



viewpoints

SPRING 2016

Volume 46 Issue 2

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



GMIA Art & Garden Tour

Five fabulous gardens will be featured at our May 1st Art & Garden Tour. This year our tour has expanded from four to five exceptional landscapes. To be sure members have plenty of time to see each delightful venue, we have extended our tour time from 12:00 to 5:00 pm.

As always, admission to our Garden Tour is complimentary for GMIA members whose dues are current. Please check the mailing label on this newsletter – if the date is not 6/30/16 or later, your dues are not current. Please mail your payment to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa CA 91943 or renew online at www.gmia.net. You may also join or renew at the Tour.

Our self-guided tour is a great opportunity to learn which plants flourish in our Grossmont-Mt. Helix region. Be sure to bring the enclosed Garden Tour flyer/map with you.

Check in (just one time) at any garden and you will receive a wrist band for admission to all the gardens. While it is not our intention to open our tour to the general public, we will accommodate guests who wish to experience our event. Nonmembers may participate on the tour for a nominal donation (\$5). There is no entry charge for children under 18 years old.

See **TOUR** on page 4

3rd Annual GMIA Succulent Swap

Saturday – May 21st | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Everyone in the community is welcome at this FREE event to help promote water-wise landscaping!

- * Trade, swap or give away your succulents and other plants
- * Leave with lots of new plants
- * Bring your neighbors
- * Enjoy coffee and light refreshments

Don't have cuttings? Come anyway. You will leave with new plants for your garden.

Special thanks to GMIA members Tere Trout and Jonathan Becker who are graciously hosting our plant exchange in their magnificent garden located at 10805 Melva Road.

Bring your cuttings (any size is fine) and extra plants. This is a no-cost and no-fuss way to add to your landscape plus meet your neighbors. As a special treat, GMIA member Mike Atkinson will answer any questions and offer advice about plumerias. He will bring examples from his collection of this beautiful, flowering, drought tolerant plant.

Questions? Contact GMIA Board member Dagmar Miller at 619-579-1844 or dagmaremiller@yahoo.com. 



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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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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

“Gardening is cheaper than therapy and you get tomatoes.”

– INSPIRED SLOGAN ON A TEE SHIRT



Happily, science now validates what we already sensed: although researchers have not yet discovered the exact reason why, gardening decreases cortisol, the hormone involved in the stress response. So lower your blood pressure and enjoy a little bliss as we kick off the spring season with our beloved May 1st Art & Garden Tour followed later in the month by our Succulent Swap (May 21st). Both of these events give GMIA members a chance to savor the beauty of our Grossmont-Mt. Helix community and meet like-minded neighbors. We hope that you will take advantage and attend these complimentary member events.

Fostering pride in the community, encouraging water-wise gardening, providing neighbors with opportunities to meet one another: these continue to be important facets of our organization. Our GMIA calendar has evolved to include five mainstay events:

- ✱ Annual Dinner Meeting (Summer)
- ✱ Community Forum (Fall)
- ✱ Walk Up Mt. Helix to Welcome the New Year (January)
- ✱ Art & Garden Tour (Spring)
- ✱ Succulent Swap (Spring)

This cycle of gatherings bring us together to celebrate our wonderful semi-rural neighborhood. Popular and well-attended, our events showcase our efforts to go the extra mile to work for our community.

Events also help us engage members so that we are able to better advocate for our area and support efforts to improve our region at large. In order to be successful, we rely on a robust membership to ensure our collective voice is heard – by governmental agencies, developers, and others whose actions affect our quality of life. Your membership is vital – thank you for your support.

This month our Membership Committee, chaired by Vice President Pat Ryan, launched a mail campaign to boost our numbers. We sent an informative brochure with an application form to non-member households within our geographic boundaries. Do you have neighbors who are not members? Ask them if they received our mailing and please encourage them to join in supporting our all-volunteer, grassroots non-profit organization. Membership is just \$18 per household and now is a great time to join (or renew) because members enjoy complimentary admission to our beautiful Art & Garden Tour.

Gardening, (and its subsequent resulting therapy), tomatoes, and GMIA membership. Now that is a winning combination! 🌱

Susan Nichols

Thank You Donors!

Special thanks to members who donated a gift of \$25 or greater in excess of their dues.

Jim & Geri Bollman • Gary & Cindy Rambis King • Paul & Janel Pehau
Eva B. Goode & John Grasberger • Daniel Lamb

Helix Water District Board Raises General Manager's Salary



At a time when water customers struggle with escalating rates, the Helix Water District Board of Directors voted an unprecedented 3 year salary increase for General Manager Carlos Lugo. Director Kathleen Hedberg was a lone vote against the multi-year contract.

GMIA attended the meeting to speak out against this action, noting that:

- Historically the District has reviewed compensation annually and should continue to do so.

- The increase exceeds the current rate of inflation and sets a precedent for all employees' compensation.
- Senior citizens received no cost-of-living adjustments for Social Security.
- While rate payers sacrifice to face spiraling costs for this essential commodity, it is unconscionable to increase the salary of already well-compensated management.

We will continue to monitor the actions of this Board as we look toward the 2016 election. GMIA has created an ad-hoc committee to consider an active role in the election process. If you would like to be a part of this effort, contact Larry Nichols at 619-440-1607 or Lsnnichols@cox.net. ▲



Fuerte Drive Realignment Slated

Roads that wind throughout our neighborhood are the hallmark of our community. Heavily travelled Fuerte Drive is one such road. For some homeowners whose properties line Fuerte, damage from careening cars that fail to properly navigate the curves is a real concern.

The Department of Public Works is in the preliminary stages of a third iteration of a plan to realign the Fuerte Drive/Alzeda intersection. Although their previous designs were objectionable and did not conform to the character of our community, they have come up with a concept that appears to be acceptable. By lowering the grade of the road and slightly redirecting the curve, this dangerous "Y" intersection will become a much safer "T".

GMIA thanks our Valle de Oro Planning Group, especially current chair Mark Schuppert and former chair Jack Phillips, for their input that has been incorporated into the current plan. Mark and Jack's initial input, along with subsequent actions by the VDO Community Planning Group, has resulted in the proposed redesign which will hopefully diminish the dangers at this intersection while maintaining the community character of Mt. Helix. ▲

Thank You GMIA Member Pete Pickslay

GMIA member Pete Pickslay stepped up and emailed Supervisor Jacob to ask for her help with the poor condition of our Mt. Helix roads. In response, the Supervisor requested the Department of Public Works address his request for resurfacing. Road crew inspected the roads Pete specified, and determined that some of them require maintenance due to significant degradation. Because of his request, they scheduled work (to have been completed in January 2016) on Nabal from Calavo Drive to Challenge Boulevard, and on Alzeda Drive from Fuerte Drive to Snyder Road. Calavo Drive will be resurfaced during the summer of 2016.

As Pete put it so well, it's "Amazing what a nice letter to Dianne can generate." Way to go Pete, thank you!

For more information about planned and completed road repair, see:

http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/dpw/roads/Resurfacing_Program.html. ▲



After Dark Advice

Thank you to GMIA Director Dagmar Miller for this suggestion

Walking our beautiful neighborhood is a great way to enjoy healthy exercise. Many folks are walking in the dimly-lighted early morning hours, twilight, or after dark. Unfortunately, drivers may fail to see pedestrians on our narrow, winding streets. GMIA recommends that our members carry a flashlight and wear light/reflective clothing when strolling our streets. Dog owners, please consider a reflective collar or safety vest for your pet. ▲

TOUR from page 1

We are grateful to our five generous homeowners who will open their gardens and welcome you for a look at their unique outdoor sanctuaries. Thank you to Pete & Joan Camana, Jeff & Giana Crispell, Dr. Stephen & Barbara Barnes, Paul & Mary Russo, and Mary Ann Stepnowsky & Tom Clark. Our tour is organized by GMIA Directors Jeff Rule, Pat Ryan, Kay Bickley, and Sue Creveling. ▲

Our \$1,200 Nearly Deadly Mistake

by Susan & Larry Nichols

Not too long ago, we dug a hole for a new plant for our landscape. Unbeknownst to us, the line bringing gas to our property lurked like a landmine, buried just a foot below the surface. The proper depth for the gas line should have been 36". We'll never know if our shallow gas line was the result of shoddy construction when the house was built some 60 years ago, or a reflection of countless front yard improvements that changed the contour of our property. We had no idea of the line's location or shallow positioning.

Breaking our gas line with a shovel was an expensive and potentially deadly happening. Gas began to spew as we sprinted to call the SDG&E emergency number. Fortunately we also called 911. Within five minutes our local fire station responded; firefighters located the offsite gas main and used a special tool to shut it down. A crew from SDG&E arrived a while later, delayed because they responded from a more distant starting point. We are grateful that the fire department was speedy to respond.

Meanwhile, we evacuated our home as we waited for the gas to clear. The situation was made more dangerous because the pilot light for our hot water heater was located in our open adjacent garage. Our plumber was called to repair and relocate the gas line to a proper depth. We felt very lucky the house didn't blow to bits.

The unlucky part was the \$1,200 SDG&E charge for the emergency call and subsequent monitoring of the situation until it was resolved. We had no idea that as utility customers we were financially responsible for SDG&E's response to our emergency.

So we hope you benefit from our mistake, avoid an emergency crew in hazmat suits camped at your house, and a helicopter news crew circling your property waiting for it to blow up - this was our unwelcome fifteen minutes of fame on the 5:00pm local news. A simple phone call to DigAlert can save you time, money, and possibly your life. ▲

From this experience, we learned that when installing sprinklers, irrigation systems, ponds, fences, mailboxes or trees and shrubs, it is important to call DigAlert. As the website for this service states: "Buried utilities can exist just about anywhere on your property – hence the importance of checking with DigAlert before digging. You can prevent damage to underground utilities and avoid service interruptions simply by utilizing the online service DigAlert Express or call 811 (or 800-227-2600) two business days prior to starting your excavation. This is a 100% free service, and more importantly – it's the law."





FOCUS: Cleaning Up Casa de Oro

As GMIA noted in our last newsletter, Casa de Oro is our gateway on the region's southern boundary. In 2015, GMIA created a sub-committee to understand what our organization might be able to do to help this blighted area.

The good news is that a new pro-active entity, the Casa de Oro Community Alliance, has been organized to work on a myriad of problems that have been identified. Public drunkenness, graffiti, illegal drug dispensaries, and crime are some of the concerns addressed. The formation of the Casa de Oro Community Alliance is the result of a County grant to the Institute for Public Strategies which has helped residents, businesses, and like-minded organizations to come together to take action.

The important work of the Casa de Oro Community Alliance meshes well with a larger effort by Supervisor Dianne Jacob who recently initiated a quarterly meeting of Casa de Oro community stakeholders of which the Alliance, GMIA, your Valle de Oro Planning Board and many others are involved. At the first meeting, participants had an opportunity to have an open dialogue and ask for help from representatives of County agencies including Code Enforcement, the Department of Planning and Development Services, our local law enforcement officers, and others.

In addition to noting concerns, attendees also identified a vision to restore Casa de Oro to the family-friendly neighborhood it was in past decades. Three major elements were envisioned: a new, large

free-standing library, development of the long neglected Estrella Park, and creation of a youth oriented recreation facility.

GMIA thanks all who are working on a long-overdue improvement for this region. A special shout-out to GMIA member Bob Yarris who chairs the Casa de Oro Community Alliance to bring about positive change.

The Casa de Oro Community Alliance meets locally on the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 pm. All community members are invited to take part. For more information please contact Chair Bob Yarris at Jake318@cox.net or the CasadeOroCommunityAlliance@gmail.com. Find them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CasadeOroCommunityAlliance. ▲

Supervisor Approves \$125,000 for New Casa de Oro Library

Back in 2014, GMIA asked Supervisor Jacob to help revitalize Casa de Oro with a new library. The current strip mall location is heavily utilized and significantly undersized. Early in 2015, we received word that our request, with Supervisor Jacob's backing, was reviewed by the San Diego County Library administration who then recommended a new stand-alone, County-owned 15,000 square foot facility.

We are happy to report that in late December, Supervisor Jacob released \$125,000 in County funds to begin the process of acquisition of land for the new library site. This very exciting next step brings us closer to a much needed community asset. Thank you to Supervisor Jacob for supporting our neighborhood. ▲

Garden Tour Volunteers Needed

GMIA needs your help! Our popular Art & Garden Tour is May 1st, and volunteers are needed. Assist with day of the event registration, setup, parking logistics, and more. A two hour commitment is required. As a special incentive, volunteers are invited to attend our Pre-Event Tour and Reception the day before (April 30th) our public event. This private tour with garden-owners and artists is followed by a gathering hosted by our GMIA Board of Directors.

Please contact our GMIA Volunteer Coordinator Sue Creveling at Screv@yahoo.com.



Families and Pets Enjoy GMIA's 8th Annual Mt. Helix Walk

An enthusiastic crowd of families and their pets gathered on January 2nd at the fire station on Vivera for our 8th annual Walk to Welcome the New Year. This trek, behind our yellow GMIA banner, continues to be a favorite community event. At the top, the Jan McBride Jazz Duo filled the air with great music and GMIA provided delicious bakery items, fruit, and beverages.

Special thanks to:

- ◆ La Mesa Blvd. Starbucks for donating coffee.
- ◆ Cal Fire who parked their engine at the top and gave firefighter hats to the kids.
- ◆ The Mt. Helix Park Foundation for helpful volunteers and providing use of the amphitheater and parking lot.
- ◆ GMIA Director Mike Valley who generously gave away

“litter picker-uppers” to encourage walkers keep our community clean.

- ◆ GMIA Director Dagmar Miller who drove to the Alpine fire station to bring dozens of sandbags to the Walk.
- ◆ GMIA Member and photographer extraordinaire Bob Cederdahl for wonderful pics.
- ◆ All our GMIA Board members and volunteers who pitched in to make this event a success.

A great way to start the New Year, GMIA created this popular event to foster a spirit of community. Members appreciate the opportunity to greet the New Year, see old friends and meet new neighbors. We invite you to contact us at yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com if you have comments or would like to be involved with next year's celebration. Thanks for your participation!

Got Fruit? Invite Gleaners

Many of us on large lots have fruit trees laden with more produce than we can personally consume. Rather than sending it to landfill or feeding the local rodent population (ick!), GMIA encourages members to contact organizations that “glean” homeowners' gardens and donate the fruit to feed those in need.

Your extra backyard produce can make a big difference to the 1 in 5 people in San Diego County facing food insecurity.

Senior Gleaners is an all-volunteer organization headquartered in East County that distributes gleaned food to 40 food-giving agencies in the County. According to their website, “Only those with low incomes are eligible for this food. None of it is ever sold. Recipient groups include churches, food pantries, senior meal providers, a teen residence and residents in low income housing.” Last year they gleaned a very impressive 350,000 pounds of food. ▲



Looking for a volunteer opportunity? Volunteers, ages 55 and older, glean surplus food from fields, groves, backyards, stores and restaurants. Senior Gleaners is affiliated with the San Diego County Office of Aging and Independent Services.

To volunteer or donate, contact them at 619-633-9180 or visit their website at www.seniorgleanerssdco.org.

Is Your Front Yard a Winner?

Nominations are now open for the 2016 GMIA Curb Appeal Award. We invite you to nominate a front yard (your own or another member's) that shows pride of ownership. Any well maintained landscape is welcome, and drought tolerant designs are especially encouraged. GMIA recognizes members who maintain their properties and thus add beauty and value to our community. As more and more



residents remove thirsty front lawns, we especially encourage the installation of attractive low water alternatives.

Winners will be featured in our newsletter and recognized at our June 26th Annual Dinner. You can nominate a front yard in our area at www.gmia.net (click the Curb Appeal Award Nomination Form), or mail your completed form (below) to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943. ▲

GMIA Curb Appeal Award Nomination Form

Location (Address) _____

Homeowner's Name _____

Person nominating (optional) _____

Comments:

Please return to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943-2751. You may also go online to nominate at www.gmia.net

GMIA Supports Fuerte School PTO

To help strengthen GMIA's ties to younger families in our community, our organization partnered with Fuerte Elementary School. We presented a \$250 gift to the Fuerte PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization) to help fund their many programs that benefit children in our community.

This gift is part of our latest initiative to inform neighbors about the important benefits of joining GMIA. As a voice advocating for our region, there is strength in numbers!

Thanks to GMIA Directors Sue Creveling and Allison Henderson who chair our School Outreach sub-committee. ▲



(Left to right) GMIA Director Allison Henderson, Fuerte Principal Bryan Schultz. PTO President Heather Zimkin.

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 2016 or later, your dues are paid in full. Thank you! Annual membership is just \$18 (2 years - \$36; 3 years -\$54). You may renew online at our secure website www.gmia.net or mail your payment to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943-2751.



**June 26th Annual Dinner Meeting
You're Invited!**

Mark your calendar! Join us for an evening of food, friends, and information. GMIA's Annual Dinner Meeting at the beautiful Cuyamaca Water Conservation Garden is a great opportunity to get to know your neighbors and enjoy an evening under the stars. Supervisor Dianne Jacob will take questions and address issues of concern from our members.

CALENDAR

Sun., May 1st
Art & Garden
Tour

Sat., May 21st
Succulent
Swap

Sun., June 26
Annual
Dinner