

\$30,000 lawsuit filed over trapped squirrel's nutty rampage

By KELLY NIX

A DISORDERLY squirrel that seriously damaged the inside of a Carmel home — breaking China, destroying furniture, chewing electrical cords and severing water lines — is at the center of a lawsuit filed against a local real estate company.

In a suit filed Jan. 18, Mary Brinton alleges someone working for Estates on the Bay, which Brinton hired to rent

out her Rio Vista Drive home, left a door open, allowing a squirrel to enter and cause nearly \$30,000 in damage.

"A caretaker, unaware of the presence of the squirrel, closed and locked the doors, and the home remained in that locked condition for one week," according to the lawsuit, "during which time said frustrated squirrel, seeking its freedom, literally wreaked havoc on the home."

During her week-long, rent-free occupancy of the house last summer, the rambunctious rodent severed a water line to an ice maker, chewed electrical cords, broke China and

gnawed on wood trim and telephone lines.

"As the result of such efforts to extricate and entertain itself while imprisoned within the home," according to the suit filed in Monterey County Superior Court, "extensive water damage to the kitchen floor was caused."

The damage, which included lots of gnaw marks and droppings, amounted to \$27,729.13, which Brinton is seeking from Estates on the Bay.

"The reason it did so much damage is that it was a female

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CHP officer's U-turn didn't turn out so well

By MARY BROWNFIELD

CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY Patrol officer Matthew Lieb, 33, received stitches in his head at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula Saturday morning after he pulled from the shoulder of narrow Carmel Valley Road into the path of a large truck driven by Cachagua resident Tom Nason. The collision occurred just west of the turnoff for Tassajara Road.

"Our officer was parked on the westbound shoulder of Carmel Valley Road, and he began to initiate a U-turn and didn't see an approaching vehicle also moving in the westbound direction," explained CHP public information officer Bob Lehman.

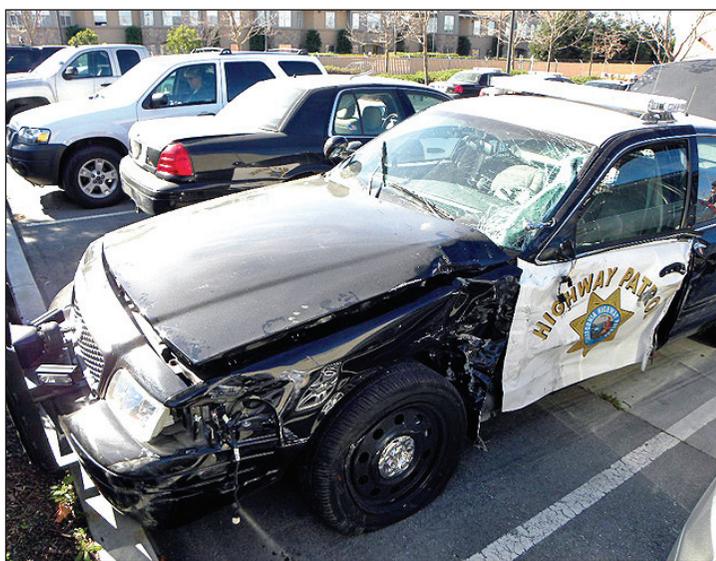
Fortunately, Lieb saw the oncoming Ford F-550 truck at the last minute and managed to slightly correct his patrol car, avoiding a T-bone crash that could have killed him. Instead, Nason's truck plowed along the side of the CHP cruiser, smashing the door, wrinkling the windshield and munching the fender.

"It was a big truck, so the officer's pretty lucky," Lehman observed. The crash occurred around 8:30 a.m. Jan. 22.

While Lieb was taken to CHOMP for treatment of the lacerations on his head, Nason was uninjured, and his truck sustained moderate damage.

Lehman said collisions involving officers undergo the same investigation and scrutiny as wrecks caused by civilians, and the CHP is looking into Lieb's crash.

Because making a U-turn from the shoulder of the roadway is against the law — and has resulted in many serious accidents on the Peninsula — it's likely the officer



PHOTO/MARY BROWNFIELD

The CHP officer who crashed this patrol car on Carmel Valley Road Saturday morning received stitches in his head, but the driver of the truck that hit it was uninjured.

will be found at fault. Citations are rare in crashes unless they involve drivers who are unlicensed or don't have insurance, according to Lehman, so Lieb won't get a ticket, but if the investigation concludes it was his fault, he may undergo some additional training by the CHP. Other corrective action could also be taken.

In addition, the CHP will foot the bill for repairs to Nason's truck.

"In this case, the highway patrol will be the one that will cover the cost of that," Lehman said.

C.V. environmentalist denied appointment to county commission

By CHRIS COUNTS

SHE MAY one day be a member of the Monterey County Planning Commission, but it's unlikely Janet Brennan will ever serve as a representative for the part of the county that includes Marina, Sand City and Seaside — unless she moves there.

Just two weeks after the Carmel Valley resident was nominated by 4th District Supervisor Jane Parker to represent her area on the planning commission, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday 3-2 to deny her confirmation after hearing from residents of the district who opposed the planning commission seat going to an outsider.

Supervisors Simon Salinas, Fernando Armenta and Lou Calcagno opposed the appointment, while supervisors Dave Potter and Parker supported it.

The first sign of trouble for Brennan's confirmation came Jan. 11, shortly after Parker nominated her for a planning commission vacancy in her district. Potter, 5th District supervisor, initially objected to the nomination on the grounds that because Brennan lives in his district, he should have been consulted on the choice. Potter didn't object to Brennan's credentials — he simply asked to meet with her

A seat that 'belongs' to Seaside, Marina and Sand City

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Judge: No more water hookups until desal plant is finished

By KELLY NIX

MONTEREY PENINSULA residents would face even more water restrictions if a proposed decision issued this week by a judge is approved by the California Public Utilities Commission.

In a ruling released Tuesday, Administrative Law Judge Gary Weatherford said California American Water cannot provide water for any new uses until a desal plant is built to eliminate overpumping from the Carmel River.

Though the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District put a stop to most new connections after a state cutback order in 1995, the latest moratorium would be even more prohibitive, cutting off access to the small amounts of water set aside by some cities for emergencies and important civic projects.

"Anybody who was going to get water through the cities' allocations would be affected," said Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Bowie said.

It's possible that even those few homeowners who have water credits to use for additions to their houses

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Prosecution, defense face off before King trial begins

By MARY BROWNFIELD

THE DEATH of Joel Woods in front of Pacific Grove Middle School in September 2008 was a tragic accident caused by properly used prescription painkillers, not a crime, according to a public defender representing Deborah King, the driver of the BMW SUV that struck Woods as he was picking up his son from school.

The attorney, Heather Rogers, is so adamant about the point that she doesn't even want Woods referred to as a "victim" in front of the jury as King is tried for murdering him by driving under the influence.

The verbal question was one of many argued by Rogers and prosecutor Steve Somers in front of Monterey County Superior Court Judge Russell Scott Monday.

They sought rulings from Scott on everything from whether King's prison time for multiple DUI convictions could be raised during testimony, to whether witnesses could use the words, "reckless" and "impaired," not to mention "victim."

King, who was arrested shortly after the fatal accident more than two years ago but then spent several months in a mental institution after she was declared unfit to stand trial, appeared in court Jan. 24 in civilian clothes with shackles on her wrists and ankles that were later removed so she could sit comfortably. Her attorney claims she suffers from chronic pain due to injuries originating from an attempted rape when she was a prison guard many years ago.

Regardless, Somers plans to prove King was addicted to painkillers and other drugs — including those that allegedly impaired her driving so badly that she hit and killed Woods

with her SUV. He also alleges her five DUI convictions in Kern County in the 1990s, the last of which resulted in a two-

See **KING** page 8A

Website offers 'proof' of P.B. art heist



The former P.B. residents who claim their art collection was stolen in September 2009 have set up a website — including extensive photos of the works packed in boxes and hanging on walls — to show the claim is real. See page 2A.