Although a local realtor (whose signs often festoon our community) when asked about her signs, told me: “Real

estate agents don’t know where it’s legal to put them, it’s the sign installation company’s responsibility,” GMIA believes the regulations to be clear.

So what can all of us do if we are fed up with the visual clutter of “bandit” real estate signs that plaster neighborhood intersections and roadways on many weekends? Here are four ways to help end this trashy mess:

1. The California Association of Realtors website at [www.dre.ca.gov](http://www.dre.ca.gov) has an online complaint form.
2. Code Enforcement for San Diego County has an online complaint form <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/pds/ce5/CodeEnforcementRequest.html>.
3. You can stop by the local Sheriff’s Department Storefront in Casa de Oro which also serves for Code Enforcement at 9732 ½ Campo Road (in the Autozone/ Starbucks strip mall) to make a complaint.
4. Contact the realtor and proclaim your displeasure at their law-breaking behavior. 🏔️



## Help Wanted

by Tom Osteen

The GMIA Improvement Committee is looking for a few good men and women. Yes, we have openings for community volunteers to help us routinely maintain our GMIA beautification projects.

One of the Improvement Committee’s goals is to make the gateways into our Grossmont/Mt.Helix community more attractive. We recently finished the Park & Ride and off ramp at the southwest corner of Fuerte and I-8. With CalTrans cooperation, we

cleared weeds, upgraded the irrigation system, trimmed the existing palm trees and truckloads of mulch were spread throughout. The soil was amended and 32 red trumpet vines were planted to grow along the chain link fence. Take a look—it is a tremendous improvement.

Now we need your help to keep these new improvements maintained. GMIA will provide all necessary tools to get the job done. Light weeding and litter pick-up are the primary chores. We need YOU to join us in promot-

ing community spirit, to meet your neighbors and to reap the satisfaction of making our common home a better place.

If you can spare a little time please join the GMIA Green Machine. Our volunteer corps will meet at 9:00 a.m. on the first Sunday and 3rd Saturday of each month. Any help is welcome—volunteer one time or be a regular. Contact Tom O’Steen at 619 464-8887 or email [tosteen2@hotmail.com](mailto:tosteen2@hotmail.com) to join or get additional information.



## The Rock Walls of Mt. Helix

A concerned resident contacted GMIA to tell us of a workman who defaced the rock wall by cementing over its surface. On behalf of our residents, GMIA asked the County to investigate and, if necessary, require the homeowner to return the wall to its historic condition.

We have been advised by the County that the homeowner's engineer will submit a site plan to the county for review and comment. Once the site plan is in final form, it will be presented to the Historical Site Board for their review and recommendations. The next scheduled meeting of that Board is October 21st.

We are dismayed to note that residents along Mt. Helix Drive cope with vandals who remove stones from the rock wall and throw them at their homes. Argh! Please call the Sheriff if you see this happening. 🚩

### HISTORY OF THE MT. HELIX WALLS

In 1933, during the Depression and thanks to Franklin D. Roosevelt, federal Civil Works Administration crews made improvements on the road to the Mt. Helix summit to ensure the safety of visitors. The workers earned 60 cents to \$1.20 an hour, depending on their skills. A successor agency, the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) completed the project in 1934. They straightened the road and built the rock wall winding 7,000 feet up to the summit. Over 10,000 tons of rock were donated by Ed Fletcher for the carefully stacked wall constructed without mortar and with only a cement cap for reinforcement. Today the Department of Land Use is responsible for the maintenance of the wall and relies on two expert stonemasons skilled in this building technique.

## Trees of Mt. Helix

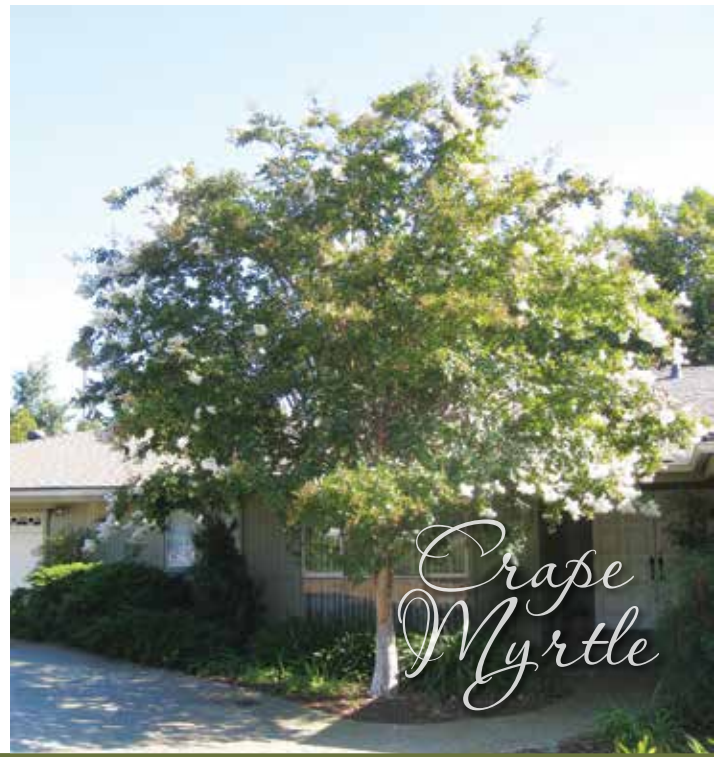
### *Lagerstroemia indica* – Crape Myrtle

by Jeff Rule

This continues a series of articles about interesting trees within the GMIA area. Members are encouraged to share their favorite or special tree with others through these articles.

The Crape Myrtle featured is located in the front yard and entry of GMIA members Bob and Barbara Cooley. The Cooleys have lived in the Horizon Hills neighborhood since they built their home in 1971. What makes this Crape Myrtle tree special is its compatible scale to the house, beautiful bark, light airy foliage, showy flowers, and fall leaf colors. The Crape Myrtle is a small size deciduous tree and can grow to 25' feet tall by 12-15' wide. It has a moderate growth rate in the inland area and takes regular watering. The tree is native to China. If purchasing a Crape Myrtle, buy the "Indian Tribe" varieties that are mildew resistant. The tree featured is the "Natchez" variety with white flowers and one of my favorite trees.

Members are encouraged to share their favorite or special tree with others through these articles. If you have a tree that you would like to share with fellow members, please call Jeffrey Rule (Director) at (619) 466-0362, and he can schedule a site visit. Thank you for your interest. 🚩



# 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner Meeting

by Holly Yarris

Over 200 neighbors were serenaded by classical guitar under the stars at our GMIA Annual Dinner Meeting. Held at the magnificent Water Conservation Gardens at Cuyamaca Community College, our dinner was catered by Phil's BBQ and paired with local wine from San Pasqual Wineries and Ballast Point beer. Delish! The weather was perfect, the setting magical. It was a beautiful evening, enjoyed by all. 🌱



Thanks to Sue Crevling, Holly Yarris, Tom Osteen, and Marty Ornish for serving on the committee that organized this event, and to Kay Bickley for chairing. A shout out to all our GMIA board members, spouses and family members who helped with set up, serving, and clean up. Great team effort!



WATER from page 1

goal should be to finally get Tier 1 rates close to the actual cost/unit of delivered water.

We know that owners of large lots or those with large families can be rigorous water conservers but still fall in Tier 3. Likewise, homeowners with small parcels or small families can be water wasters but remain in Tier 1 or 2. The District's policy assumes rate payers in Tier 3 are wasteful and must be penalized for usage. We disagree.

2. We suggested that the District consider establishing utilization budgets for high-end Tier 3 domestic water users, as is done with irrigation class customers.
3. We proposed that the District Board not set the 2014/2015 water rate structure at this time; the rates should be set next year when all relevant information is available. Helix Water District has no precedent for a two year budget. The proffered explanation that we, the customers, would be saved the cost of mailing an announcement of a Public Hearing does not wash.
4. Finally, we urged the Board and management to conduct a serious review of the cost of operating the District. While Standard & Poors, with their double A rating, gives the District credit for a healthy balance sheet and debt service coverage, it also sounds an early warning regarding "rapidly rising operating expenses". We are concerned that the Board may believe the unfunded liability in excess of \$40 million for future health and pension benefits can be gradually funded with continued water rate increases. We believe that there is a breaking point.

GMIA will continue to be involved in this issue, but we need your help. Although three of the five Helix Water District Board disregarded our objections and approved their budget, we encourage our members to continue to voice their concerns.

To reach your representative, contact (619) 667-6232 or [board@helixwater.org](mailto:board@helixwater.org). Not sure who serves your neighborhood? Check out their website at [www.helixwater.org](http://www.helixwater.org) for Board member boundary designations. ▲

## Share Before Recycling

Please share this newsletter with a neighbor before you recycle it.



## Traffic Bottleneck on Route 125

by Guy Halgren

We all know what a mess Route 125 is both ways between Lemon Avenue and Spring Street during rush hours. This is caused by two deficiencies. First, Route 125 was expanded north of Lemon and south of Spring but not in between. So there is a real bottleneck. The route needs to be widened in both directions. Second, the State has never built the ramp from 125 Southbound to 94 Eastbound so traffic piles up at the Spring Street ramp as motorists get to 94 Eastbound on surface streets. In addition to impacting us when we drive 125, these problems also force traffic onto Fuerte, Bancroft and other surface streets in our area, significantly increasing our traffic.

GMIA has been involved with Route 125 issues for over 20 years. We recently met with Supervisor Dianne Jacob and personnel from Caltrans to discuss our concerns and receive a status report. We did not receive good news.

We learned the anticipated connector has been delayed again and is now due for completion around 2020. Additionally, we learned the State does not anticipate widening 125 between Lemon and Spring until 2030 – 2040 when it widens 125 from the Mexican border to Santee. We absolutely cannot wait until 2030 – 2040 to get the bottleneck between Spring Street and Lemon Avenue resolved. This bottleneck should be dealt with entirely independently from the expansion of the entire 125 corridor that will take place in 20-30 years.

We followed up our meeting with a letter to Supervisor Jacob explain our concerns and asking for her assistance. The Supervisor promptly responded, agreed the widening project should proceed independently, and offered to assist.

Our thanks to Supervisor Jacob for facilitating the meeting and assisting us. We appreciate her support to help GMIA keep these projects on the "front-burner." ▲



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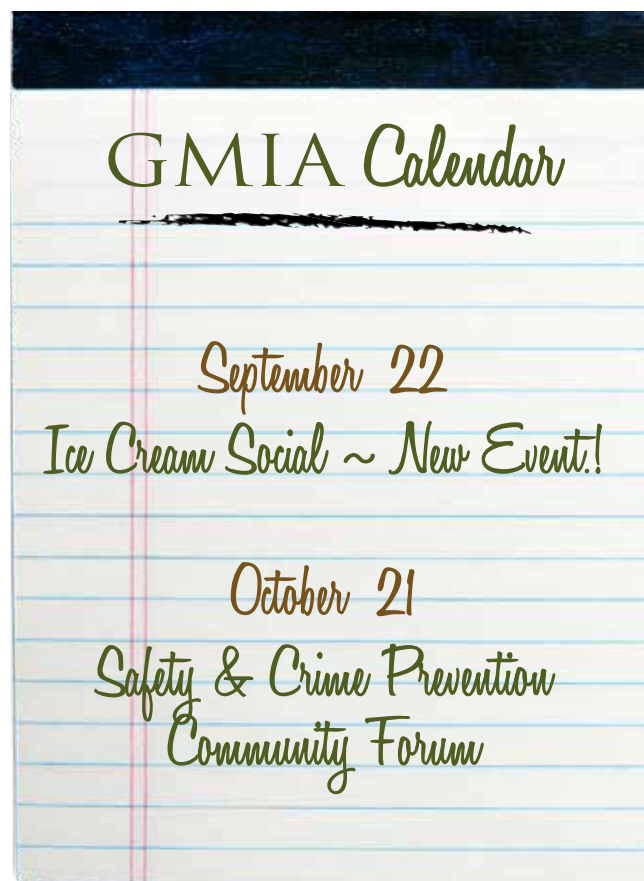
To ensure your membership is current: please look at your mailing label on this newsletter. On it you will find the renewal date of your membership. Note: if the date is June 2014 or later, your dues are paid in full. Thank you! Annual membership is just \$18. You may renew online at our secure website [www.gmia.net](http://www.gmia.net) or mail your payment to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943-2751.

## Why No GMIA Renewal Reminder Letters?

Unlike some nonprofits and commercial enterprises, GMIA doesn't send letters to remind members to renew membership. We are all volunteers and don't have a paid staff or resources to mail our members reminders. We'd rather use our funds to benefit the community!

We ask you, our members, to please check your mailing label on this newsletter. On the label you will find the expiration date of your membership. If the renewal date is 2014 or later, your dues are current. Thank you!

Time to renew? Please remit your \$18 dues to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943. You may also renew online at our secure website [www.gmia.net](http://www.gmia.net). We appreciate your membership and support for our organization. ▲







*You are invited to a Family-Friendly, Old Fashioned*



# *Ice Cream Social*

Join us to celebrate our unique neighborhood and simple pleasures of life in our community. Meet your neighbors, enjoy the beautiful Mt. Helix Park amphitheatre, and indulge in a scoop of ice cream or a root beer float.

Sunday Afternoon, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013  
2:00 – 4:30 pm

Mt. Helix Park Amphitheatre  
Complimentary - Members Only

We'll meet at the parking lot at the Fire Station at 10105 Vivera. From there, take a shuttle to the summit or stroll the approximately 2/3 mile distance to the top. The shuttle will run continuously throughout the event.

Please RSVP by returning the form below.  
You can also RSVP by email at [YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com).  
Be sure to let us know how many family members will be attending.



Please RSVP using this form, or by email at [YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:YourGmiaNeighbor@gmail.com)

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

# Attending