

Outstanding Agents
Outstanding Results
Don Edwards
646-9602 Gold Coast Realtors

Hartmann Mortgage
Voted #1
2004, 2005
& 2006
646.7399
Theresa Hartmann
MB# 01327523

OJAI VALLEY NEWS

The Ojai Valley's newspaper since 1891
ojaivalleynews.com
116th Year, No. 54 • Friday, April 6, 2007 • Newsracks, 75¢, retail stores, 70¢ plus tax • Yearly subscription, \$52



The Wet and the Wild

By increasing habitat, wetlands project also soaks up storm runoff

Nao Braverman
nao@ojaivalleynews.com

In a once-desolate field at the Ojai Meadows Preserve, passersby now hear the fluttering wings of meadow larks, sparrows and red-winged blackbirds that have come to nest in the forest of cattails. On quiet mornings egrets and blue herons can be spotted hunting their prey.

For years the 58-acre plot of land along Highway 33 next to Nordhoff High School was just a dry grassy area that had to be cut down to a barren lot every fire season. Within the past two years a portion of the plot has flourished to a lush forest of cattails and coyote brush and Heerman's tarweed.

But Fred Fox, executive director of the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, sees the metamorphoses as a restoration rather than a transformation. Wetlands originally existed in the Ojai Meadows property over a 100 years ago with Canada geese, California black bears and numerous wetland birds. But in the early 1900s oak woodlands were cleared away for cattle grazing and over the years sediment from neighboring



Photo by Rob Clement

A red-winged blackbird makes a landing on the cattails at the newly restored Ojai Meadows Preserve wetlands. The project was financed with a \$985,000 Proposition 40 grant.

residential development gradually degraded the freshwater marsh.

In 2005 the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy began restoring the wetlands. The local organization purchased the land in 2001, to shield it from developers who had been eyeing the property for a shopping center development among other projects.

In late November 2006 the Land Conservancy received a \$985,000 grant from the State Water Resource Control Board Proposition 40 Urban Storm Water Grant Program.

The wetlands is expected to increase wildlife habitat for

Please see Wetlands, Page A-3

Caltrans study prompts fears about results

As engineers launch Highway 33 safety investigation, committee wonders whether results will bolster case against trucks

Nao Braverman
nao@ojaivalleynews.com

At the end of March, Caltrans engineers launched a comprehensive investigation of the mountainous section of Highway 33 from the five points intersection at El Roblar Drive and Maricopa Highway through Pine Mountain until its descent into Lockwood Valley.

Though the study was initially applauded by members of the local coalition, Committee to Stop the Trucks, some are beginning to wonder whether the government agency will come up with the results they hope for.

The study is meant to determine whether the highway is suitable for what could become 300 double-hopper gravel truck trips per day, each vehicle weighing up to 80,000 pounds.

Ventura County 1st District

Supervisor Steve Bennett requested the investigation after a new sand and gravel mine was proposed in Cuyama Valley and another mine in Lockwood Valley proposed to expand. Both projects are expected to increase the truck traffic on Highway 33.

Engineers are currently conducting a geometric study of the roads, which includes an examination of the radius of the curves in the highway to determine if there is enough turning room for the large trucks.

The Caltrans Design Division is excavating portions of the road and taking them back to a lab to perform stress tests. The results will show how the structure will handle the increased truck load said Caltrans' chief traffic engineer for the area, Sameer Haddadeen. Engineers will be

Please see Caltrans, Page A-3

Casitas orders up bullet-proof glass

Board votes to spend \$54,833 on protection

Sondra Murphy
nao@ojaivalleynews.com

Post-9/11 awareness has prompted the Casitas Municipal Water District to install bullet-resistant glass at its office. The CMWD board of directors recently voted to approve \$54,833 for the installation of security enclosures and windows at the district office in Oak View.

"We wanted to be proactive in protecting our employees against any potential future threats," said the district's public affairs manager, Ron Merckling. "Many other public agencies in the area have installed similar security systems, such as the city of Ventura and United Water."

"Nothing in particular led up to that decision," said board director Pete Kaiser. "Essentially, we're looking at everything, post-9/11, that provides better security for government agencies." Kaiser said that employees are a vital part of the district's business efforts and protecting them is important to the water district.

"In this day and age, we have to take care."

"This building has been in place close to 40-plus years," Kaiser added. "So we're just modernizing the security measures of the building."

Approved as a capital item for this budget year, the security glass should be installed by June 30.

Arcade district linked to Subway chain

After history of failed eateries, Matilija Street location opens to possibility of nationwide chain

Nao Braverman
nao@ojaivalleynews.com

A Subway sandwich shop is expected to open on the back side of the Arcade Plaza district, bringing about what some vocal community members have feared: the emergence of chain stores in Ojai's historic downtown area.

Ernie Salomon, a Santa Barbara resident who has owned the building at 323 E. Matilija St. since 1989, said he contacted the Subway corporation after seven sandwich shops and

delis he rented the space to flopped in a span of about 10 years.

When Salomon purchased the building the space housed an antique and vintage shop that went out of business. After that he rented to an affordable locally owned sandwich shop called Friends which went out of business and then sandwich shop after sandwich shop failed until he was fed up.

"The local people had difficulty making it there," said Salomon. "We had a friend in Solvang who owned a Subway that was doing pretty well so I decided to contact the company."

Salomon said that the last tenant fell behind in rent until he finally had to close the door. The new lease is with Subway Real Estate Corporation which will sublease it to

the Subway store operator. Salomon expects that the operator, Dave DiTomaso, a Simi Valley resident who owns the Subway in Mira Monte as well as 15 other Subway stores, will be able to overcome economic challenges that defeated the locally owned shops he rented to previously.

"Most building owners would rather have a lease with a corporation because they have deeper pockets," he said. "If we lease to someone who has 16 stores and the corporation behind them, we can expect them to do better."

Salomon said he understands that some Ojai residents do not welcome chain stores, but argues that there is not a single person in

Please see Subway, Page A-3

Ojai Valley neighbors

Laignee Barron
laignee@ojaivalleynews.com

Trudie Town grew up living the adventures of Tom Sawyer.

In the small southern town of Charlottesville, Va., Town had a magical childhood. A self-described tomboy, she loved spending hours in the woods behind her house, building forts with her two siblings and the neighborhood kids.

"We usually played cowboys and Indians. I always wanted to be Pocahontas and the boys all wanted to be Indians. There was always a shortage of cowboys," she recalled.

In the summer, Town would wake up early and ride her bike with her brother and the local kids to the nearby lake. They would swim all day long and wouldn't come back home until midnight. Although their parents often had no way of contacting their kids, they didn't worry.

"Back then, there was a lot of freedom for kids. We would hike into town five miles away

and people we knew would pick us up and drop us off where we wanted to go," she said. "Now though, as a mother of two, I wouldn't let my kids do what I used to do."

Town is especially cautious with her kids around water because of a near disaster. "In Virginia there are rivers everywhere. But the undercurrents can be harsh," she said. "When I was 7 I nearly saw my sister drown. The undercurrent grabbed her and my mom, who didn't even know how to swim, grabbed her."

Another of Town's favorite hobbies was also risky, dirt biking. She loved making tracks around the woods and practicing wheelies. Only once did she wind up in a serious accident.

"A friend of mine decided to do a wheelie up my back. He popped the tire up and went flying over the handlebars. We both had to go to the hospital. He broke both his legs and I was lucky. I just hurt my arm," she said.

Up until four years ago, Town



Trudie Town

was still living in her hometown. When she went to work for Nimbus Records she met her husband, who came from England to help start the company. In 2003, Nimbus Records became Technicolor and transferred to Camarillo. The Towns decided to come along, and wound up in Ojai.

"I had told my husband I would move anywhere but California. If you're from a small southern town, California's like another country," she said. "When I knew we were moving here, I did a school search and came here to interview schools all the way from Calabasas to Ojai. We ended up loving the Ojai Valley School. And we fell in love with Ojai. I'm doing things here I never thought I would do, like riding horses and writing. It's great!"

News Briefs

DAM SIREN TEST SET FOR WEDNESDAY: Routine quarterly tests of the 11 sirens of the Casitas Dam Siren System occur at noon on the second Wednesday of April, July, October and January. These sirens are located in the Ventura Avenue-Highway 33-Casitas Springs area, stretching from the ocean up to Casitas Dam. Residents of the area will hear voice test messages and test chimes/tones emanating from the sirens for approximately 10 minutes. Voice messages will be in both English and Spanish. The next test will be Wednesday, April 11.

PUC PETITIONS FOR WATER RATE HIKE READY FOR SIGNATURES: Petitions to the California Public Utilities Commission, protesting Golden State Water Company's proposed 43.95 percent rate increase, can be signed at: Ojai Valley Chamber of Commerce, 201 S. Signal St., Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (closed for lunch about noon to 1 p.m.); and Treasure Beach & Café, 928 E. Ojai Ave., Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday through Sunday from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Only customers of Golden State Water Company should sign this petition.

HAPPY VALLEY SCHOOL STAGING ABSURDIST COMEDY: Happy Valley School Theater Arts Department will stage the comedy, "Summer Evening in Des Moines," by absurdist playwright Charles L. Mee. Performances run April 5, 6, 7 and 12, 13, 14. Curtain is at 8 p.m.



Sports
Fishermen at Lake Casitas going whole "hawg" as spring brings in the big ones.
Page B1



Arts
Fine arts photographer shows off wild side.
Page A10

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Due to some strong language and adult content, parental discretion is advised. Zalk Theater is located at 8585 Ojai-Santa Paula Road in Upper Ojai. Call 646-4343 for more information.

BIRTH RESOURCE AND SUPPORT BOARD INVITES PUBLIC: The second meeting of the interim board of directors of Ojai Valley Birth Resource and Support will convene on Saturday at 11 a.m. at the Nan Tolbert Nurturing Center, 555 Mahoney Ave., Oak View, to continue the progress started a month ago. All interested adults are invited to participate in this renewal of the community's long-standing early childhood organization. For more information, call 646-0441 or 646-0388.

Blotter/Obituaries	Much Ado/Pets	Opinion	Religion	Around Our Valley	Food & Beverage	Arts	Sports	Classified	People
A2	A4	A5	A6	A8	A9	A10	B1	B2	B4

Wanna' be a CUTIE PIE?
The biggest selection, the best styles, & the lowest prices anywhere.....
New shipments every week
Check us out...www.ojaisurplus.com

WE ARE SOOOO FUN!
Ojai Surplus
952 E. Ojai Ave. 646-2350 SINCE 1989

Wetlands:

(Continued from Page A-1)

endangered birds such as the Least Bell's vireo and the willow flycatcher. But the marsh is expected to do much more than bring wildlife to the vacant spot. A wetlands retention basin will alleviate flooding of Highway 33 during the rainy season. Wetlands function as sponges that trap, filter and slowly release water while improving water quality, said Lynn Malone, director of member services at the Land Conservancy.

At full restoration, the freshwater marsh will collect water from the Maricopa Drain and drains from Taormina Lane to retain the marsh area and keep it saturated year-round. Eventually the marsh area is expected to provide a year-round open water source when excavated to the proper depth, according to Rich Handley, the conservancy's preserve manager.

The conservancy has been cooperating with local schools in the development of their wetlands restoration project.

In October 2004 the Ojai Unified School District directed all stormwater runoff from Nordhoff High School into the Meadows Preserve which hydrated the ground for the first of the wetland plants.

Local school students have also been participating in water testing, soil sampling and litter removal.

In "Once Upon a Wetland ..." project, a partnership with local schools and the land conservancy, third-grade students from Oak Grove School and Melners Oaks Elementary School have been partnering with Nordhoff High School students to weed and plant coyote brush and water to restore the health of the meadow that is situated in between the three schools.

"The locally based experimental approach to learning gets children outside interacting with nature in a meaningful way that develops a sense of place," said Robin Godfrey, public relations



Photo by Meaghan Quesada/Brooks Institute of Photography

Greg Taylor takes down one of the 30 eucalyptus trees marked for removal at the Ojai Meadows Preserve. For every non-native tree taken, the Land Conservancy will plant 100 native trees.

representative for Oak Grove Groves School.

Most of the groundwork for the restoration will be completed by the summer said Fox. But the wetlands will gradually develop over the next 10 years.

The large grove of eucalyptus trees will be preserved but some that are located in the area of the restoration will be removed for grading purposes. Though 30 eucalyptuses have already been removed, 100 native trees will be planted for each tree that is

removed said Malone.

More details on the wetlands restoration will be presented at Oak Grove School in conjunction with the school's Earth Day Celebration on April 13 at 7 p.m. Land Conservancy members and Oak Grove School's environmental and outdoor coordinator Sara Benjamin will share more details on the methods and results of restoring the wetlands at Oak Grove High School's Student Learning Center at 220 W. Lomita Avenue.

Caltrans:

(Continued from Page A-1)

measuring tunnels on Highway 33 to ascertain whether the vertical and horizontal clearances are the appropriate size to accommodate the passage of two trucks traveling in each lane. Caltrans employees will also consider noise, air pollution and traffic congestion, said Haddadeen. They are currently awaiting an Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Diamond Rock Mine and will take the report into consideration, he said. They also plan to examine the size and weight of the added trucks included in the Diamond Rock Mine expansion proposal.

Bennett was pleased that Caltrans offered to conduct the study at no cost and said he hoped the results would verify what he said "common sense tells us about the safety of the roads."

But Caltrans officials disagree with some members of the Committee to Stop the Trucks on one important point.

While many local residents believe that there are already too many hazardous trucks on Highway 33 abusing the mine's permit requirements, the study only focuses on the increased truck trips.

"Right now I think the operation of trucks on Highway 33 is safe," said Haddadeen. "We are only concerned with what the mines are proposing for the future."

But Howard Smith, an active member of the Committee to Stop the Trucks, said that Route 33 already surpasses its maximum traffic loads in the Ojai Valley. The committee members feel that the existing truck traffic on highway 33 poses a safety hazard. Some of the issues they listed in a letter to Scott Ellison, the project planner for the Ozena Valley Ranch mine which is proposing to expand, include the absence of truck scales between Cuyama and Ojai, the deteriorating conditions of the Arnaz Grade and the series of antiquated tunnels that they

"There is no conceivable way that the people of Ojai will allow these trucks to go through as proposed."

— Howard Smith

believe are far too narrow to accommodate modern gravel trucks in their lanes.

One of Smith's concerns about the Caltrans study is that it does not include the Arnaz Grade, a portion of Highway 33 that is frequented by gravel trucks and is already in poor condition, according to members of Committee to Stop the Trucks.

In response to questions about traffic impacts, Ellison explained that congestion from truck trips to and from the Ozena Valley mine can be reduced by restricting additional trucks from traveling during peak traffic hours, and weekends when tourists come into town. But many local residents believe that gravel truck drivers who deliver gravel as independent contractors, have been violating permit requirements and driving during peak traffic hours regardless of restrictions.

"One of my biggest complaints with Ozena's truck drivers is that they have travel restrictions but they never follow those restrictions and the county seems unable to do anything about it," said Bob Walker who lives off of Highway 33 in the Ojai Valley.

Ellison said that it has been difficult to monitor trucks violating their travel restrictions because there are several mines in the area use gravel trucks, each with varying permit restrictions, and it has been almost impossible to identify which mines the trucks are coming from. Trucks coming from the existing GPS Mine use Highway 33 and have no permit regulations while trucks from the

Ozena Valley Ranch are currently not permitted to travel at peak traffic hours.

Ellison said that the Ventura County planners are proposing a more aggressive monitoring program that requires trucks to be identified with placards indicating which mine they are delivering for, as well as a fine to the mining company for each time a restriction is violated. Planners are still awaiting a response from the Santa Barbara Planning Board on the proposed monitoring program. Cooperation from the Santa Barbara planners is an important component of such a program because the Diamond Rock Mine is located in Santa Barbara County.

Still Ellison said he is not sure when or if the monitoring proposal will be approved. The Caltrans study will be completed in about two months said Haddadeen.

Smith said that the Committee to Stop the Trucks is highly concerned that there is a potential conflict of interest in the Caltrans study.

The Ozena Valley Sand and Gravel wet site lists Caltrans as one of its regular customers.

If the study does not find Highway 33 to be unsafe for increased truck traffic, members of the Committee to Stop the Trucks plan to hire an independent company to redo the study.

"There is no conceivable way that the people of Ojai will allow these trucks to go through as proposed," wrote Smith in a letter to Ellison. "As a community we have the experience, the expertise, the total determination, and the deep financial pockets to fight this effort in every legal manner possible."

A fourth meeting of the Committee to Stop the Trucks will be held at Smith's house on April 18 at 5:30 p.m. For more information call Smith at 640-7612.

A public hearing for the Diamond Rock Mine will be held on May 30 at 9 a.m. in Santa Maria. For more information on the hearing location, contact Jeff Kuyper, 252-4277 or at action@lpfw.org.

Subway:

(Continued from Page A-1)

Ojai who does not frequent a chain, whether it be a gas station, a bank or a supermarket. Salomon also says he is highly against Wal-Mart, but has nothing against Subway because it is a cheap healthy eatery which caters to Ojai's working class and student population.

"The food is healthy and cheap," he said. "Not everyone in Ojai is rich." Salomon added that his other tenants in the building including Java Joe's, Curves, and DeHlah Hair Salon, are very excited that Subway is coming.

DiTomaso, who finalized the lease earlier this week, said he had been interested in opening a Subway in Ojai for some time but was discouraged by city managers in the past who told him that it would be an uphill battle. DiTomaso had informally approached the city several years ago but did not tell them of any specific locations he had in mind. Among prospective buildings were the vacant building which was most recently housed James Auto Repair on Ojai Avenue and what is now Jersey Mike's in the Fitzgerald Plaza.

"When Jersey Mike's opened up I realized that the rules of the game had changed," said DiTomaso. He doesn't expect to have to go through the Planning Commission since he is opening up the exact same kind of store

that has been there for over a decade.

"I'll do whatever is required in the city, follow the sign ordinance and whatever else they require," he said. "I'm not here to challenge any guidelines."

DiTomaso said that he can build a store in four to five weeks but expects this one take about four months.

"We'd like to be open in the summertime," he said.

City manager Jere Kernsar said that the city had not yet been contacted by the Subway owner but expects that the project won't need to go before the Planning Commission as long as no changes are made to the usage.

As he had warned at a City Council meeting in January, there is legally nothing to stop chain stores from opening up downtown. The Arcade Plaza district already has a Chevron gas station, a Wells Fargo bank, a Radio Shack, and a Prudential Real Estate Corporation, but no food or retail chains yet.

At the January council meeting, council members agreed that the proliferation of chain stores in the downtown area would threaten Ojai's tourist-based economy. City planners agreed to begin working on developing an appropriate ordinance that would protect Ojai from the proliferation of chain stores without harming local business.

"The council has generally agreed that the character of our

historic district is threatened and we ought to do something," said Kernsar. "That notion has advanced and we are working on it but it can't be done overnight."

Local resident Jeff Furchtchenicht, who recently proposed a controversial ballot initiative that would protect local business and discourage chain stores in the city, said he was appalled to hear that a Subway was going to open.

"The city had an opportunity to put protections in place," he said.

Another Ojai resident, Sue Williamson, said that she was concerned the Subway would set a dangerous precedent inviting more chain stores into the Arcade.

Kernsar explained that any new ordinance would have to be researched carefully and pass through the jurisdiction of several

committees before taking effect. A historic downtown area would have to be identified and decisions regarding the type of ordinance would have to be made.

Council Member Rae Hanstad had one solution: The immediate placement of a temporary moratorium to keep chain stores from opening while the city works on developing an ordinance.

"I'm going to ask for a report on chain stores that includes the possibility of a temporary moratorium on corporate retail stores in our historic district to give the city a chance to develop its policy," she said.

Hanstad said she will ask for the report on Tuesday night's council meeting and request the subject of chain stores to be placed on the next council agenda.

Ojai.Net

Ojai's Local Internet Service Provider

649-5862

56K Dialup
ISDN
High Speed Broadband
Web Hosting

Providing Local Online Service Since 1992

Ojai Community Egg Hunt

Saturday, April 7th, 12-2PM

Egg Hunt For Kids 1-12 Years @ 1PM SHARP

Free Event For The Whole Family!

Brought to you by: **NOVA Club of Ojai Valley** **OJAI VALLEY NEWS**

Homegrown Washington Mutual

Boccali's

PIZZA & PASTA
Italian Homestyle Cooking
in a Country Atmosphere

Great Salads • Meat & Vegetarian Dishes
• Draft Beer • Wine • Fresh Lemonade

Now Serving
Our Fresh, Famous
Local Strawberry Shortcake

3277 E. OJAI AVENUE 646-6116
Hours: Mon. & Tues. 4pm-9pm
Weds. - Sun. 11:45 am to 9pm

840 Ventura Ave. OAK VIEW 649-1057
Hours: 4pm-9pm 7 days a week

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Good Friday Service

7:00 p.m. • April 6th
Choral Music • Chamber Ensemble
(Nursery and Toddler Care)

Easter Day Services

8:00 a.m. Blended
(Nursery and Toddler Care)

9:15 a.m. Blended
(Sunday School for Nursery thru 8th Grade)

10:45 a.m. Traditional
(Children's Program for Nursery thru 4th Grade)

6:00 p.m. Easter Evening Jazz Celebration
(Children's Program for Nursery thru 4th Grade)

304 N. Foothill Road • 646-1437

OJAI PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH