



viewpoints

Summer 2014

Volume 44 Issue 4

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



Join Us for a Phil's BBQ Dinner

Take a night off from cooking, enjoy mouth-watering fare from Phil's BBQ (along with soft drinks, locally produced Ballast Point craft beer and wine), plus get the latest information about our community.

Join us for our GMIA Annual Dinner Meeting on June 22nd from 5:30 – 8:30 pm. Our informal buffet style dinner is just \$10 per GMIA member. The meeting will be at the magnificent Cuyamaca Water Conservation Garden. Last year over 200 people attended! We hope you will show your support for GMIA's advocacy and attend this event.

Do you have community issues you would like to see addressed or need information about our region? County Supervisor Dianne Jacob will be there to answer your questions and hear your concerns.

This year, we've asked Supervisor Jacob to forgo prepared remarks and instead devote her time to respond-

ing directly to our members. Please include your question/comment on your reservation form. We will also have question/comment cards available at the dinner.

Please be sure to invite your neighbors and encourage them to become GMIA members. Note: reservations are required. Our Annual Meeting is designed for GMIA members but nonmembers may attend for \$20 per person. As a special bonus, complimentary tours of the Garden will precede the Annual Meeting. For those who wish to participate in a complimentary tour, please be sure to note that on your reservation. Tour time is 4:30 p.m.

Get to know your neighbors and enjoy an evening under the stars. This is a great opportunity to connect with old friends, meet new friends, voice your concerns, and hear what's going on in our area. Reserve online at www.gmia.net or return the enclosed form. Don't delay—we want to be sure to have an ample quantity of Phil's yummy cooking. ▲

Time to Renew Your Membership

Check Your Mailing Label

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 June 2015 or later, your dues are current. Thank you!

Time to renew? We encourage our members to renew for multiple years. Annual dues are just \$18 per household. Your payment of \$36 for 2 years or \$54 for 3 years will help us by reducing paperwork and ensure your membership is current. Please remit your dues to GMIA, P.O. Box 2751, La Mesa, CA 91943. You may also renew

online at our secure website at www.gmia.net.

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. Questions? Contact Larry Nichols, Treasurer at 619-440-1607. ▲



GROSSMONT-MT. HELIX
IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

Officers

Susan Nichols, President
440-1607

Larry Nichols, Treasurer/Membership
440-1607

Kay Bickley, Secretary
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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.

Editor: Susan Nichols

Design & Layout: Victoria Vinton,
Coyote Press Graphic
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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

Yesterday

A worn copy of the March 1982 edition of this newsletter (a single page produced on a typewriter!) provides us with fascinating details of the many early accomplishments of GMIA. In 1938, when GMIA was founded, there was no zoning of any kind in San Diego County. In fact, the planning department consisted of only three employees. The need for control of local residential development was recognized by residents of our area, and the Grossmont-Mt. Helix Improvement Association was formed.

Surveillance of requests for zoning variances was the foremost focus of the early organization. Their efforts were effective in curbing literally hundreds of alterations that would have changed the unique quality of our hillside community.

Because of increasing density, the decision was made in 1957 to organize a local fire protection district. Under the leadership of the GMIA Board of Directors, the community voted in favor of the project. Fire Station #1 at Vivera and Mt. Helix Drive was completed in 1958, with service then expanded to include two more stations. In 1973, GMIA sponsored elections to bring sewer services to the area—the Otay Municipal Water District and Spring Valley Sanitation District.

Minimum half-acre zoning was introduced in 1979 when the community plan for the Valle de Oro area was adopted. This achievement was wholly a product of GMIA members, spearheaded by Mrs. Kenneth G. Rogers.

These enormous contributions to our region were the result of efforts led by our all-volunteer GMIA board. Their vision built the foundation of the unique community we enjoy today.

Tomorrow

As we look to the future, your GMIA Board of Directors has agreed to meet this summer for a special retreat to reflect on our goals. To help us determine our future direction, we ask you, our members, to assist us. For those members with email addresses in our database, we will be emailing a brief survey to ask for your suggestions, issues, and concerns. We also welcome your calls or written comments. Your input is very important!

With your support, and the dedication of your Board of Directors, we will fine tune our energies to fulfill our mission to preserve and enhance the character and quality of our community and to foster pride in the region. Thank you!



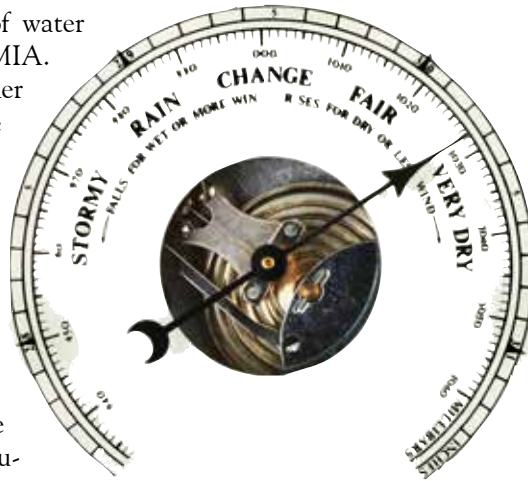
Thank You Donors

Thanks to the following donors who have made gifts to GMIA of \$25 or more in excess of their annual dues. We appreciate your support.

Delevan Lisk, Helen Graham, Timothy Young, Roger & Ann Graham,
John & Teresa Fistere, Bob Blessing, Fern Bowen

How Dry We Are

Drought conditions and the price of water are continuing concerns to GMIA. Although we can't convince Mother Nature to give us a needed shower, we are working to influence the agency that provides much of our region's water—Helix Water District. Recently Helix Water District announced they are embarking on creation of a strategic plan to guide their operations for the coming years. A consultant has been hired to direct this effort. GMIA believes we are important stakeholders and should have a voice in the planning process, along with other community members. After much debate, the District agreed to include community members in the process.



At a recent Helix Water District meeting, your representative from GMIA spoke on behalf of our members, addressing concerns about the District's administrative and operations budget which directly affect our rates (only one half of the entire budget is water purchases). GMIA Treasurer Larry Nichols, whose education in Finance (MBA) and business expertise includes management of mid-size corporations, noted the following expenditure and made cost-cutting suggestions:

- ◆ The District's very generous pension benefits (CalPERS) are underfunded in the amount of \$23 million, and the extended health benefits after retirement are underfunded another \$27 million. This leaves our water district as far and away the highest in unfunded benefits among all the water districts. The plan to address the underfunding is staged over many years, and requires that the invested funds earn over 7% annually. Nichols suggested following the example of other governmental agencies and funding part of the unfunded benefits with a bond measure to save 3-4% on the portion funded (note that there is a limit to how much can be taken on as debt and retain a good Standard & Poors rating, but Helix could easily take on another \$10-20 million in debt at under 4%). Another caveat to this approach is that we would not suggest dumping a large payment on the unfunded balance when the investment markets are at an all-time high – rather to wait for a more appropriate time to embrace the opportunity.
- ◆ The current practice of only surveying other selected water districts for salary comparisons has led to an ever-spiraling wage and benefit structure that may not reflect lower wages for similar work in the private sector. Nichols suggested that a broader review of industry will yield a more realistic salary and benefit approach and also assist slowly in an attack on the unfunded benefit problem noted above.
- ◆ The recreational facilities under management by Helix Water District fall well outside the scope of the agency's expertise. Both Harry Griffin Park and Lake Jennings must be self-supporting and not rely on rate payers subsidizing their operation.

GMIA will continue to monitor the Helix Water District to help ensure our members are fairly charged for services from this public agency. ▲

Red Tape Abounds at CalTrans

GMIA continues to seek a solution to lighting the Park & Ride located at the eastbound I-8 Fuerte/Severin exit. At our last meeting with CalTrans, facilitated by Supervisor Jacob, we discussed the installation of solar streetlights. Supervisor Jacob suggested CalTrans consider extending GMIA's current "Adopt-A-Highway" permit to include lighting and thereby avoid a lengthy timeline for a new permit. CalTrans agreed to consider that option. Potential funding would come from a source outside of both CalTrans and GMIA.

After a delay of more than two months, CalTrans advised they will not extend our permit, and will not allow GMIA to move forward with a new permit. Our understanding is that their agency does not want responsibility for maintaining the light and will not contract with GMIA to provide maintenance (such as the eventual replacement of the battery that stores power). We have been told that CalTrans does not contract for maintenance with community organizations that may dissolve in the future. Despite our 76 years of existence, they instead require a government entity to agree to be the contracting party.

So, we are going back to the drawing board but not throwing in the towel! This Park & Ride is heavily used and very, very dark at night. Safety is an important concern for GMIA. ▲

Art & Garden Tour Revisited

Four delightful private gardens, each so different from the other, rewarded our members with a very memorable afternoon on May 4th.

We couldn't have a garden tour without the generous property owners who opened their personal retreats for our GMIA members. Our grateful thanks to the Eggersten Family, Frank & Kathleen Fox, Rick & Cheri Sparhawk, and Jeff & Dawn Silva.

Thanks to our all-volunteer GMIA board who produced this event: Garden Tour Director Jeff Rule, Tour Brochure Editor Pat Ryan, Garden Writers Pat Ryan, Kay Bickley, Allison Henderson & Holly Yarris, Volunteer Coordinator Sue Creveling and all the Directors who stepped up to lend a hand.

A shout out to our community volunteers who helped us on the day of the event: Lydia Chang, Pam Hoy, Betsy Quinn and Mary Annette Hall, along with board member spouses Tina Schuppert, Joan O'Steen, Bob Yarris, Jocelyn Zimmerman, Paulette Newcom, Doug Ryan and Claire Rule.

Please consider including your garden in next year's tour. All our garden owners report they loved the experience of sharing their garden. Not sure if your garden is suitable? Let us visit and help with the decision. Contact Jeff Rule at (619) 466-0362. 🌱

Our apologies to artist Christine Witnik, whose name and contact information were accidentally omitted from our Art & Garden Tour brochure. Christine's unique hand-colored photographs were displayed at the Eggersten family's garden. She may be contacted at 619-303-0701 or chris.witnik@cox.net.



Bob Cederdahl



Pat Ryan



Pat Ryan



Bob Cederdahl



Bob Cederdahl



Pat Ryan



Pat Ryan



Bob Cederdahl

Backyard Chicken Class and Tour

Back by popular demand, GMIA is once again hosting a Backyard Chicken Class and Tour on Saturday, August 2 at 2:00 p.m. Our class will be held at the downtown La Mesa library branch located at 8074 Allison Avenue.

This is a great class for beginners who want to enjoy the freshest eggs possible. (A lesser known but important benefit of chicken keeping, is the good belly laugh owners will experience when watching the amusing antics of their feathered pets.)

We also welcome experienced chicken owners to participate and share their knowledge. Our panel of speakers will cover the basics of chicken-keeping including breed selection, coop construction, feeding your flock, deterring predators, maintaining health, and local and online resources. "Chicken Whisperer" Don Newcom, along with other GMIA Board Directors, and the helpful folks from East County Feed & Supply will present information.

Immediately following the class we will have an informal, self-guided tour featuring a variety of coops in the Grossmont-Mt. Helix area. No need to RSVP, but please note that every seat in the library was taken at last year's well attended class. ▲



Mt. Helix Rock Wall Restoration Approved

Repairs have been approved by the Valle de Oro Planning Board to restore the historic stacked-rock wall near the summit of Mt. Helix Drive. The homeowner, whose worker applied cement to the face of the wall, is cooperating with the County and agreed to hire a contractor with historic restoration experience to return the wall to its original condition. Thank you to our Planning Board, county Historic Board, and GMIA for preserving this important community asset. ▲

Cell Tower Update

Most of the build-out of the new cell tower facility atop Mt. Helix is done, with some finish work to be completed. Our understanding is the AT&T site is up and running, and the Verizon's service is soon to follow. Thanks to the Mt. Helix Park Foundation, the Valle de Oro Planning Board and to GMIA for ensuring this project design maintained the character of our community. ▲

Lake Jennings

Paradise in San Diego's East County

by Kathleen Hedberg

Looking for a place to get away and don't want to drive very far? Drive just ten miles on I-8 East and you will find Lake Jennings Park.

Lake Jennings stores water for Helix Water District, water that becomes drinking water for more than 250,000 people in our region. Built in the 1960's, the facility includes a campground and fishing program as required by the original funding of the site.

Helix Water recently took over operations from the County and has made improvements. Lake Jennings provides fishing, camping, hiking, and picnicking activities. There are over 90 campsites available year-round for campers and tents, and large group sites with terrific views of the lake and surrounding area. The lake is open to the general public for fishing three days a week: Friday, Saturday and Sunday. During the month of July the lake is open all month long!



From May through Labor Day the lake is stocked with catfish which means night fishing, with the lake open to midnight every Friday and Saturday. The lake is stocked often and with large trophy fish. Nice way to keep cool and have fun! For more information, visit their website or FaceBook page. ▲

www.lakejennings.org

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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 2015 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.

Two Important Community Organizations

Sometimes our residents are confused about the two nonprofit organizations that serve our Grossmont-Mt. Helix community. Here's a brief synopsis of the two groups.

The Mt. Helix Park Foundation, founded in 1999, is responsible for the park, amphitheater and cross memorial on top of Mt. Helix. The organization is led by Executive Director Tracey Stotz (www.mthelixpark.org).

The mission of your Grossmont-Mt. Helix Improvement Association (GMIA) is to preserve and enhance the character and quality of our neighborhood, and to foster pride in the community. We are a nonprofit public benefit membership organization founded in 1938 and are led by an all-volunteer Board of Directors. 🏔️

Coming Soon!

A combination fast food restaurant (hot wings and Mexican food) will soon be open at Campo Road at Kenwood Drive in Casa de Oro. The fast food restaurant will have a drive-thru and will be open 24 hours a day. Along with the recently opened Grocery Outlet and drive-thru Starbucks, these businesses will help revitalize this commercial thoroughfare on our Grossmont-Mt. Helix border. A sporting goods store plans to occupy the former Peter Piper Pizza location in the Rancho San Diego shopping center near Edward's Theater.

Other land use news: seven areas in the GMIA area have been identified for potential repaving sometime next year if funds remain available. The streets include portions of Avocado Boulevard, Fuerte Drive, and Fury. We are hopeful that there will be sufficient funds to complete the improvements.

Calendar

Sunday, June 22nd

Annual Dinner Meeting

Sat., Aug. 2nd

Backyard Chicken Class

Fall 2014

Community Forum