

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## P.B. WOMAN DIES IN MYSTERIOUS KITCHEN FIRE

By MARY SCHLEY

A PEBBLE Beach woman found lying on her kitchen floor with second- and third-degree burns covering 90 percent of her body last Thursday evening later died at a Santa Clara County trauma center.

While the Santa Clara County Coroner's Office would not release the cause of death, an official confirmed the victim was 64-year-old Mary Wyatt, who was discovered by her caregiver at around 5:20 p.m. Jan. 26.

After the caregiver dialed 911, according to Cal Fire public information officer Jonathan Pangburn, firefighters arrived to find Wyatt lying on the floor, critically burned but conscious and breathing. Residual smoke drifted in the kitchen, but there were no immediate signs of fire.

Because she was in dire need of urgent medical care, the crew rushed to get her to the hospital and did not try to ask her what happened, according to Pangburn.

"Her clothing caught fire, but by the time our folks got there, it was pretty much gone. Any kind of material she may have been wearing was unrecognizable," he said. "They didn't spend a lot of time with her, because they wanted to get her out quickly."

Due to the severity of Wyatt's injuries, the paramedics requested an air ambulance to fly her to the nearest burn center. But fog prevented the helicopter from landing, so she was taken to Community Hospital of Monterey Peninsula, where an ER surgeon assessed Wyatt and made arrangements to transfer her to a burn center, according to Pangburn.

Meanwhile, at the residence at Padre Lane and Laureles Lane, firefighters searched for further signs of fire but found none.

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## Highwire act in Big Sur



PHOTO/COURTESY CALTRANS

Highway 1 reopened Tuesday at Pitkins Curve after crews cleared debris from a Jan. 22 landslide. They also risked their lives to prevent more rocks from reaching the road. See page 11A.

## PEPE'S CAMPAIGN GETS BIG KICKOFF



Vesuvio restaurant was packed Tuesday night with more than 300 supporters of Rich Pepe's mayoral campaign. The candidate (left) told the crowd he would use his "business expertise" to help "lead Carmel to a new cultural and economic renaissance," and promised that, as mayor, he would devote all his attention to the city's problems and not use the post as a "stepping stone" to higher office.

PHOTOS/GINA TARO



## Showdown at Brinton's as owner tries to change locks

■ Store also sued for not repaying loan

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE ABRUPT closure of Brinton's — which was announced Jan. 22 to its employees and went into effect the following day — took an unexpected turn this week when a Monterey County Sheriff's deputy was called to enforce a court order requiring that the store be vacated by 3 p.m. on Jan. 31.

"The owners refused to leave," said attorney Tony Lombardo, who is representing the Prim Family Partnership in Nevada, which owns the Carmel Rancho shopping center. "We went to change the locks, and there was a big scene. They tried to block our entrance. We had to call the sheriff to carry out the court order."

Sgt. Mike Burns confirmed the sheriff's office responded to the dispute. He said the owners asked for more time to remove some property from the store. "An arrangement was made to give them a little more time," Burns said.

According to Lombardo, Brinton's owner, Richard Brinton, was on scene during the incident.

Prim Family Partnership, meanwhile, is in negotiations with a possible tenant for the now vacant space in its shopping center, Lombardo confirmed. He described the business as a "general store," but said it's too early to release any more details. "The deal isn't completed," he said.

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## Neighbors question Mission Fields firefight

By MARY SCHLEY

THE STORY swept through the neighborhood like a wildfire: The hydrant failed when firefighters tried to save a burning Mission Fields home last Monday, forcing the crews to wait 10 or 15 minutes before aggressively battling the blaze.

But fire officials said the rumor isn't true and that everything worked according to plan when they fought the fire — including the hydrant.

**The claim: a 'trickle'**

Several property owners in the area of David and Debbie Travaille's residence, where a garage fire spread to the laun-

## Water district fights to restore 'user fee'

By KELLY NIX

THE GENERAL manager of the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District will make a desperate plea to a judge in San Francisco next week to restore a "user fee" on customers' water bills the district argues is necessary to avoid layoffs and a drastic reduction in the environmental work it performs on the Carmel River.

The user fee, which accounts for 46 percent of the water district's \$10 million annual budget, had been collected from customers since 1983 in order to help pay for staff salaries,

dry room, attic and roof, causing an estimated \$300,000 in damage shortly before 9 a.m. Jan. 23, claimed water from the firehose was just a "trickle" after it was hooked to a hydrant. They also said firefighters were either forbidden to use the water on their engines or "had to wait" for a water truck to arrive.

See NEIGHBORS page 24A

## Doctor who sued caregiver over financial abuse dies

By KELLY NIX

LAWRENCE LOFTUS — the Carmel man who filed a lawsuit against his former caregiver nearly two years ago for taking millions of dollars from his estate — has died. He was 88.

Loftus, a retired physician who had a home on Scenic Road, passed away Jan. 21 less than two years after he filed suit against his former caregiver, Charles Harper.

"He was a sweet guy," Loftus' Carmel attorney, Frank Hespe, told The Pine Cone Tuesday.

Loftus made news in February 2010 when he filed suit against Harper in Monterey County Superior Court, alleging the caregiver looted his estate, includ-

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