



viewpoints

Winter 2013

Volume 43 Issue 2



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Art & Garden Tour Volunteers Needed

Your GMIA Board is gearing up for our next Art & Garden Tour, our biggest event of the year. Always very popular with our members, around 400 visitors typically attend to view the featured gardens. To make sure the day runs smoothly, we ask for help from you, our members, as volunteers. On the day of the event, volunteers help with check-in, parking, and garden monitoring. As a special thank you, our volunteers are invited to a private "Owners and Artists Pre-Event Tour and Reception" held the day before our public event.

This year's Art & Garden Tour date is May 5th, from 12:00-4:00pm. If you would like to help GMIA (and meet a lot of neighbors in the process!), please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Sue Creveling at 619-447-2071 or email her at screv@yahoo.com. ▲



Sales Tax Alert for Grossmont-Mt. Helix Residents

How many people from our area have been overcharged on major purchases and didn't even realize it? GMIA member Bob Perry wants you to know that residents who live in our unincorporated areas but have La Mesa or El Cajon zip codes are at risk of overpaying sales tax on DMV purchases such as cars, boats, motorcycles and planes. Bob had this happen twice, most recently in November. He bought a new car and was charged 8.75% since it appeared he lived in the city of El Cajon because of his 92020 zip code. He should have been charged a lower rate, a difference of hundreds of dollars.

In Bob's case, although the dealer said he could not override his computer program, a refund is available. Officials with the California Board of Equalization, which collects sales tax, say those who have overpaid should talk to the retailer. If they don't get their money back, they can request a refund form. Those who live in the unincorporated areas of San Diego should rightfully pay the 8% sales tax rate on those expensive items no matter where they buy them in California.

Regarding overcharging, Board of Equalization spokeswoman Anita Gore has said "It happens when there is an overlap in ZIP codes and confusion otherwise about which tax rate should have been charged. But it's not very common." We disagree—GMIA believes this mistake may be very common here in our community, and encourages you to be aware.

Thank you to Bob Perry, GMIA member, for taking the time to let us know about this potentially costly tax issue. ▲

Sales tax for
the city of
La Mesa is
8.75%. El
Cajon is 9%.

For those of
us who reside
in the unin-
corporated
areas, sales
tax is 8%.

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

Message from the President

Where we live has a real impact on our culture, way of life, and one another. Every day, our physical environment shapes our actions. Here in our unique semi-rural community, we are greatly influenced by our strong link with nature. Abundant birds and other wildlife, lush gardens, verdant natural landscapes, and walkable neighborhoods: these hallmarks of our neighborhood are irreplaceable.



When we adopt behaviors and habits to sustain the existence of these outstanding community features, we help ensure our continued way of life, for ourselves and for future generations. GMIA has long been an advocate for safeguarding our region's natural environment. We know that one important way we can help to do so is to practice water and energy conservation. Conservation is a vital concept we embrace.

In this edition of Viewpoints you will find two articles that exemplify our commitment to water and energy conservation.

- ◆ Our regularly featured column "The Water Wise Grossmont-Mt. Helix Homeowner" provides methods for members to utilize water resources more efficiently. This month we highlight a new rebate available to homeowners for turf replacement. (To find previous articles about reducing water usage, check out past issues of our newsletter available online at our website www.gmia.net.)
- ◆ Along with water conservation, managing energy consumption will also help our community. Herein you will also find an article describing an event at Fuerte Elementary School hosted by the Center for Sustainable Energy, a nonprofit agency dedicated to helping homeowners learn about home energy upgrades and the rebates available to do so.

I hope you will consider both of these avenues and take action to better our community by improving your own home. As the popular expression states, "think globally, act locally" and what could be more local than your own residence.

Founded in 1938, GMIA exists because 75 years ago, people of vision recognized a need to preserve and enhance the neighborhood they enjoyed. Today, every one of us can help to safeguard our way of life. In addition to our own benefit, imagine the year 2085 (the next 75 years), when a homeowner on your street will look back to this era and thank GMIA for our efforts. ▲

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: Donald & Maxine Asbury, Arthur & Suzanne Raybold, Kenneth Bullock, William & Adele Woolman, and David & Myra Zimmerman. Our apologies to members Fletcher & Marcy Thornton whose names were listed incorrectly in our last issue. ▲

Mail Theft on Mt. Helix

By Allison Henderson

So there I was, exiting my driveway as on any typical car-pool day when I almost literally bumped into mail thieves. I didn't know it at the time. I thought these two youngish females with the purple, pink and blonde hair in a beat up old Honda Civic might be the new neighbors grabbing their mail. I drove up the hill across Fuerte to pick up another kid and while we were loading gear, I saw the same car across the street, with the passenger leaning out of the window opening up a neighbor's mailbox. I pointed at them and yelled. I told the kids to hold on because I was going to chase them and get their license plate number.

Now what happened next is something the Deputy Sheriff later told me was incredibly stupid. I know and I agree: I chased them down Avocado to the 94 and off onto Bancroft in Spring Valley. I finally could see their license plate number at that point and broke off the chase. Why my action was stupid: 1) they knew I was chasing them and though I was not speeding, they definitely were; 2) their speed could have caused a crash and hurt innocent bystanders; 3) they ran all the red lights on Avocado on their way to the 94; 4) they could have been armed ... enough said.

What I should have done and what we all should do when confronting mail theft: Report Every Instance!

There is a US Postal Inspection Service call center that handles all mail theft complaints. No need to go to the post office because the USPS will simply direct you to their postal inspectors. The appropriate number is 1-877-876-2455. They have regular business hours and will take down the information. You will receive a reference number and they "will contact you if warranted." You can also go to their website and fill out the same complaint form

<https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/24/365>.

It does help if you saw the mail theft personally. You can only call on theft from your own mailbox when you witnessed a theft as I did. One of the kids in my car had dialed 911 as we were pursuing the thieves so I also met with a Deputy later that morning.

The end result of my adventure with mail thieves? The license plate number led the Sheriff Department to a false address so the perpetrators were not caught. I may have chased them out of the neighborhood that day but I might also have angered what could be meth addicts with no sense of right and wrong and with a penchant for retaliation. The moral of my story: Dialing a 1-800 number from the relative safety and anonymity of your kitchen table is probably the saner way to respond to mail theft. ▲



MAIL THEFT WEBSITES

The official United States Post Office website is: usps.gov. To learn about and/or report any mail crime, go to: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/>. Postal inspectors have a great website with detailed alerts on a variety of schemes and fraud. There you can find secure links to information on bogus e-mails concerning fake package deliveries, mail theft and fraud, mailbox vandalism, identity theft and, of course, the infamous Wanted posters.

Mini-Improvement Project

Many drivers entering our neighborhood do so at the Fuerte/Grossmont intersection. At that intersection is a traffic island with a wood and stone monument sign identifying our community. Close to a decade ago, a helpful Eagle Scout project improved the island by clearing weeds and installing artificial turf. At the same time, a low planter bowl with a (then) small agave plant was placed on the stone wall. Over the years the little agave has proven to be a hardy, drought tolerant grower and is now enormous. Because of the plant's nearly 4 ft. height, drivers can no longer read the "Grossmont Mt. Helix" inscription. GMIA has received permission from the Department of Public Works to replace the agave with a suitable smaller scale succulent and maintain the traffic island. That new planting will be in soon. ▲

How is Your Home Performing?

Many of us are vigilant about scheduling doctor appointments for our family and performing check-ups on our cars. But what about our homes? Your home is likely your biggest investment and it directly impacts the well-being of your family. Is it providing the comfortable, healthy and safe environment you want it to? Is it running cost-effectively?

In fact, your home may be “low performing” if you notice symptoms such as:

- ◆ Rooms that are too cold or too warm
- ◆ Poor indoor air quality – from dust, mold or household chemicals – which may aggravate allergies or asthma symptoms
- ◆ Natural gas appliances in poor condition – potentially generating carbon monoxide or gas leaks
- ◆ High energy bills, especially during winter or summer

The good news is that upgrades such as adding insulation, sealing air leaks and upgrading heating and cooling systems can significantly improve your family's quality of life while reducing energy bills.

So how do you know what upgrades your home needs? Experts at the non-profit California Center for Sustainable Energy say, “Test, don't guess!” In other words, get a home energy assessment from a contractor certified by the Building Performance Institute (BPI). The contractor will run diagnostic tests to generate a list of recommended upgrades customized to your home. And if he or she is participating in the statewide Energy Upgrade California™ program, you'll be eligible for a rebate between \$1,000 and \$4,500 to offset the cost of your upgrades.

In Mt. Helix, homeowners will have a unique opportunity to learn more about home energy upgrades. The California Center for Sustainable Energy and a few Energy Upgrade California participating contractors will be at Fuerte Elementary School (11625 Fuerte Dr.) on Wednesday, January 30, from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Join your neighbors at this exciting event and get the resources you need to make your home a high-performance home!

More information is available at www.energycenter.org/helix2013. ▲



GMIA Celebrates the New Year

By Sue Creveling

January 5th was the date of our annual Walk Up Mt Helix to Welcome the New Year. The weather couldn't have been better with clear blue skies and the “just right” temperature for enjoying the event. Neighbors, many with dogs on leashes, strolled from the Vivera fire station to the Mt Helix summit. The amphitheater was set up by your GMIA Board Members with pastries, fruit, and even sweet tangerines from Board Member Tom Huffman's tree. Thanks to our local La Mesa Starbucks who generously donated a giant urn of fresh brewed coffee. Neighbors were able to mingle, enjoy the view, the refreshments, and the wonderful jazz music provided by pianist Jan Conner and bass player Jeff Blanco.

The GMIA Board would like to thank the Mt. Helix Park Foundation for partnering with us to provide usage of the lovely park and help with set up and clean up. Thanks also to firefighters from our local station 21 who brought their fire truck, the California Center for Sustainable Energy who had a display about many energy issues, and to DeAna Verbeke of the Helix Water District. She shared information about the Water District, the Water Conservation Garden and rebates.

Once again, the walk reminded us that we live in an awesome community that we can all take pride in being a part of. What a great event to welcome 2013! ▲



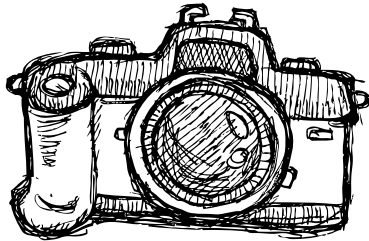
MT. HELIX WALK

Photos by Allison Henderson and Patricia Ryan





Will you be a "friend" of GMIA? If you are a Facebook user, please "friend" GMIA. GMIA has recently published its own Facebook page. Let's be friends! ▲



Photography Committee Launch

Our newly formed Photography Committee was busy snapping photos at our Mt. Helix Walk. They plan to exhibit their photos documenting our unique community at our Art & Garden Tour on May 5th. If you enjoy the art of photography we welcome you to be a part of this informal group. For more info contact GMIA Board Member Allison Henderson at yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com. ▲



Stop by and say "Hi" to us at the Farmers' Market. On the first Saturday of February and March, your GMIA board will host a booth at the market in order to meet new prospective members and share information about what's going on in our neighborhood. ▲

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.

Volunteer Opportunities for GMIA Members

by Pat Ryan

GMIA has a variety of committees at work throughout the year to plan events, increase membership, and communicate with members through our newsletter and the internet. We keep an eye on county planning and land use issues involving our area and also work to initiate improvement projects to benefit the community.

We are all volunteers (no paid staff) and appreciate any help our members can provide. Check out our list of committees to see where you can lend a hand:

- ◆ **GARDEN TOUR** (May 5th): Parking, check-in, set-up, garden monitoring, signage (day of event)
- ◆ **COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE:** GMIA website management, write articles for our newsletter, provide photos of GMIA events
- ◆ **PLANNING, LAND USE AND ZONING:** Attend meetings as needed, research issues as needed – development, cell towers, etc.
- ◆ **ANNUAL MEETING** (June 23): Planning, publicity, invitations, set up, check-in, program
- ◆ **COMMUNITY EVENTS** (Forum, Walks, various workshops): Planning, publicity, day of event logistics
- ◆ **IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS:** Identify projects, attend meetings as needed
- ◆ **TRAFFIC & SAFETY:** Work with CalTrans, Department of Public Works, Sheriff, Fire District and Highway Patrol to resolve issues to benefit our neighborhood

If you have an interest in working with the Board on any of these committees, we encourage you to contact us. Send an email to yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com or call Director Susan Nichols at 440-1607 to get involved with GMIA and our community. Thanks! ▲



WATER-WISE GROSSMONT-MT. HELIX HOMEOWNER

Rebates Available for Turf Replacement

The new San Diego County Water Authority “WaterSmart Turf Replacement Program” offers an incentive of \$1.50 per square foot for home owners that replace existing turf with WaterSmart landscaping. Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis.

There are many benefits to replacing turf with drought tolerant landscaping. WaterSmart landscapes can use about 70% less water than traditional landscaping and transform regular yards into neighborhood showpieces. For homeowners who would like to reduce routine maintenance, installing state-of-the-art irrigation systems and plants appropriate for the local climate can trim the amount of time spent on yard chores. Landscapes that are WaterSmart reduce the amount of polluted water that flows into creeks and ultimately ends up in the ocean, while conserving energy by reducing demand for water that must otherwise be treated and transported across the state, thereby saving huge amounts of energy.

Here are a few criteria for the new rebate program:

- ◆ Pre-existing turf removal projects are not eligible
- ◆ Site must be visible from street — front or side yards
- ◆ Incentive amount cannot exceed total project cost

This is only a partial list of program criteria and requirements. For a complete list go to: turfreplacement.watersmartsd.org or call toll free 1-866-685-2322. Remember, funds are limited so be sure to act quickly to secure your rebate. Our thanks to Michelle Curtis, Water Conservation Specialist at Helix Water District for this timely information. ▲

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 2013 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 or mail your payment to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943-2751.

Mark Your Calendars!

Our annual Art & Garden Tour is May 5th from 12:00pm to 4:00pm. Explore beautiful private gardens here in our Grossmont-Mt. Helix community.

The tour is complimentary for GMIA member households in good standing. (Non-members are welcome to attend for a \$5 per person donation.) ▲

