

Mt. Diablo teens learn that they, too, can save lives

By Theresa Harrington
Contra Costa Times

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CONCORD — Some Mt. Diablo High School students giggled as they blew up inflatable mannequins while learning how to save a person who goes into sudden cardiac arrest.

But many understood the importance of what they were doing.

"Please take this seriously," said Joe Farrell, a volunteer instructor for the American Heart Association. "What you learn here in 20 minutes could save your mom or your dad or your best friend."

Farrell knows. He told the students he was brought back to life with the help of friends who used CPR after his heart stopped in 2008.

"The harder you push on the chest," he told students, "the more likely the person will be saved."

This week, more than 3,000 ninth-graders

in the Mt. Diablo school district learned cardiopulmonary resuscitation as part of a countywide initiative to create "HeartSafe"

communities, in which residents are educated about what to do when someone's heart stops beating.

The effort follows several incidents of cardiac arrest among young people in Contra Costa County in recent months:

- In December, Northgate High student Trevor Tonsing, 16, died after going into sudden cardiac arrest on the Walnut Creek campus.
- In January, 17-year-old Calvary Christian Academy student Joshua Ellison, of El Sobrante, died after collapsing at a basketball game.
- In February, an El Cerrito High School basketball player survived after going into sudden cardiac arrest because an off-duty coach performed CPR, 911 was called and arriving firefighters used a defibrillator on the youth. Pam Dodson, prehospital care coordinator with Contra Costa Health Services' emergency medical services division, led Wednesday's training in Concord. "We really want you to be the generation that is not afraid to do this so that we can have the chance to save more people in Contra Costa County," Dodson told the teens. The Mt. Diablo Health Care District spent \$80,000 to provide "CPR Anytime" kits to every freshman in the school district, with the hope that students will teach their families the lifesaving technique. The kits include inflatable torsos and DVDs explaining how to administer CPR. "We need to start young," said Grace Ellis, a health district board member, "because so many young people are having heart problems." The students learned to call 911 if someone collapses. They practiced pressing their hands on the chests of their mannequins and they learned that the school has four automated external

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defibrillators, or AEDs, that can be used to revive the heart if it stops. Oscar Torres, 16, of Concord, said he would tell his family about what he learned. He also said he would be willing to try CPR, if someone needed it. "I got taught," he said, as he folded up his mannequin and put it into a box to take home. "So, I know how to do it now." Learn more Details about CPR training and how to become a HeartSafe community are available at 925-646-4690 or www.cccems.org. Watch a CPR training video at ContraCostaTimes.com.

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California Special District, May-June 2010

Kids Learn about Water and Environment at Nation's Largest Interactive Field Trip of its Kind

More than 6,000 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students, teachers and parents learned about water resources, the environment and recycling at a two-day event hosted by the Orange County Water District Groundwater Guardian Team, Disneyland Resort, the Municipal Water District of Orange County and the National Water Research Institute.

The Children's Water Education Festival teaches children to be aware of their environment through hands-on learning activities. Approximately 91 schools representing 21 cities throughout Orange County attended the event. Volunteers from more than 50 public and private organizations provided the interactive presentations. The festival, in its 14th year of educating Orange County's students, is a fun, environmental-education field trip designed to teach elementary school children about the interdependence of water, soil, plants, trees, animals and humans. The goal of the festival is to provide youth with the tools they need to protect and improve the environment each and every day.

Sources for In Briefs and

Recognitions: *Contra Costa Times, Manteca Bulletin, MyDesert.com, North Bay Business Journal, Orange County Water District The Mercury News, Times Press Recorder*



Fire District's Website Nominated for Webby Award

The San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District's (SRVFPD) website has been nominated for a Webby. The Webby Awards are administered by the International Academy of Digital Arts (Academy) and Sciences and honor outstanding websites throughout the world. SRVFPD's website is among five agencies nominated for best government website, alongside two NASA websites, the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Air Force. The Academy received 10,000 website submissions this year from 60 countries around the world for various categories. SRVFPD designed the website, www.firedepartment.org, around the needs of their residents and held a survey for residents asking them what they wanted and needed from the fire district's site. Based on those results, the website includes emergency radio traffic, live dispatch logs and up-to-date information for residents and businesses. Plans are also in the works for a new iPhone application for the district – the first ever fire district application created.

CSD Opts to Run Meetings with Robert's Rules of Order

In an attempt to get more accomplished at its bi-weekly board meetings, Oceano Community Services District has decided to throw out its previous rules of order and replace them completely with Robert's Rules of Order. Robert's Rules of Order is a parliamentary method to conduct public meetings and many government agencies use it to fall back on when their own rules fail to cover a certain issue. In this case, Oceano opted to adopt Robert's rules completely, after much debate in the board. The district has had difficulty getting through its entire agenda in recent months and, according to district board member Jim Hill, "(Robert's Rules of Order) may be a more stable means of getting through the meetings. It's definitely worth a chance." If your district would like a copy of Robert's Rules of Order or the accompanying Quick Reference chart, contact travisw@csda.net.



Making Green with a Green Portfolio

South San Joaquin Irrigation District (SSJID) has achieved a 100 percent green portfolio and it is paying off. The district receives over \$12 million annually from its sale of clean hydroelectric power from a Tri-Dam System it operates in conjunction with the Oakdale Irrigation District. Now, they could receive up to \$52,500 by selling renewable energy credits the district generated from its solar farm. The SSJID board has been asked to authorize selling those credits to Shell Energy North America at a rate of \$7.50 per credit - \$4.50 more than initially projected when considering whether to build the solar project. SSJID has pursued fiscally conservative approaches when considering major decisions regarding district projects and efforts and is now reaping dividends from those approaches.

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East Contra Costa fire officials ready to close two stations

By Rowena Coetsee
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 06/08/2010 08:39:31 AM PDT

Updated: 06/08/2010 08:29:31 PM PDT

OAKLEY — Local fire officials are poised to close two stations while they ponder whether a tax measure could stabilize the cash-strapped agency.

Despite residents' pleas to reconsider, East Contra Costa Fire District directors decided Monday that next year's budget should be based on six fire stations instead of the eight that now exist and reflect 48 firefighting positions rather than 54.

The loss of positions doesn't mean layoffs but rather cuts in overtime pay.

The fire district currently has 43 full-time firefighters who fill the equivalent of 54 positions by working extra hours.

Although the board hasn't yet decided which facilities would close, the most likely targets are on Bethel Island, in Discovery Bay or Byron's site, said acting fire Chief Hugh Henderson after the meeting.

Looking to close a nearly \$3 million deficit, directors will reconvene at 6:30 p.m. June 29 to adopt the 2010-11 spending plan. The special meeting will be in Oakley City Hall's council

chamber at 3231 Main St.

Expenses for 2010-11 are projected to be \$11 million, with income of just over \$8 million.

The proposed budget also doesn't include money the fire district has been paying the state to operate a station in the Marsh Creek and Morgan Territory areas on its behalf from Nov. 15 to May 15. During that period, the station would be closed.

Directors also plan to discuss in more detail the possibility of putting a parcel

tax measure on the ballot as early as November to ease the fire district's financial crunch.

As property values have plummeted, so has that source of tax revenue, which comprises nearly all the fire district's income.

Residents repeatedly exhorted board members to consider every other option and spend down reserves before closing any stations.

The longer response times could have disastrous consequences, particularly right now on the cusp of fire season, they argued.

People will die and homes and businesses will burn, said one woman.

Bethel Island residents wondered how quickly the many seniors there would receive medical aid for a heart attack or stroke if the station there closed.

What's more, a natural disaster could damage the only road to and from the island, blocking access by fire engines from other parts of East County, they

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said.

Do not set us afloat without a station, said resident Olga Jones.

But fire officials reluctantly told the near-capacity crowd at City Hall that they don't have the luxury of time: If they do nothing, the agency will run out of money toward the end of 2012-13, they said.

Director Kevin Romick added that he and his colleagues must be prepared to make unpopular decisions if they're going to ask residents to pay more for fire protection.

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East Contra Costa slated to close two fire stations

By Rowena Coetsee
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 06/30/2010 06:50:31 AM PDT

Updated: 06/30/2010 05:14:21 PM PDT

OAKLEY — Despite appeals and even demands from residents to reconsider, directors of far East Contra Costa's fire district this week decided to close two stations.

The East Contra Costa Fire District board voted 6-2 in favor of a 2010-11 spending plan that calls for Byron's fire station and one of the two in Discovery Bay to close as of 8 a.m. July 16. Residents in the overflow crowd at Oakley City Hall pleaded with directors to keep the stations open at least while they explored ways to generate more revenue.

East Contra Costa Fire District, which serves approximately 105,000 people from Brentwood and Oakley to Bethel Island and Byron, is projecting \$11 million in expenses in the fiscal year starting July 1 but just over \$8 million in income.

The agency has been squeezed by a precipitous drop in property tax revenue over the past two years. Even with the \$1.3 million in cuts that the 2010-11 budget represents, it still will run out of money in three years.

By the end of 2012-13, the district expects to have gone through all its reserves.

"We are in a survival mode, not a maintenance mode," director Chris Becnel said.

The agency will save an estimated \$70,000 in operating costs by closing the stations, and will redistribute the firefighters there among the remaining six stations it operates.

The result will be that four sites will have three firefighters on duty around the clock — the number that most

Contra Costa County fire departments have — instead of just two in Oakley and Brentwood.

The industry standard is four personnel per engine.

The beefed-up coverage will be at the remaining Discovery Bay station and Brentwood's other station.

Nonetheless, the board's decision has some residents worrying about the danger that longer response times pose to lives and property, particularly in sparsely populated areas, along Vasco Road, or on the Delta where there's at least a handful of boating accidents during the summer months.

The average time it takes an engine to arrive on scene in the Byron area will increase from 7½ minutes to 12 to 14 minutes, according to the agency; the 6½-minute response time from Discovery Bay's downtown station now will be nine to 11 minutes.

"All your constituents are out there in the waterways," Discovery Bay resident Walter McVittie said.

He echoed others' reminders to board members that

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they were appointed to represent residents throughout the district and not just those in their respective cities.

Some speakers accused the Brentwood and Oakley directors of sparing stations in their cities.

Four of the nine board members are from Brentwood, three live in Oakley, and the remaining two are from Bethel Island and Discovery Bay.

But directors explained that they chose the facilities in Byron and Discovery Bay because they receive the fewest calls.

Firefighters at Byron's Station 57 responded to 294 incidents last year and those at Station 58 in Discovery Bay fielded 379.

Totals ranged from 383 to 1,853 at the other stations.

Of the more than two dozen people who spoke, many said they'd be willing to pay more to preserve the current level of service. Even after scaling back, however, the district says it still will have to ask the public for additional funds.

Directors are considering several possibilities: a special tax that would be a flat amount per parcel, an assessment that would vary among properties, and a user fee for residents outside the district who require emergency services.

Director Chris Finetti, of Discovery Bay, who voted against the station closures along with Bethel Island's Robert Kenny, warned his colleagues that in deciding to close stations, they have hurt their chances of persuading residents to pay more.

Those who live near a three-person fire engine won't feel as much need to authorize a tax, and those in the communities that have lost a station will be in no mood to shell out more money, he said.

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June 30, 2010



General Plan 2030 passes Planning Commission hurdle

by Roz Rogoff

The Planning Commission approved the General Plan 2030 -- including a new Urban Growth Boundary and the extension of Ordinance 197 -- at a special meeting Tuesday, June 29. The version is now in the hands of the City Council, who are scheduled to meet on the topic July 13.

The Commission voted on the Environmental Impact Report first. Several residents spoke about the section of the EIR on Tassajara Valley, which did not include impacts of development on water, noise or traffic. The five commissioners voted to accept the EIR, since the General Plan does not contain anything in it about developing Tassajara Valley.

The General Plan does, however, extend the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to the West to incorporate Norris Canyon Estates and the Laborer's Property and to the East to Camino Tassajara. Once again residents of Tassajara Valley questioned what this would do to their rural way of life.

Tassajara Valley resident Harriet Newman complained that the planned cemetery was not compatible with open space. It would flatten a ridge line and include a large building.

The cemetery and the New Farm residential development are the only developments planned for Tassajara Valley right now. The City wants to include any new developments in its sphere of influence by moving the UGB out to Camino Tassajara.

Planning Commissioner Donna Kerger assured Newman that the UGB does not confer any development rights. The General Plan maintains Tassajara Valley's open space designation.

"It's very frustrating when the public has issues we have no control over," Kerger said. She recalled when she lived in the mid-west that nobody wanted to live in the unincorporated areas.

Vice-Chair Harry Sachs said the Planning Commission and the City Council won't make this decision. It's for voters to decide.

"To me it's about control over the planning process, period," Sachs said.

Jim Blickenstaff and Jim Gibbon of San Ramon for Open Government recommended taking the eastern change to the UGB out of the General Plan 2030 and giving voters a choice of keeping the existing eastern UGB or extending it to Camino Tassajara.

Commissioner Dennis Viers appeared to agree with them.

"If I could vote it down, I would. I like the UGB right where it is," Viers said. "I owe it to myself and the Commission to give that choice to the voters. You can't carve the baby up. You vote it up or you vote it down."

Commission Chairperson Phil O'Loane was all alone in outright opposition to the new UGB.

"It's not impossible to pull something out of the General Plan," he said, citing the changes to Measure G and the El Nido rezoning. "We're faced with a Hobson's choice, where we are being given one choice. Tassajara Valley is a separate set of circumstances. Development is not inevitable."

O'Loane questioned Planning Director Phil Wong about New Farm, the housing development planned by Tom Koch in Tassajara Valley. Since New Farm has already been accepted by the County even if the City moved the UGB to include New Farm in its sphere of influence, the City would not have control over the planning. Wong agreed that was true.

This surprised Sachs and raised doubts about the City's ability to control the planning of New Farm under those circumstances.

One of the other elements in the General Plan 2030 is the extension of the City's Ordinance 197. Ordinance 197 restricts building on ridge lines and near creeks. It is set to expire in 2010, but would be extended in the General Plan 2030 for developments in Tassajara Valley. However, developments already started by the County would be exempt. Sachs also wondered about separating the UGB from the General Plan.

Three of the Planning Commissioners -- Kerger, Viers, and Eric Wallis, the newly appointed replacement for Bob Patrino --

served on the original General Plan Review Commission when it was formed in 2000 to develop the City's General Plan. The Commission was made up of 32 residents from all political points of view, and chaired by Kerger. Wallis recalled that the Commission wanted to put all of Tassajara Valley, not just out to Camino Tassajara, into the City's planning area.

The original General Plan 2020 requires a vote on the UGB and the extension of Ordinance 197 this year. Viers asked Wong if those two elements could be separated from General Plan, since the vote on a new General Plan isn't required until 2012.

Wong grimaced and told the Commissioners they would have to go through the whole process again.

"We're talking big money!" Kerger warned.

At 11 p.m. the Commissioners voted to extend the meeting by another half hour, but by 11:12 p.m. Sachs made a motion to accept the complete General Plan with all of its parts. The motion passed 4-1 with O'Loane dissenting.

The Planning Commission must approve amendments to the General Plan by a four-fifths vote to go to the City Council, so the General Plan 2030 with the new UGB and extension of Ordinance 197 is on its way to the July 13 City Council agenda.

Find this article at:

http://www.SanRamonExpress.com/news/show_story.php?story_id=1830

July 6, 2010



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Employees Say WCWD a Top Small Workplace

There are many happy faces among the employees, management, and board members of the West County Wastewater District (WCWD) these days for the recognition by various organizations for achievements in the areas of performance, capital improvement projects, energy conservation, even for its financial reporting.

And now there is another reason -- 32 of its 53 employees responded to a recent poll conducted by the Bay Area News Group and placed WCWD among the top 35 small companies in the Bay Area for which to work.

Among the reasons cited by the employees, WCWD provides good pay and benefits in a secure industry and has a great work environment. Employees are motivated by support from managers and peers to enhance their knowledge and skills in the wastewater industry and through technical classes. Additionally, employees have the opportunity to take supervisorial and leadership classes.

"It's a cordial environment. The employees are always treated well, management is always fair," said Marc Raynor, Collections System Supervisor. "When we need a certain piece of equipment we always have the backing of management, particularly if it's related to safety. Safety is the first concern here, among management and employees. It's one of the reasons I've been here this long," the 28-year employee added.

The "family-like" atmosphere is one of the reasons Mike Mayorga has enjoyed working at WCWD for 15 years. "I'm with my 'sewer brothers' eight hours a day. It's a tight group. We share a lot of things. I love coming to work," said the foreman in the collections systems department, who does construction and maintenance of the sewer system. "The work that we do comes back to us. Each of us has a specialty – welding, electrical. We share the work."

Learning how the employees feel about working at WCWD was a very pleasant surprise to E.J. Shalaby, WCWD General Manager. "It means the employees care enough about the district and what they do to take the time to respond to a survey, and to let people in the community know how they feel.

"We have a congenial, productive workplace where people respect each other. Our employees are mindful of the fact that WCWD has a responsibility to the environment, the public, and our ratepayers in particular, to do the best job that we can to comply with the rules and regulations under which we operate and where safety is our highest priority. Credit for WCWD's success in these areas is attributable to our employees. Our Board of Directors joins with the management team in applauding our employees for this recognition," Shalaby added.

Founded in 1921, WCWD has 53 employees and serves more than 120,000 ratepayers in West Contra Costa County.

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Bradford Island residents fight blaze without aid of firefighters

By Hannah Dreier, Rowena Coetsee and Robert Salonga
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 07/06/2010 11:35:19 AM PDT

Updated: 07/06/2010 10:23:03 PM PDT

BRADFORD ISLAND -- Residents using hoses, tractors and a single water truck have been fighting fires on their own here since Saturday morning despite multiple visits by firefighters to the Delta island.

At least five single-family homes, a cottage and a mobile home have been consumed by what began as a small vegetation fire but spread until the island's extensive accumulation of peat began burning, residents say.

Bradford Island is not protected by a fire agency. The closest, East Contra Costa Fire District, only responds to fires outside its jurisdiction when lives are in jeopardy, acting Chief Hugh Henderson said.

Flames so far have ravaged about 550 acres, according to Henderson.

East Contra Costa firefighters visited the island several times throughout the holiday weekend but did not take any steps to put out the blaze, say residents, whose hopes repeatedly were raised only to be dashed. They said they were told the agency was there strictly to ensure their safety.

"People are frustrated that there are not fire personnel out there," Henderson said. "I'm not trying to sound cold or anything, but we're attending to our own district."

Among the damaged structures on the densely vegetated island are homes, boat docks and a pump station.

Some residents are getting by with backup generators because they haven't had electricity since Saturday night.

Alameda resident Liz Lighthouse brought several friends to her vacation house on

the island to celebrate the Fourth of July holiday, and found herself among those trying to put out the fire.

Lighthouse bought her home knowing that she would not have any fire protection but has been disappointed by the lack of attention from emergency services, which she believes she is entitled to as a taxpayer.

"At this point, we're not really expecting much from anybody because there hasn't really been anything so far," she said.

East Contra Costa Fire first responded to the blaze Saturday morning but left the island after confirming that no lives were in danger and authorizing a helicopter water drop.

Firefighters returned that night with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office to organize the voluntary evacuation of 15 people, and came back a gain Sunday evening to help sheriff's and U.S.

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Coast Guard personnel clear a downed power line. Firefighters also watered down the ferry slip, which is the only way vehicles can reach the island.

Concord resident Karen Cunningham estimated that the fire had blackened about six acres of the approximately 132-acre cattle ranch she and her husband operate on the island.

They moved their herd three times to save it but lost a boat trailer and two large containers filled with horse, cattle and fencing supplies as well as other tools, she said.

Cunningham said that she and about 10 others have been working to put out the fire, carrying portable tanks of water in pickup trucks from one site to the next and using hoses to fill irrigation ditches.

Here and there, plumes of smoke were still wafting from the charred landscape Tuesday afternoon, and a stiff wind carried ash through open windows. The flames had downed telephone poles and left only a scattering of metal debris where houses had stood.

About 15 people live on the island year-round, Cunningham said, with the majority of residences vacation homes. The island is accessible only by boat.

Contra Costa County Office of Emergency Services helped with the evacuation, brought in the American Red Cross to provide temporary housing assistance, and monitored the fire to ensure that the residents who have chosen to stay aren't in imminent danger.

The island is one of a handful that have not been in any fire district since Contra Costa County was created in 1850. Fighting fires ultimately falls to property owners, said Chris Boyer, Office of

Emergency Services manager.

"One would hope that when they buy real estate, someone tells them that," he said.

State-run CAL FIRE doesn't have jurisdiction over Bradford Island, either.

"It's a unique animal," said agency spokeswoman Julie Hutchinson of the island.

The fire is reminiscent of a blaze in April 2008 on Sherman Island, where grasslands burned for an entire weekend and sent clouds of smoke toward Contra Costa County.

That island, too, was in a jurisdictional no man's land, and agencies generally stayed back once they determined that no people were in danger.

Residents who live in remote areas generally can expect different levels of fire service than they would in populated areas, Hutchinson said.

Cunningham said the fire started at approximately 9 a.m. Saturday, and calls were made to the fire department throughout the day.

"It could have been extinguished so easy," she said.

Contact Hannah Dreier at 925-779-7174.

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