

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

Helix Water District Sweep



GMIA is happy to report that our monumental effort to change the leadership of the Helix Water District Board was a sweeping success. Newly elected Directors Mark Gracyk and Luis “Lu” Tejeda will replace two long-term incumbents, and Director Joel Scalzitti, who was not challenged, will retain his seat.

We believe this new leadership will bring a fresh perspective and greater sensitivity to rate payer concerns about water rates and fiscal management, while continuing to provide excellent water quality and delivery. GMIA's interest in participating in this local election was sparked, in

part, by the infamous Helix Water Public Hearing of October 2015. At that Hearing, upwards of 200 rate payers protested the unprecedented five year rate increase plan. Despite this public outcry and the more than 500 letters written in opposition, the (then) majority of Directors voted to approve staff's recommendation of a five year plan with increases of up to 70%, rather than consider an annual or bi-annual rate review.

Our GMIA Election Committee for Change was created in response to that action; we brought together a diverse group of both GMIA members and non-members from other regions served by Helix Water in order to expand our outreach throughout the District. Over the months preceding the election, we identified, vetted and endorsed candidates. The Committee supported their efforts by walking precincts, distributing literature, placing signs, phone-banking, and raising funds to help subsidize costly campaign expenses. Although our endorsed candidate in Division 1 did not prevail, our efforts to replace the incumbent were successful. Another challenger, Mr. Tejeda, defeated the incumbent, and both he and candidate Dan McMillan outpolled the incumbent with significantly more votes.

We appreciate the willingness of our newly elected representatives to roll up their sleeves and serve our community. They have pledged to:

- ◆ Ensure water quality continues to be outstanding
- ◆ Control costs to stabilize rates
- ◆ Listen to and respect the rate payer

Thank you to all our members who supported our efforts, to our hardworking volunteers who went above and beyond to secure this victory, and to our new Helix Water District Directors who have stepped up to serve. 🏔️

9th Annual Walk to the Top!

January 7th • 10:00 am • Meet at 10105 Vivera (fire station)

Join us at one of our most popular activities—the Walk Up Mt. Helix!

This event has grown each year as word spreads about the family and dog friendly walk, which starts at 10 am at the fire station at 10105 Vivera.

Stroll up Mt. Helix Drive behind our big yellow banner with friends and neighbors! Look for your photo featured on our website and in the pages of the next Viewpoints! At the top, enjoy complimentary refreshments by GMIA. Our co-sponsor, the Mt. Helix Park Foundation, provides our magnificent location and volunteer assistance.

As always, children and well-behaved dogs are welcome. Questions? Contact us at: yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com. 🏔️





GROSSMONT-MT. HELIX
IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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Tom Huffman	Elizabeth Smith-Chavez
Don Newcom	Mike Valley
Tom Osteen	Holly Yarris
Krista Bishop Powers	Dave Zimmerman

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

Email us at:
yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com

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.

President's Message Why Community Partners Are Important



Building collaborations with like-minded agencies and organizations strengthens our voice and creates awareness about issues of importance to our region. As a result of our 2015 Strategic Plan, GMIA identified and is working with community partners to multiply the power of our advocacy efforts. Vital to our long term goals, these meaningful connections help us work more effectively for the benefit of our community.

A great recent example were the many agencies, nonprofits, and other local entities we invited to participate at our fall Community Forum. Look for many of them to join us again with exhibits at our upcoming Walk Up Mt. Helix to Welcome the New Year on January 7th.

Here are some of our other community partners of note:

- ◆ County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who has championed many of our projects and continues to be a wonderful resource and support for GMIA.
- ◆ Caltrans, with whom we partnered to adopt, plant and maintain the Park and Ride at the Fuerte off ramp/I-8.
- ◆ Department of Public Works, our partner in our adoption/maintenance of the monument sign and planter at the intersection of Fuerte and Grossmont Blvd. We also work regularly with the DPW to ensure our historic rock wall lining Mt. Helix Drive is maintained in good condition, and other community features.
- ◆ Fuerte Elementary School PTO, our 2015 recipient of a monetary gift from GMIA to encourage younger families to join GMIA.
- ◆ Cuyamaca Water Conservation Garden, the site of our Annual Dinner and a resource for water wise landscaping.
- ◆ Mt. Helix Park Foundation and the San Miguel Consolidated Fire District, partners for our upcoming project to design and install a fire resistant, low-water demonstration garden at our neighborhood Fire Station on Vivera Drive.
- ◆ Casa de Oro Community Alliance, a dynamic group of businesses, residents, and others working to revitalize the area with the support of GMIA.

If you know of additional prospective community partners, please let us know. We welcome your suggestions and recommendations because we want to do everything possible to make sure our advocacy efforts remain an effective force for good for our members. Contact us at yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com. Thanks for your membership! ▲

Susan Nichols

Thank You Donors!

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

Anonymous, Gary & Cindy Rambis King, Tom O'Steen



GMIA Receives Volunteer of the Year Award

For the fourth year in a row, we are proud to announce GMIA has received the Volunteer of the Year award from Caltrans for the Park and Ride at Fuerte/I-8. Formerly a weed filled, trash strewn lot, we adopted the location and maintain our “front porch.” Here’s what we’ve done:

- ◆ Brought about installation of two solar street lights for nighttime safety
- ◆ Removed an abandoned dumpster that was a magnet for debris
- ◆ Maintain the palm trees with regular trimming
- ◆ Work with Caltrans to mulch for weed abatement
- ◆ Purchased, planted and maintain flowering trumpet

vines to screen the chain link

- ◆ Partner with Caltrans for ongoing gopher eradication
- ◆ Provide monthly litter removal and weed control

GMIA thanks our Green Machine clean up team members who lend a hand with ongoing maintenance: Tom O’Steen (Chair), Mike Sciulli, Larry Nichols, Don Newcom, Pete Camana, Kay Bickley, Brad Boswell, Gretchen Morrison, and others who drop in to volunteer. We welcome your help – many hands make the task go quickly. We meet monthly on the third Saturday at 9:00 a.m. to pick up trash and eliminate weeds. See you there! 🌱

Valle de Oro Planning Group Happenings

Our local Planning Group meets monthly to review requests and provide input to the San Diego County Planning Department, the Planning Commission, and potentially the County Board of Supervisors regarding proposed developments and land use in our community. Here are some projects recently considered:

1. The Planning Group recommended the denial of the proposed development of a Mountain Empire Charter School located along Madrid Way and Aqua Dulce, citing the impact of traffic concerns at this location across from the Casa de Oro Elementary School. The next step for the Group is to attend the Planning Commission Hearing and potentially appeal the project to the Board of Supervisors.
2. Faith Chapel has submitted a proposal to add a private elementary school to their existing facility at 9400 Campo Road. The Valle de Oro Planning Group vote was a split decision; however, they will provide input to the Planning Commission regarding minimum conditions if the development is approved by the Planning Commission.
3. A wholesale/retail bakery is proposed for the former site of Diego’s Thrift Shop in Casa de Oro. The family owned bakery has been in Little Italy for 70+ years and is looking to move to Casa de Oro. The Planning Group has worked closely with the applicant to ensure the compatibility of the exterior building design and to maximize landscaping on the site so the use will conform to the community plan guidelines and contribute to the beautification of Casa de Oro.
4. CVS Pharmacy, the subject of earlier review, has opened their new store at the former location of Fresh and Easy on Campo Road. The Community Planning Group was in favor of this project as it serves as a catalyst for continued re-use and gentrification. 🌱

Meeting Schedule

The Valle de Oro Planning Group meets once monthly on the first Tuesday at 7:00 pm at the Otay Water District Office located at 2454 Sweetwater Springs Blvd.

For further information, contact Chair Mark Schuppert at 619-749-2464.



Passionate About Plumerias

An Interview with GMIA Member Mike Atkinson

by Mary Curran Downey

The first thing you notice is the heady scent – a lush, floral perfume with tangy hints of citrus. It brings to mind tropical rainforests, afternoon rainbows and technicolor sunsets. Mike and Stacy Atkinson's home is a little bit of Hawaii on Mt. Helix.

The aroma is courtesy of the couple's 250 varieties of plumeria, with 175 plants in the ground and another 450 in pots throughout their property.

"We're fairly addicted," said Mike dryly.

Most people know fragrant plumeria for the variety with its creamy white blossoms and bright, yellow center commonly used for making leis. It's a symbol of a relaxing vacation often forgotten once the suitcases are packed away in the garage back on the mainland. But the Atkinsons are a different breed; you might even say they're downright passionate about the plumeria. Over the course of several decades, they've expanded their initial knowledge of the low-water-use plant to become two of the area's go-to authorities on the versatile bloom that can be grown as either a shrub or small tree. And it all started with a broken branch.

"My wife's father lived across the street from us in a house he bought from a botany professor at SDSU," Mike ex-

plained. "Many of the plants were donated to the Zoological Society after the professor died, but there were still plenty of beautiful plants on the property. One day, her father broke a plant, and just stuck the broken branch in the ground and it grew. Stacy loved the branch's blossom and stuck it in her hair behind her ear."

That was all it took, she was hooked.

As the parents of eight children, the couple agreed that Stacy's interest in all things plumeria would give her some much-needed "me" time away from their active family. Mike was less interested, busy with his work as one of the early champions of the internet as a marketing tool. It wasn't until a visit to a plumeria farm in Tampa, Florida that Mike started to become a fan as well.

After returning home, she reluctantly allowed him to accompany her to a meeting of the Southern California Plumeria Society in San Diego. At his first meeting, he found out that the organization needed a webmaster. He took the job and Stacy's solo hobby became a joint interest that sees both of them actively involved in supporting the local society and similar organizations throughout the state, encouraging fellow plumeria enthusiasts and growing, growing, and growing the versatile plant. Stacy also has a flourishing business making leis for private celebrations and hula competitions and creating tropical centerpieces as well as teaching lei-making.

Mike is drawn to the science of grafting

different varieties, rooting the plants, starting seedlings, and perfecting the best potting soil.

"Each plant has a completely different DNA," he said. "So every seedling is a new variety."

Working from seeds is not for the impatient; it can take from five to ten years to go from seed to fully flowering plant. The evidence of all that patience surrounds the couple's home: the sloping front yard is filled with tree-sized plumeria, some originally planted when Stacy first became fascinated by her father's plants. The back property is home to a greenhouse, a commercial mixer for creating Mike's potting soil mix, and row upon row of plants in all stages of development, from full grown to tiny seedlings. The seeds are transferred to a series of different pots, and eventually into the ground, as they grow. Although taking care of it all sounds like a

See **PLUMERIAS** on page 8

We are fortunate to feature this article by GMIA member and talented author Mary Curran Downey, a retired reporter for the Union Tribune, who has volunteered to write human interest stories about our unique region. Thanks Mary! If you have a topic or suggestion for her, please send a message to yourgmianeighbor@gmail.com.

2016 Community Forum Recap

by Wendy Tinsley Becker

Our GMIA Community Forum was held on October 5, 2016 at the Fuerte Elementary School Auditorium. We had a full panel of guest speakers who focused on general issues of identifying who to contact for needs in our community. Our audience received answers to many questions pertaining to the status and repair of local roads (County Public Works Department), auto speeds and pedestrian safety on our main thoroughfares (California Highway Patrol), and local crimes including mail theft, credit card theft at gas station pay pumps, and noise and safety violations (Sheriff's Department).

Guest speakers and table organizations graciously donated their time to attend and address community questions and concerns. We thank them and acknowledge their commitment to furthering our community through a positive relationship with GMIA. Additionally, we would like to thank all of the attendees, friends and neighbors, for participating in the Community Forum. To review the 2016 Community Forum presentation, please visit the GMIA website.



Contact information for our Community Forum Speakers

San Miguel Consolidated Fire District, Chief Darren Howell, darin.howell@fire.ca.gov, 619-670-670-0500

California Highway Patrol, Outreach Officer Kevin Pearlstein, kpearlstein@chp.ca.gov, 858-637-3800

Helix Water District, Carlos Lugo, General Manager, carlos.lugo@helixwater.org, 619-466-0585

Otay Water District, Mark Walton, General Manager, mwalton@otaywater.gov

S.D. County Department of Public Works, Roberto De La Torre, Assistant Superintendent, Roberto. delatorre@sdcounty.ca.gov, 619-660-5809

S.D. County Sheriff, Rancho San Diego Station, Captain Marco Garmo, 619-660-7090

Casa de Oro Community Alliance, Bob Yarris, Chair, casadeorocommunityallinace@gmail.com, 619-813-2164

Valle de Oro Community Planning Group, Mark Schuppert, Chair, 619-749-2464

Additionally, organizations local to our area set up information tables around the auditorium to share their mission and engage with Forum attendees:

Water Conservation Garden, www.thegarden.org, 619-660-0614

County Animal Control, Loren Bunnell, Loren.Bunnell@sdcounty.ca.gov, 619-498-2305

Sheriff's Volunteer Senior Patrol, Craig Carlson, SVP.RanchoSanDiego@sdsheriff.org, 619-660-7021

La Mesa Historical Society, Jim Newland, President, info@lamesahistory.com

Earth Discovery Institute www.earthdiscovery.org, 619-277-3605

Mt. Helix Park Foundation, Nicole Robert, Executive Director, nroberts@mthelixpark.org, 619-741-4363



On Demand: how we deliver water

Saturday, January 28, 2017
9:00-10:30am

Reserve Your Seat: hwd.com/water-talks

Curb Appeal Award Winners

Pictured here are this year's winners (clockwise from right) John & Marilyn Ray on Cliffwood, Gaylord & Jill Norcross on Monahan, Shannon Varley & Javier Aguilar on Mollywoods, and Lee Knight on Via Escuda. These members were nominated and recognized for visual presentation, maintenance, plant materials with a focus on water wise landscaping, and originality and distinction.

GMIA is starting early to gather nominations for 2017. We encourage you to nominate yourself or a neighbor's front yard using the form below, or go online to our website www.gmia.net and complete the simple form found there. The deadline is March 30th. 🌱



NOMINATE A BEAUTIFUL FRONT YARD

GMIA Curb Appeal Award Nomination Form (Deadline March 30, 2017)

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

Architecture & History of the Grossmont-Mt. Helix Community

by Wendy Tinsley Becker

As an urban planner and architectural historian, I have had the pleasure of working on several historic home designation projects here in our area. On November 5, 2016, our greater Grossmont-Mt. Helix community hosted the La Mesa Historical Society's 11th Annual Historic Home Tour, which featured seven architecturally significant modernist properties located throughout our neighborhood. Following is a summary of the modernist period in the greater Grossmont-Mt. Helix community.

Modernism is most simply expressed as a departure from historical precedent in architectural ideology when old, stereotyped forms were discarded. New modes of expression created an aesthetic reformation influenced by innovations in technology and a change in lifestyles. These, in turn, created a new residential architecture based upon the organic life of the family to be housed and the logical use of the products of invention. Three characteristics helped to inform the geographical distribution of modern dwellings in the 1940s and 1950s with California and the Atlantic Seaboard states leading the way. The first was the presence of a naturally beautiful environment, including the ocean, lakes, rivers, mountains, and deserts. The second was the cultivation of outdoor living and rise in leisure stimulated by wealth and opportunities. The third was an eagerness for simplicity without sacrificing the conveniences of modern technology.

In the post-WWII period Mt. Helix and Grossmont became a haven for modernist residential architecture, likely inspired by the area's natural terrain and landscaping with granitic boulders and outcroppings, steep slope lots, and panoramic views. The environmental conditions of Mt. Helix and Grossmont provided an ideal setting for the construction of new dwellings in wood and glass that were true in form, simple in plan, and integrated with the surrounding conditions. Our community is exemplified by Modern style dwellings designed and constructed by a series of architects, designers, and builders who today are regarded as Masters. We are fortunate to have residences by Lloyd Ruocco, Homer Delawie, Sim Bruce Richards, A. Quincy Jones, Kendrick Bangs Kellogg, and John N. Mortenson.

Editor's Note: Do you live in a Modern-period home? Send GMIA a note if you are interested in featuring your home in a future newsletter edition. 🌱



**Casa de Oro
Fall Festival!**

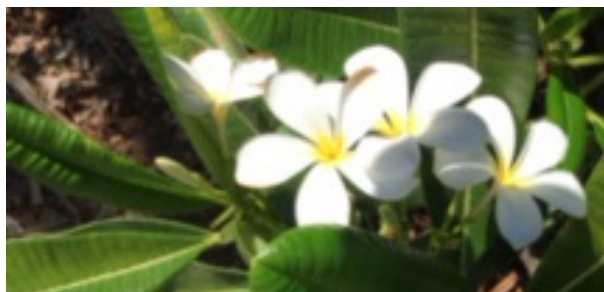
A Vision for a Renewed Casa de Oro

Bringing together architects, urban planners, real estate professionals and community members, the Casa de Oro Community Alliance is working toward a redevelopment plan to revitalize the blighted business district along Campo Road. In the works is a detailed analysis of the area with a focus on creating a family friendly, safe, attractive, and walkable community. This far reaching vision is in its preliminary stage. We recognize that it will take time to turn around the deterioration of the past several decades, but are pleased to advise that Supervisor Dianne Jacob has indicated she is open to supporting this major undertaking in response to the community's grassroots efforts. GMIA actively supports the Alliance and invites you to get involved. All are welcome. Attend a meeting on the third Thursday of the month at 6:00 pm at Faith Chapel, 9400 Campo Road, Spring Valley. For more information, please contact Bob Yarris, Chair at 619-813-2164.



A local modernist home built by John Mortenson with broad eaves and full-height glazing surrounded by trees that creates a birdhouse effect for occupants.

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 2017 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.



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full-time job, Mike points out that in San Diego's climate, the plants need to be watered just once a week in the summer. They lose their leaves in winter and don't need to be watered. And they are a nice compliment to succulents in drought tolerant gardens.

Although most associated with Hawaii, they're not native to the state. (They are native to the Caribbean, and in a large swath from Southern Mexico to Northern Brazil as well as Nepal and India.) They do thrive in Hawaii because of the well-drained soil. Or, as Mike puts it, "They hate wet feet."

He suggests that gardeners interested in

adding plumeria to their gardens as well as experienced growers can find a wealth of information online and at yearly festivals like the one hosted by the Southern California Plumeria Society. Mike conducts the media blitz for the event, and Stacy offers talks and workshops. The festival was held this past September, but the website – www.socalplumeriasociety.com - has information about upcoming meetings, presentations and plant and seedling care.

After decades of growing, the Atkinsons show no signs of losing their fascination with plumeria. Each has their own special relationship, Mike explains.

"I water the plants, she's their friend," he says with a smile. 🌱

CALENDAR

