



viewpoints

Winter 2010

Volume 40 Issue 3



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Upcoming Art & Garden Tour

Saturday
May 2nd
Noon to 4 pm

County Planning Commission Ignores Mt. Helix Community... *Chicken Ranch Update*

After being denied by the County Planning Commission, the applicant requested a delay and the Board of Supervisors remanded the project back to County staff to work with the community to resolve the problems with the project as defined by the Planning Group, GMIA, and the local community. On Friday, January 8th, approximately 32 neighbors and Mt. Helix residents attended the Planning Commission meeting and spoke against the revised project which was prepared unilaterally by the applicant and County staff.

In the new project, the number of units was decreased from 40 to 36; several lots were faced onto Damon Lane; the 16' high building pad at the southwest corner was lowered to 10'; but the sewer was still called out.

In the first Planning Commission hearing, the commissioners denied the project by a 5-2 vote. However, this time the testimony of the Planning Group, GMIA, and over 30 neighbors was ignored. Only commissioner Michael Beck understood the problems the community had with the project but he was outvoted 6-1. The only significant change the

Commission recommended was to add a design review designator as the developer would not commit to what the homes would look like.

Planning Group Chairman Jack Phillips and GMIA President Mark Schuppert both believe that this project represents an unconscionable attack on the planning for our Mt. Helix community. At the most basic level of planning integrity, it challenges the very basis of why community plans are created and whether the goals and policies of these plans are to be followed.

With its 700% increase in General Plan and zoning density and introduction of sewer to this non sewered area, only the developer will benefit while our community will have to struggle with the resulting traffic and community character impacts.

Now the project goes back to the Board of Supervisors and, according to staff, that hearing will not be held before March 24th. When the project has been docketed with the Board, we'll get the word out as to the date and time. ▲



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GROSSMONT - MT. HELIX



IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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Kay Bickley	Val O'Connor
Rosemary Hewicker	Jack Phillips
Dagmar Miller	Jeff Rule
Vern Neff	Mike Valley

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

Message from the President

The board members of GMIA have remained diligent in their efforts to enhance our neighborhood experiences and to preserve the character of our community. The GMIA-sponsored walk to the top of Mt. Helix in January encouraged everyone to start the year with a positive experience and allowed us to meet many of our neighbors that we would have otherwise never met. The walk was such a success that our next walk—in conjunction with a plant exchange—has already been planned for early spring. Please encourage your neighbors to attend this community event and to sign up as a member of GMIA, if they haven't signed up already. It is our strong membership that allows us to have such an effective community voice.

Our annual Garden Tour has been in the planning stages for awhile and is now taking shape and promises to be memorable. We have our annual dinner planned soon after the Garden Tour and we are securing speakers that will ensure the evening is enjoyable as well as insightful.

Board members have attended community forums on safety, water district meetings on upcoming rate changes, and planning commission hearings. We have also corresponded with local residents and GMIA members who have community concerns and we continue to contribute to the beneficial resolution of these concerns.

Thank you board members for your past and continued efforts in making GMIA effective and successful. Thanks and appreciation are also warranted to all our neighbors who care enough to be involved in our community through various groups and organizations like GMIA, and those who participate in their own way to help maintain the desirability of the Grossmont / Mt Helix community.

It is a great pleasure to be part of this organization and this community.

Mark Schuppert

Sheriff's Storefront Opens in Casa de Oro

December 21st marked the opening of the much anticipated sheriff's office in Casa de Oro. It is located at 9736 Campo Road (a few doors east of Starbucks) and will be staffed seven

days/week. A code enforcement officer is scheduled to be there on Mondays. To contact the office, call 619-464-5700. ▲

GMIA Annual Dinner – Go Green!

Go Green is the theme for this year's GMIA annual dinner. May 10 is the date, and the Abbey Catering Company will be catering our event again at the La Mesa Community Center. Check our website at www.gmia.net for updates and upcoming events. ▲





Trees of Mt. Helix

This is the third of 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.

Podocarpus gracilior

Fern Pine

The Fern Pine featured is located in the courtyard of a Cliff May designed home of GMIA members, Steve Hubbard and Janet Patzer. The tree was most likely planted when the house was built in 1939-1940. The property is located in the vicinity of Grandview Drive and Resmar Road and Steve and Janet have owned the property for around four years. What makes this shade tree special to the owners is that the canopy and its sculptural branching covers the entire courtyard. The owners have trimmed the tree to allow dapple light to shine through the courtyard below. The tree is set into a raised stone planter in the center of the courtyard. This specie of *Podocarpus* is native to east Africa and can grow 60' in height and 50' wide, but can easily be contained to an appropriate size by pruning. The tree has bluish green foliage with 1-2 inch long and narrow leaves.

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. ▲

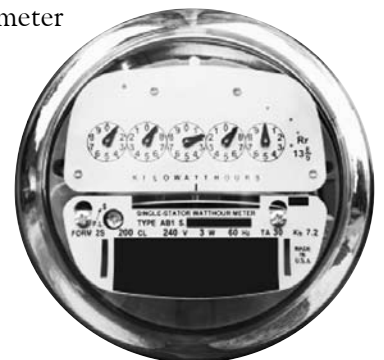


Solar Power Our Renewable Energy Source

If you're considering converting to photovoltaic cells for your electricity, learn all about it at the California Center for Sustainable Energy (CCSE.org). Their website is quite comprehensive and should provide answers to your questions. Cash incentives are also available for about 13% of the cost.

In addition to the cash incentive, a new program, scheduled to go into effect in a few months, will offer low-cost loans to residents that can be paid off over 20 years through your property tax bills. Even though SDG&E does not presently purchase any excess energy generated by your PV cells, they will be doing so in a year or two. This is definitely an added incentive.

Right now, any excess energy is credited to you (your meter runs backward) and, in the evening, you draw on that excess. If there is anything left over, it goes on the grid. ▲



Visit us at www.gmia.net

Helix Rate Increase Update

Your water bill should already reflect an approximate 23% increase (\$/unit) as of September 2009. Hopefully, your conservation efforts have led to less water use which would partially offset the increase to your total bill.

The cost of water to the District will increase again in 2011. With Kathleen Hedberg dissenting, the board voted to increase our rates as of September 2010, before the District is charged the increase and before the District even knows what the amount of their increase will be. The Water District contends that the "pre-payment plan" is in our best interest as the increase would be greater if they waited. The "sample" increase at the 11/09 hearing was stated at nearly 13% if charged in September 2010 and another compound increase of nearly 6% in September 2011. These amounts will likely change, but the dates of the increases have been set.

GMIA opposed the pre-payment plan at the hearing and doesn't believe this plan is in our best interest. Not only will we be charged increases before the District is charged, the increases will begin in August which is the hottest period with the highest water demand. The supposed 13% increase will effectively be much higher due to the punitive pricing tiers that we normally pay during the summer months. This seems to be a win/win for the District and a lose/lose for the rate payer.

Kathleen Hedberg and DeAna Verbeke are our elected representatives and want to know how you feel. Their email addresses are kchedberg@cox.net and verbeke@cox.net. ▲

Fuerte Drive and the Helix Water District Pipeline Project

We've received several inquiries about the poor paving repairs that were made at the western end of Fuerte Drive. The repairs have not been completed, but Tarbell Martin, a long-time resident of Mt. Helix and retired engineer for Caltrans, has been in contact with the Helix Water District and the County's Department of Public Works concerning the rough pavement. According to the Helix Water District engineer, only a slurry will go on top of the existing repairs. But according to Tarbell who has many years experience in related fields, the slurry will be like a coat of paint and will not adequately smooth the newly created substandard road surface.

Helix Water District and the County Public Works have been made aware of these concerns and are re-assessing their options as of the date of this publication. GMIA has contacted our representatives at the Helix Water District and they are also now involved.

As of press-time for this article, Helix Water District and the contractor have agreed to mill the top surface of the area in question and repave the street using a paving machine that will result in a uniformly smooth surface.

It is actively involved neighbors like Tarbell who contribute so much to maintaining the character of our community. Thank you Tarbell for your community involvement, and thank you Helix Water District for getting it right. ▲



Help the Bees!

Because we're in danger of losing our bee population, the Pollinator Partnership is urging gardeners to plant flowers, trees, and bushes to attract and sustain bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators. For more information regarding the types of plants needed, consult your Western Garden Book or go to www.pollinator.com. Remember, pollinators are necessary for the growth of three out of every four crop species. ▲

Nature's Effects

Those of us who live in the Mt. Helix area are surrounded by a bountiful supply of Mother Nature's greenery that we enjoy on a daily basis. Now a study done at the University of Rochester concluded that people coming in contact with nature become kinder, more generous and more community-minded than when they're in artificial, human-made surroundings. Past studies found that natural settings also tend to make people happier and healthier. Other studies found links between green surroundings and less violence, faster recovery from illness and better grades for students.

As residents of Mt. Helix we've known most of these things intuitively for quite some time and have defended and protected our way of life for 72 years. But it's still nice to know that defending our green oasis has produced real and lasting social benefits. ▲

Public Safety

The Casa de Oro Business Association sponsored a public safety meeting on September 16th, 2009 in the community library. The primary focus of the meeting was related to the business district of Casa de Oro, but much of the information is applicable to all of us.

MAIL THEFT

The regional Postal Inspector, Amy Spaag, cautioned everyone not to use the blue mailboxes for depositing mail. She said that even the boxes in front of the post office have been subject to theft and it would be prudent to use the drop-offs inside the post office instead. She also brought attention to advertised "free credit reports" that are not free. She said the only proven safe site to get free credit reports is FTC.gov.



USE "ABC" FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

The Fire Inspector for San Miguel, Natalie Grimes, reminded everyone to use "ABC" rated fire extinguishers in our homes and to aim at the base of the fire from an adequate distance. She also reminded us about the importance of having your extinguishers serviced, but be careful about phony servicing businesses that are out there.



SEATBELTS

Brian Pennings, Officer and regional spokesperson for the CHP, said that 95% of drivers are now wearing their seatbelts, but *nearly half of all traffic fatalities are within the remaining 5% who were not wearing seatbelts.* To emphasize the importance of seatbelts, he quoted studies that have shown that no person can survive an impact of only 35 mph into a stationary object. He also emphasized the dangers of using a cell phone while driving and noted the \$132 fine that is now applicable.



GRAFFITI

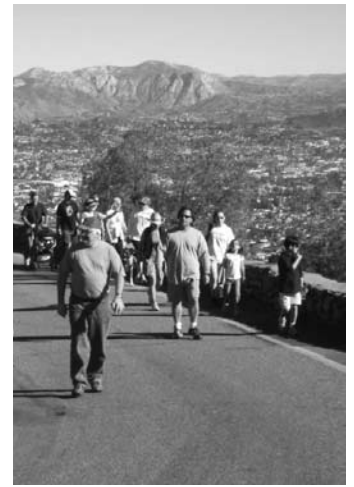
The Sheriff is now using "Graffiti Tracker" which allows for the identification of related crimes for which the "taggers" can be prosecuted. Digital photographs are loaded into a computer bank that can identify related graffiti made by the same person. When caught in the act at one crime, the tagger can now be prosecuted for multiple related crimes. You can send graffiti photographs to be included in the computer bank to victoriapaylor@sdsheriff.org. If you see graffiti in progress, call "Dispatch" at (858) 565-5200.



COLD OR FLU?

According to the February issue of "Consumer Reports", here's how to tell the difference:

SYMPTOMS	COMMON COLD	INFLUENZA
Fever	Uncommon; slight	Common; high (102°F to 104°F)
Headache	Uncommon	Common
Muscle aches	Slight	Common; often severe
Fatigue, weakness	Mild	Extreme; sudden onset; might last several weeks
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Less common
Sneezing	Common	Uncommon
Sore throat	Common	Less common
Cough	Sometimes; mild to moderate	Common; often severe



3rd Annual Mt. Helix Walk

Sunshine was in abundance for our 3rd annual GMIA Mt. Helix Walk on January 2nd, 2010. Perfect weather provided a glorious morning for over 150 neighbors to stroll from our local fire station on Vivera to the Mt. Helix Nature Park, a round trip of 1.3 miles.

Our annual Mt. Helix Walk is a wonderful way to welcome the New Year, relish the beauty of our neighborhood, and meet neighbors. At the amphitheater, dozens of well-behaved dogs communed as folks visited. We enjoyed steaming coffee donated by Starbucks and freshly baked muffins from Souplantation La Mesa. Board member Susan Nichols organized the walk, and Kay Bickley, Dagmar Miller, Jeff Rule, Mike Valley, Doug Coffey, Val O'Connor, Larry Nichols and Mark Schuppert all volunteered to ensure a great morning. Special thanks to talented pianist Aidan Miles who played throughout the event.

Thanks also to the Mt. Helix Park Foundation who co-sponsored our walk, to our Helix Water District board members who offered water conservation tips and updates, and to the San Miguel Fire Station for bringing their fire truck along with fire prevention information.

Check out more photos of the walk on our website, www.gmia.net, and also see photos and a video at www.LaMesaToday.com (click on the La Mesa blog).

Careful stewardship of our unique neighborhood remains GMIA's number one priority. This event reminds us how fortunate we are to live in our unincorporated area, where a true sense of community prevails. Please encourage your neighbors to join GMIA and support our mission of preserving the character and quality of our community. ▲





Spring Nature Walk & Plant Exchange Coming in March

Mark your calendars on March 13th for our Nature Walk and Plant Exchange. We are again fortunate to have the expertise of naturalist (and 4th grade teacher extraordinaire) Bruce Wolitz. Bruce will lead our walk at Damon Lane Park. Discover the beauty of our very own neighborhood sanctuary. Learn about birds, native plants, and our outdoor environment.

We'll meet at 9:00 a.m. at the park entrance just south of Fuerte Elementary School along Damon Lane. Please dress in layers and wear appropriate footwear for "off-roading" on the park's unpaved trails. Children are welcome, but please leave your dogs at home as they will hinder our ability to interact with birds and other shy creatures. Some loaner binoculars may be available, but we encourage you to bring your own binoculars to enrich your experience. The Nature Walk will last about one hour.

Following the Nature Walk, at approximately 10:00 a.m. GMIA will host our first ever Plant Exchange in the parking lot at Fuerte Elementary School. Here's how it works: bring your cuttings or plants to the parking lot, meet neighbors, trade plants, get or give advice, and enjoy a morning of gardening camaraderie. What a great way to beautify our neighborhood without expense!

Need pots to put your plants in? GMIA boardmember Dagmar Miller can supply empty planting pots. If you are unable to dig out plants or need a little extra help, Dagmar will come by to help. Just give her a call at 619-579-1844 or email her at DagmarEMiller@yahoo.com.

See you in the Spring!

Self-Help Contact List for the Unincorporated County

Animal Control..... 619-236-4250

Hazardous Waste Recycling..... 877-713-2784

Abandoned Vehicles..... 619-401-2000

California Highway Patrol..... 858-637-3800

Code Enforcement Hotline 858-694-2705

Code Enforcement 858-694-3741

Dead Animal Pick Up..... 888-299-9905

Dig Alert 800-227-2600

Locate gas lines, electrical wiring, water pipes and phone lines before you dig. Call at least two days before you dig.

Grading Enforcement..... 858-694-3034

Environmental Health Code

Enforcement..... 619-338-2222

Graffiti Removal on Roadways ... 858-467-4042

Graffiti/County Property 858-874-4040

Dept. of Public Works

Junk & Debris..... 858-495-5143

Dept. of Public Works

Lemon Grove Sheriff's Station... 858-337-2000

Noise Enforcement 858-694-3741

Road Maintenance - Potholes.... 858-565-5262

Dept. of Public Works

San Diego Sheriff's Dept..... 858-565-5200

Non-Emergency

San Miguel Fire District 619-670-0500

Business & Administration

**Vector Control – Rodents, 858-694-2888
Flies, Mosquitoes, etc.**

Health Services Dept.

For those living in the city of La Mesa or city of El Cajon, please contact your city's offices.



About GMIA ...and What We Do

The Grossmont- Mt. Helix Improvement Association (GMIA) is one of the oldest and largest associations of its type in San Diego County. It was formed in 1938 as a result of community concern for the lack of adequate land use planning and zoning type requirements. It is a non-profit public benefit corporation that represents thousands of families residing in the large unincorporated area of the County that is east of Bancroft Drive, south of El Cajon, generally north of SR94 and Rancho San Diego, and west of SR54/Jamacha Rd. The GMIA area contains over 7,000 single-family residences with a population approximating 20,000 people.

The primary mission of GMIA is to work on behalf of all GMIA community members to ensure that the quality and character of our community is preserved and enhanced. Unlike a typical "homeowners associa-

tion," GMIA does not own any property or facilities, nor is it responsible for any property maintenance. GMIA is served by an elected, unpaid Board of Directors and has no paid officers or employees. The GMIA Board works with County and regional governmental entities to help resolve issues that impact our community such as transportation systems, traffic control, planning and land use, zoning, code enforcement, as well as crime prevention and law enforcement.

GMIA invites and encourages all residents in our membership area to become active members and to support the efforts of the GMIA Board to preserve and enhance the character and lifestyle that are currently enjoyed in our wonderful community.

For more information on GMIA, please visit our website at www.GMIA.net ■