



# viewpoints

Fall 2011

Volume 42 Issue 1



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## Water Rates Revisited

Your GMIA board continues to be concerned about our water rates. While we recognize that 40% of the budget for our water supply is the cost of water itself (which is beyond the control of our local district), there may be other "operational" costs that could be better managed if the entire Board at Helix Water District was so inclined. Your GMIA board notes with interest that Helix Water District employees, according to its own website, enjoy a very generous benefits package. For every dollar in wages, employees receive approximately \$.070 in benefits.

Faced with these lean economic times, many private companies and public agencies strive to pare expenses. With this in mind, our question is: Should we (the customer) be burdened with rate increases while our water district employees enjoy benefits that are generally greater than the benefits of most rate payers?

Fair practices and compensation are very much in the news at this time. According to a recent article in the San Diego Union Tribune (October 6, 2011), a new bill signed into law this month expands the authority of the state auditor's office to examine the finances of local governments which appear "at high risk" for fraud, waste or mismanagement. Water district agencies are among those under review. The Union Tribune has called for an investigation of the Otay Water District, whose board voted to give lifetime retiree health benefits to more than 100 management and union employees along with their spouses and dependents. Our local representative Senator Joel Anderson (R-El Cajon) is on the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. ▲

## Single Family Zoning Update

Our Summer Viewpoints included an article concerning proposed changes to the single-family zoning ordinance which could result in attached units allowed within traditional detached neighborhoods, including the Grossmont/Mt Helix community. The ordinance was passed as proposed; however, a letter was sent by Eric Gibson, Director of the Department of Planning and Land Use to Supervisor Jacob which states that the county has determined that the allowance of attached units "would not be practicable in the Mount Helix area of the unincorporated County and therefore would not impact the Mt. Helix community." GMIA appreciates the Supervisor's efforts to help protect the character of our community. We hope this letter will serve as insurance to clarify the intent of the new ordinance should there ever be attached units proposed in our single-family community. A copy of the letter is available for review at our website, [www.gmia.net](http://www.gmia.net). ▲

2012

## ART & GARDEN TOUR

Sunday, April 15

Noon – 4:00 p.m.

Visit four beautiful  
private gardens in  
our community.  
Complimentary  
admission for GMIA  
members. ▲

GROSSMONT - MT. HELIX

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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**

## Message from the President

**D**o great work, have a lot of fun, and lend a hand along the way: that sums up our GMIA board activities.

For 73 years, GMIA has considered issues that face our community. Often, the same issues come up again and again; vigilant stewardship remains critical. To fulfill our mission we inform our members, create solutions, and take action.

As volunteers, we know that without action, there is no commitment – merely good intentions. We hope our service inspires you to take action to help preserve and enhance our unique region.

Opportunities are many. The simple acts of renewing your GMIA membership or passing our newsletter on to a neighbor are two easy ways to help. Participating in local community events or sharing your talent and time by serving on a committee are other ways to be involved. We, your GMIA board, aspire to lead by example. We invite you to get involved, because each of us can do our part, at any level, to keep our Grossmont-Mt. Helix area so special.

## Thank You Donors

GMIA wishes to thank the following members who have donated \$25 or more during the last quarter to support our organization and its programs.

Gene & Linda Brouillette	Fletcher & Marcy Thorton	Jack & Kathleen Saucier
Rey & Molly Nocon	Paul Wells	Leo & Beverly Papas
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Jim & Geri Bollman	Dayle Fischer & Susan Dieter	Charles & Beverly Little
James & Jessie Reston	William & Judith Friedel	Jean Gastelum

## Calling All Writers

**P**roducing this newsletter packed with local, informative articles for our members is a big part of our GMIA focus. Your all-volunteer board pitches in to make sure we deliver up-to-date commentary and truly local information. We know our newsletter fulfills a vital role supplying information you can use—at a time when commercial news sources are winding down their reporting and content.

If you enjoy writing and would like to lend a hand, we welcome your participation in our Communication Committee. The committee, with editorial oversight by the GMIA Board President, produces this quarterly newsletter. To unleash your “inner author” and help our neighborhood, contact the editor, Susan Nichols, at 619-440-1607 or email her at [lsnnichols@cox.net](mailto:lsnnichols@cox.net). ▲

## Come One, Come All For the New Year Walk up the Hill

**B**ring your friends and neighbors—everyone in the community is invited to join us! Welcome the New Year with our 5th Annual Walk Up Mt. Helix on Saturday, January 7th at 10:00 am.

We'll meet at the Fire Station at 10105 Vivera Drive and stroll together to the Mt. Helix summit, approximately 1.3 miles round trip. Enjoy entertainment and light refreshments at the top. Meet your neighbors, relish the beauty of our community, and welcome the New Year! As always, well behaved children and dogs are welcome.

If you would like to lend a hand, your all-volunteer GMIA board would be glad to have your help. We are a friendly group and appreciate any level of commitment to help with things like, set up, publicity, gathering supplies, and securing local entertainment. To join the Mt. Helix Walk committee, contact Susan Nichols at (619) 440-1607 or email her at [Lsnnichols@cox.net](mailto:Lsnnichols@cox.net). ▲

## Charge for Garden Tour? Please Give us Your Opinion

**O**ver the course of the last couple of years, your GMIA board has considered this question: At our popular Art & Garden Tour, should we continue to provide complimentary admission for our members but add a small (\$5) charge for nonmembers? We need your input about this decision.

Here is some background to help you come to a conclusion. Complimentary admission to our Art & Garden Tour has always been a benefit of our low-cost \$18 annual membership fee. However, it has been our policy not to screen guests at the event nor require a ticket. We know that some folks come from outside our GMIA boundaries while others reside here but choose not to pay and join. Should these guests continue to be included but contribute a modest admission fee? Funds collected could help defray costs for the event (printing, insurance, supplies) or be donated to support nonprofits who serve our community. Or, should we continue our current policy, opening our participating gardens to all as a free service to the community at large?

Help!!! Since the board would prefer to make this decision with broader input from our membership, we need to hear from you. For members who have provided GMIA with your contact information, please respond to our very brief (3 minute) email survey asking for your opinion. Other members may let us know your thoughts via email at [yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com). ▲



## Backyard Chickens Seminar a Success

**C**ommunity members responded with enthusiasm to our first-time seminar and tour about backyard chickens. We met at the Casa de Oro library for an informative class led by our aptly named “chicken whisperer” GMIA Director Don Newcom. Don relayed a bounty of information about chicken breeds, chicken health, chicken behavior – in short, everything needed to get started. Details about chicken coop construction were provided by GMIA Director Larry Nichols. Following the class was a self-guided tour for participants to view a variety of different style chicken coop installations. Thanks so much to chicken fanciers Brian & Jora Vess, Diane Bernal, Don & Paulette Newcom, and Larry & Susan Nichols who generously shared their time and venues for our tour.

GMIA recognizes we couldn't have offered this class without the expertise of Don Newcom, who shared his 40+ years of raising chickens. Great job, Don! We hope to offer this popular class again, and will let our members know via this newsletter and email when we schedule another session. This class reminds us that our semi-rural life style enables us to enjoy the pleasure of keeping a variety of animals. ▲





## No-Cost Family Caregiver Support Program

When folks move in to our beautiful Grossmont-Mt. Helix community, they tend to stay. This provides the benefit of a stable network of friends and neighbors. We know that when long-term residents age in their homes, sometimes their families may need extra help. GMIA would like to pass on this valuable information for those who provide care to older family members, as well as grandparents raising grandchildren.

If you regularly aid an older relative maintain his or her quality of life, you are a caregiver. You help your loved one and the San Diego County Family Caregiver Support Program can help you. The Family Caregiver Support Program offers a seamless system of home and community-based caregiver support services. There are no charges for most services. Provider agencies offer opportunities for voluntary contributions.

### WHO IS SERVED

- ◆ Adult family caregivers of individuals, age 60 and older, in San Diego County.
- ◆ Grandparent caregivers of minors, where the minor is a relative of the caregiver, and resides with the caregiver, in San Diego County.

### SERVICES PROVIDED

- ◆ Assistance to caregivers through contracted providers
- ◆ Comprehensive assessment
- ◆ Care management
- ◆ Professionally administered support groups and counseling
- ◆ Caregiver skills training
- ◆ Respite care
- ◆ Legal services
- ◆ Minor Home Modification (grab bars, safety checks, etc)
- ◆ Grandparent caregiver support
- ◆ Outreach and education

### HOW DO PEOPLE APPLY?

- ◆ For general information, contact the AIS Call Center 800-510-2020.
- ◆ For respite, assessment, counseling and support groups, caregivers should call Southern Caregiver Resource Center at 800-827-1008.
- ◆ Caregivers seeking legal assistance can contact Elder Law & Advocacy at 858-565-1392.
- ◆ Grandparents who are caring for grandchildren should call the the YMCA Kinship Program at 619-543-9850 x116.
- ◆ For Respite services provided by volunteers trained as Intergenerational Teams, caregivers should call Legacy Corps at 619-615-0701.
- ◆ For minor home modifications in Central, South, and East areas of the County, caregivers should call JFS Fix-it at 858-637-3040.

To find email contact information for these and other services, go to [www.sdcounty.ca.gov](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov) and type in Area Agency Aging and Independent Services. ▲



## Vineyards of Mt. Helix/Grossmont

by Kay Bickley & Susan Nichols

A mutual interest in growing grapes for wine brought together neighbors Anne & Jim Wermers, Janet & Vic Ryder, Stephanie & Bill Altonan, and Dawn & Jeff Silva. These GMIA members met at our Art & Garden Tour in May. At our subsequent GMIA Annual Meeting featuring wine tasting, plans were made to launch a local wine growers group. Their idea fermented and after many hours of discussion (accompanied by many glasses of wine), the group has tentatively selected the name "Mt. Helix Wine Growers Association". They now meet every two months to discuss their backyard "micro" vineyards.

Growers Jeff and Dawn Silva, whose home was featured in our Art & Garden Tour, currently have 20 vines and would like to increase their vines to 60. Some type of Italian varietal—Sangiovese and maybe Nebbiolo are their preference. Wine has been a part of their live for years; Jeff is classically trained in French cooking. They started their vineyard from scratch but have been surprised by the slow growth to date. They hope to see grapes in three years. Because of this experience, they recommend starting with two year old, disease resistant vine stock for faster results.

Members of the Mt. Helix Wine Growers Association have found the Maness Winery ([manessvinyards.com](http://manessvinyards.com), 619-251-1891) in Jamul very helpful as a source of grape stock and information. When the Association has enough grapes, Maness has offered their facility for crushing. Of course, crushing by foot is an option and may be a fun thing to do.

The group credits member Vic Ryder for serving as their driving force and having the vision to put this idea into action. Vic would like to see 1,000 vines in the area growing in many different yards. The Mt. Helix Wine Growers Association is looking for others in the Mt. Helix-Grossmont area who have vines on their property or who want to grow grapes. They hope to expand the group and make this a community effort to produce wine. Everyone plants the kind of grapes they want—there are no rules. If you are interested in joining or would like more information, contact Dawn or Jeff Silva at [dnjsilva@cox.net](mailto:dnjsilva@cox.net) or Vic Ryder at [vryder@cox.net](mailto:vryder@cox.net) ▲

## In and Around Our Mt. Helix Neighborhoods

### Pothole Hotline

Help our community with a simple phone call. If you notice potholes on county maintained roads, please take a moment to report them to the Pothole Hotline at 1-877-684-8000 or via email at [www.sdcdpw.org](http://www.sdcdpw.org) (roads service request). In our unincorporated area, roads are maintained by the San Diego County Department of Public Works. The DPW is responsible for ensuring our roads are safe and passable. For emergency road service after hours or on a weekend or holiday, call the San Diego County Sheriff Dispatcher at 858-565-5262. ▲

### Tune-In for Info

For the late-breaking information, you can monitor live audio police communication through your computer. The website [www.radioreference.com](http://www.radioreference.com) broadcasts law enforcement scanner communication. To hear live communication in our neighborhood, go to their website and select San Diego from the United States map. Then select the specific region (San Diego County Sheriff and Law South, CHP) to hear what's going on in our area. ▲

## 2012 ART & GARDEN TOUR

Sunday, April 15

Noon – 4:00 p.m.

Plan now to include the 2012 Art & Garden Tour in your calendar.

Visit four beautiful private gardens in our community. Complimentary admission for GMIA members. ▲



— WATER-WISE GROSSMONT-MT. HELIX HOMEOWNER —

## Well, Well, Well – the Scoop on Digging a Residential Well

An interview with Kathleen Hedberg by GMIA Director Allison Henderson

**W**ith the escalating price of water, GMIA has heard that many homeowners are considering digging a well in their backyard. Kathleen Hedberg, one of two board members of the Helix Water District (HWD) representing Mt Helix, agreed to answer some questions regarding the pertinent details of drilling for water. Please see the report prepared by HWD on our website for more detail.

**Q: How many wells are there in our area?**

**A:** County records show that there are about 170 wells that exist in our district. Some of those wells are abandoned. There are about 149 active wells in the HWD area with about 35 wells in the Mt Helix neighborhood. The majority of the wells are in the Granite Hills area.

**Q: How deep are the wells?**

**A:** In the lower areas, for example around Fuerte Elementary School, there are shallower wells, around 200 feet deep. Obviously, on Mt. Helix, wells are going to be deeper, around 1000 ft. deep or more.

**Q: Who actually owns the water?**

**A:** For most homeowners, if you own the property, you own the water.

**Q: Is drilling a well cost effective?**

**A:** As you know, water rates from HWD have increased about 40% over the last few years. Our recent 5 year budget projections indicate significant future water rate increases if cuts by the board aren't made. Next year alone, HWD projects a 9% increase, which is not yet board approved but will be discussed at the next budget meeting, possibly May or June. Drilling is expensive but it's an investment in the property by having a private, dependable water supply for irrigation

**Q: What is the water quality of the groundwater?**

**A:** The water quality should be fine for irrigation. Quality is measured in total dissolved solids (TDS). Higher TDS is to be expected, around 1000ppm. Most plants tolerate this. There are county regulations regarding setbacks from septic systems that also have to be considered when evaluating the site.

**Q: What about the dependability of the groundwater supply? I've heard that Borrego has issues with this.**

**A:** A drilling company would help evaluate the yield and system based on the homeowner's specific property and irrigation schedule. They also give guidance on storage tanks, hydro-pneumatic tanks and power supply needed.

**Q: Are permits necessary?**

**A:** Yes, the County of San Diego Environmental Health Department issues the initial permit which costs about \$535. A 1" back flow device is required by HWD which costs roughly \$800-1200 to install depending on the site. This device needs to be re-certified annually by a back flow tester and there is a charge for this, currently \$75. The back flow device is imperative to ensure that the private well doesn't send water back into HWD's system.

**Q: What do you really think about private wells?**

**A:** I wholeheartedly support alternative supplies for irrigation. I encourage rainwater collection, grey water recycling, drilling wells. Using local groundwater should be cheaper than importing water from Colorado or Northern California. It is also a rechargeable resource in that not all irrigation is taken up by plants and that excess leaches back into the water table.

*Kathleen Hedberg has served as an elected director for the Helix Water District since 2006. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from Cal Poly and a Master's of Public Health from SDSU. Often a lone vote against rate increases, this 10 year resident of our Grossmont-Mt. Helix community believes that adjusting expenses in the Helix Water District budget will help stop or slow down increases. If you would like more information, Ms. Hedberg is available by email at kchedburg@cox.net to answer questions you may have. ▲*



## Interview with Joe Fain, Fain Drilling, Inc.

Joe Fain, of Fain Drilling, Inc, says that he's drilled hundreds of wells ranging from 55 ft to over 2000 ft in San Diego County. According to Mr. Fain, the cost of an average well, about 400 feet deep, with state of the art equipment would run roughly \$15-20,000. There are a couple of reasons to drill wells. Some homeowners want to be off the grid and be self sustaining. Others are more interested in protecting their investment in landscaping and want a dependable supply of water. During the most recent power outage, we were all warned to limit water consumption to household use only. Irrigation systems were to be turned off. Mr. Fain says that, in San Diego County where there are hundreds of millions of dollars worth of landscaping, drilling a well is a long term investment. He has one client who has a 1500 ft. well for which payback is anticipated somewhere in the 5-8 year range. Almost half of his work these days comes from smaller parcels where the monthly water bills are averaging \$500-600/month. Some are even installing reverse osmosis systems such that the water is "bottled water" quality.

Groundwater is a renewable resource and, while worries about a pump running dry will always persist, Mr. Fain notes that overpumping hasn't yet been a problem in the County. Mr. Fain says to be careful about drillers who claim they have technology that can guarantee success. Even though instrumentation has improved, there is no computer model or perfect technology out there that can eliminate the uncertainty. After decades in the business, he says that knowing where to drill is still a "qualified guess". That said, after having drilled hundreds of wells, he's pretty sure he knows where all of the aquifers are in San Diego County. ▲



## Trees of Mt. Helix

*Sapium sebiferum – Chinese Tallow Tree*

by Jeff Rule

**T**his is the seventh 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.

The Chinese Tallow tree featured is located in the front yard of GMIA members, Jeffrey and Claire Rule. The tree was planted from a 5 gallon container in 2001. The Rules have lived in the Horizon Hills neighborhood for over the past 10 years. What makes this Chinese Tallow tree special to the homeowners is its light airy structure, aspen shaped leaves, and brilliant fall color. The leaves flutter in the slightest breeze. The Chinese Tallow tree is deciduous and can grow to 30' to 40' feet tall wide by 25' wide. They have a moderate to fast growth rate and take regular watering.

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. ▲

GMIA is a 70+ 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.

## Receive This Newsletter by Email

Your GMIA board continues our efforts to go green by delivering this newsletter by email. If you would like to receive Viewpoints via the internet in lieu of postal mail, please let us know at [yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com). We ask you to be patient as we continue to work out the logistics of converting from postal mail for those who wish email only. If you would like to help us improve our email communication, please contact Allison Henderson, chair of our Communications Committee at (619) 593-0443.

## GMIA Email for Event Updates

In addition to our newsletter, GMIA occasionally emails our members with event reminders and notice of current issues of interest. If you would like to receive these notices, please contact us at [yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com](mailto:yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com). We promise never to sell or give your contact information to anyone, and we will not "spam" you. ▲

## Time to Renew

Please check your mailing label on this newsletter for the renewal date of your membership. Memberships renew annually on July 1st, so it is time for many to update their dues.

Annual membership dues are just \$18. Please help preserve and enhance the character and quality of our region, plus enjoy these benefits:

- ◆ Complimentary admission to our Art & Garden Tour
- ◆ Subscription to the informative Viewpoints, our quarterly newsletter
- ◆ Invitations to our Annual Meeting, Neighborhood Walks and other events

When neighbors come together as a community, we can influence the proceedings of government, developers, and other external forces that affect the quality of our lives. That's why your membership in GMIA makes a difference. Please renew today and encourage your neighbors to join. ▲