

THE VICENTE CANYON VOICE

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VCNA's 3rd Annual Meeting a Success!

by Chris Johnson, VCNA President

Nearly one hundred Vicente Canyon neighbors gathered on the afternoon of September 12 for the third annual "VCNA Neighborhood Meeting and Potluck." The event was hosted by Marty and Nelsi Held, who opened their lovely home to the neighborhood and were observed working hard all afternoon to make sure that attendees were comfortable. Guests were able to relax and socialize in comfort, enjoying the warm September sun on the Helds' wonderful outdoor decks and terraces. Commenting afterward on the success of the event, Steering Committee Vice President Louise Miller remarked, "How great to see so many people attending, and how wonderful to see so many new faces!"

The meeting portion of the event consisted of short discussions with Berkeley City Councilmember Polly Armstrong; Bielle Moore, who represented Oakland City Councilmember Jane Brunner; Lieutenant Merritt, from Oakland Fire Station No. 7; Henry Renteria, from Oakland's Office of Emergency Services; and Captain Ralph Lacer of the Oakland Police Department. The Association also used the occasion to honor VCNA founder and former board president Peter Rachor for his substantial contributions to the neighborhood. Following the meeting, guests flocked to the kitchen to sample almost fifty different -- and very delectable -- dishes contributed by the neighbors attending.

It was, all in all, an afternoon to remember. One person was overheard commenting, "This neighborhood knows how to throw a party!" I heartily agree. The VCNA board extends thanks to all who attended or assisted, especially to Marty and Nelsi Held.

Information Updates Needed

Help us help you. Each year, VCNA updates its resident information database. If you are new to the neighborhood, the Association, have made e-mail or phone number changes since you last submitted a form, or have never submitted a contact information sheet to us, we encourage you to complete and submit the form included with this newsletter.

The Second VCNA Garber Park Cleanup Will be on Saturday, November 13

by Bill McClung

A band of about 10 hearty neighbors worked for three hours on Oct 2 to begin clearing fire-hazardous vegetation from the part of the 14-acre John Garber Park that touches Alvarado Road between the 800 and 900 blocks. We had a good time and accomplished a lot that is visible from the road. Much fuel was reduced and a large stack hauled away by the city of Oakland. Some beautiful trees were revealed by our work.

On November 13, from 10 AM to about 1 PM, we will meet again to extend the work westward behind houses on Alvarado. More volunteers would be welcome. If you wish to join us, wear long pants and sleeves, bring garden gloves and a lopping or pruning tool or a heavy rake. If you have weak knees or are fearful of working close to poison oak, this is not for you. Questions? Call Barry Miller 845-2404 or Bill McClung 841-8447.

Campaign to Keep Oakland Fire Station No. 7 Open All Year - Advocates Encouraged to Attend City Council Meeting on November 16

by David Kessler

Thanks to everyone who contacted Council member Jane Brunner about keeping Fire Station No. 7 open year round. We made a difference! Jane has gone to bat for us and is 100 % committed to finding funding to open Station 7 year round.

Further good news came from Oakland City Manager Robert Bobb, who has said "I will work to keep Fire Station No. 7 open. I am in contact with Councilwoman Brunner on this issue and will work to make this a reality."

The Rules committee has remanded the matter to the Finance Committee for November 9, at 10:30 AM. On November 16 at 7:00 PM, the Oakland City Council will consider the report from the Finance Committee, which is expected to recommend that reserves be tapped to keep the station open all year. Council member Brunner

and Fire Chief Simon say that it is important that many of those concerned attend the meeting, even if they do not plan to speak. The meeting will be held on the 2nd Floor of the Oakland City Hall, Frank Ogawa Plaza.

When newly built Station 7 opened, it gave the North Hills life-saving fire, medical, and rescue services WITHOUT potentially fatal delay for the first time. If the station closes, these vital local services will vanish. The remote location of our homes and the twisting, convoluted roads vehicles must navigate cost emergency vehicles driving up from the urban area precious minutes. Life is ALWAYS precious, NOT just during the fire season.

Please contact the City Manager and City Council Members to thank them for helping us keep Fire Station No. 7 open!!!

Robert Bobb can be reached at 238-3301. You may reach Jane Brunner at 238-7001.

PODS

by Georgia Wright

It looks like an acronym but it's not. A pod is a segment of our neighborhood organized to respond to emergencies such as disasters (events that overwhelm emergency services) or local problems. One of VCNA's goals is to facilitate the formation and training of pods throughout our neighborhood.

Members of a pod will have a directory, limited to use within that pod, with information on each household: residents' names and phone numbers, pets, problems (disabilities), special skills, tools, and outside contacts (e.g., relatives). They also will have a map of the pod, with simple sketches showing locations of shut-off valves for gas, electricity, and water. We encourage the pod members to meet and establish a collection center or command post where the directory can be kept along with instructions and supplies for first aid and search and rescue. The more ambitious might include a fire hose with their supplies.

Three pods are in the process of being organized. I am working on lower Vicente Road., from Tunnel Road to the corner of West View (this will be further subdivided). Jane Barrett is working on the rest of Vicente. Mark Seligman is organizing West View and Perth Place. Neighbors on a section of Alvarado Road above Vicente already have a command post and are planning to update their directory.

That is the microcosmic organization. As for the bigger picture, VCNA has distributed a form to create a larger directory of names, addresses, and phone numbers so that when something like the recent fire in Claremont Canyon occurs, neighbors can alert other neighbors, perhaps via a phone tree. E-mail addresses will be used for crime alerts and other problems. We all know the names of many people in the larger neighborhood, but without updating, the directory becomes less useful by the year.

Join the VCNA Steering Committee

by Matt Morse

The Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association is not the kind of neighborhood association that is concerned with the color of your house or how well you tend your lawn. Instead, the VCNA is primarily interested in promoting and maintaining the safety of our neighborhood in the face of fires, earthquakes, and other hazards.

The Association's steering committee meets monthly for an hour or two to discuss and act upon issues such as:

- * keeping Oakland Fire Station No. 7 open all year
- * promoting neighborhood subgroups for earthquake safety
- * managing fire hazards in wildland areas
- * representing neighborhood interests about traffic
- * publishing the neighborhood newsletter
- * compiling a neighborhood directory
- * organizing the yearly potluck.

The committee has two formal positions, President and Vice President. Other members attend in an informal capacity. Our meeting agendas are determined largely by the interests of the people who attend.

For the VCNA to be a truly effective neighborhood organization, it needs the representation -- and the good ideas -- from all parts of the neighborhood. Alvarado Rd. (the 100, 200 and 800 blocks), Vicente Rd. and Eucalyptus Path are well represented. Clearly, the association would be stronger with additional representation from:

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|-----------------|--------------------|
| * Gravatt Drive | * Grand View Drive |
| * Amito Avenue | * Siler Place |
| * Slater Lane | * Evergreen Lane |

If you'd like become a part of the VCNA steering committee meetings, contact Chris Johnson at (510) 848-4580 or Louise Miller at (510) 848-5203.

Wildfire Condition of Claremont Canyon

The following remarks were made by neighbor Bill McClung to the "Hills Emergency Forum Regarding Claremont Canyon," on October 20, 1999. Bill is president of Shelterbelt Builders, a private open land company specializing in fuel reduction and restoration of native landscapes. He is also editor of "News from the Buffer Zone," a publication dedicated to creating a beautiful, biologically rich, and wildfire-safe East Bay Hills.

For the last five years I have been watching what has been done and not done to mitigate the wildfire hazards of Claremont Canyon. In my opinion, only about 5 percent of the vegetation management that should be done in the Canyon has been done. EBMUD and several private landowners have done a strong and sufficient job on their land, but the major landowners -- the Park District and the University of California -- have not, especially on the 300 acre south-facing slope, which has not burned in 50 years.

At various meetings over these past five years Joe Rubini and Jerry Kent have spoken of fires, under bad conditions, spreading from top to bottom of the canyon in an hour or so. It is such a commonplace observation that this canyon is "a disaster waiting to happen," that land managers and responsible officials don't seem to hear it any more.

But a threat identified is, for you gentlemen of the Hills Emergency Forum, a duty to be performed. What is that duty?

Consider the three-acre fire that burned above Stonewall Road on Friday night. I have spoken with Battalion Chief James Edwards, who led the successful suppression of the fire, and three fire fighters first on the scene.

The fire call was received in Oakland at 8:21. The new North Hills Station was dispatched at 8:22; they arrived below the fire in six minutes at 8:28. The next engine company on the scene arrived seven minutes later at 8:35. Temperature and humidity were moderate, and the wind was calm.

According to Officer Abe Merritt, who led the first crew to reach the area, they placed their Engine at the EBMUD tank at the edge of the eucalyptus forest that stands above houses on Stonewall Road. He and one firefighter then drove a brush wagon up the fire road, through the eucalyptus stand, to the top of the hill where a grass and brush fire was slowly spreading. Another firefighter, Bill Triggas, at the engine below at the EBMUD tank, and a resident laid a hose up about 200 feet of steep slope through heavy underbrush and

eucalyptus debris. They arrived at the brush fire just as it was entering the edge of the eucalyptus and pine forest. They were able to attack and suppress it just as the fire was rising into the crown of the trees.

Firefighter Triggas, who Officer Merritt said was "personally responsible for keeping the fire out of the eucalyptus stand," said to me yesterday that he hardly knew where he was. It was dark, a brush fire was coming toward him, and he was in a dense and trashy eucalyptus understory. Without the unidentified resident, he would not have known where to go.

What we know now is that he was on the edge of a 37 acre eucalyptus forest, completely unmanaged in the area he was in, with easily 1000 unmanaged trees packed together ready to consolidate a crown fire. He stopped that fire in the nick of time.

This successful attack on a potentially devastating fire shows high-order bravery and competence on the part of firefighters, but also extremely weak vegetation management that has left thousands of homes in the Claremont and Elmwood neighborhoods at unacceptable levels of risk.

What would have happened if the North Hills Station had not been there and the first fire fighters arrived seven minutes later?

What would have happened if the fire had started 15 hours later, at noon on Saturday, when the humidity had dropped to 16 percent, temperature was in the 80s, and wind was gusting from the Northeast at 38 miles per hour?

We all have a pretty good idea of what could have happened. And, if we are honest about it, we know that luck and heroic fire fighting, rather than prudent wildland vegetation management, saved us again.

To conclude with my answer to what our duty is, gentlemen, in respect to the known hazards of Claremont Canyon, I say it is this:

- * Be strong leaders
- * Accept no more excuses for not getting started on a large scale in Claremont Canyon this year.
- * Mobilize the resources to get the job done before it is too late.

I want to thank you for the time and attention you are giving each year on October 20 to our wildfire problem in the East Bay Hills.

Neighborhood History Corner

"The Hold Up at Vicente"

by Morton MacDonald

Susan Rose was a 16 year old practicing the piano on a lovely summer morning in 1956, when the doorbell rang at her Vicente Road home. Her dad, Russell Rose, answered the door and was greeted by two men who announced, "This is a holdup!" Her mom peeked in from the kitchen and saw what was happening. Terrified, she left via the back door to hail neighbor Duke Hannaford, who was tending his garden next door. She and Duke, he with a pitchfork, returned to the scene and soon both were on the floor.

A Chinese student living with the Roses sneaked out and called the police from Duke's. Susan was next on the floor, with a gun in her ribs. In the midst of all this, the cleaning lady arrived and began washing dishes, wondering where everyone was. Soon she was on the floor, too.

One of the intruders went upstairs to look for valuables and returned only with neckties to tie up his prisoners. The next moment, policemen arrived and rang the doorbell! As one robber opened the door, the other threatened to shoot the prisoners if the police came in.

Russell Rose kept a cool head, calling, "Please let these men go. No one is hurt yet, and we don't want anyone hurt." The robbers left, but one insisted that Russell drive them to the bank. Russell agreed. Susan figured her dad would talk his way out of trouble.

Russell drove the family's conspicuous pink Cadillac and told the men it was only 8:00 AM, and the bank did not open until 10:00 AM. They demanded he drive them to Tilden Park, where they would wait until 10:00. Telling them he'd instead take them to a safe place and let them go, he took the back roads we neighbors know well, until he was back near his house. They were greeted by an enormous number of police cars.

While one fellow was caught, the other ran free -- for a time. One story has it that Granny Smith (Smith Lane) saw someone enter her yard and said, "Young man, go back and close that gate!" He did, then proceeded to hide all day. He also contracted a major case of poison oak. Susan believes he was caught by a policeman hiding in a tree.

The story made the front page of all the newspapers -- headlines even. *True Detective* magazine covered the story, complete with photos. The incident was a comedy of errors, but thanks to Russell Rose, no one was hurt.

Mort is a lifelong resident of our neighborhood.

Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association

The Vicente Canyon Voice is published by the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association.

The following neighbors comprise the Association's Steering Committee: Chris Johnson - President, Louise Miller - Vice President, David Kessler, Georgia Wright, Bill McClung, Matt Morse, Susan Mattmann, Jeannie Cecka, Deborah Lesser, and Ann Smulka.

We welcome your involvement in the group. For more information, contact Chris at 848-4580 or Louise at 848-5203.