

The Carmel Pine Cone

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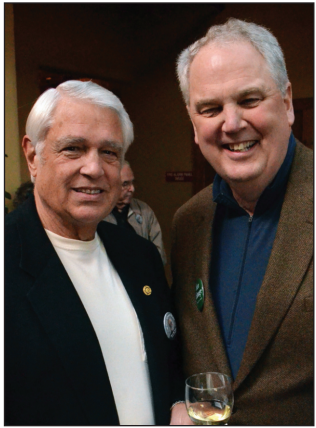
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Council, mayoral campaigns off to low-key start

■ Three candidates forums scheduled

By MARY SCHLEY

THE CAMPAIGN season officially begins next week with the first of three forums focusing on the April 10



(Upper left) Merv Sutton greeted city councilman and candidate Ken Talmage at a campaign event Monday, while council candidates Bob Profeta and Tom Leverone (above) and Victoria Beach (left, with supporter Cindy Lloyd) also got their election efforts under way.

PHOTOS/PAUL MILLER

election for mayor and two Carmel City Council members, and candidates are already working hard to distinguish themselves from the rest of the field.

Mayoral contenders Jason Burnett and Rich Pepe, and council hopefuls Ken Talmage, Tom Leverone, Bob Profeta and Victoria Beach will answer questions and debate community issues during the Carmel Residents Association's forum set for 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 29, at Sunset Center. Monterey County District Attorney Dean Flippo will moderate the forum, which will be held in Sunset Center's Carpenter Hall.

The next candidates forum will be hosted by the Carmel Chamber of Commerce and is set for Thursday, March 8, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. in the downstairs hall at the Church of the Wayfarer, on Lincoln Street between Ocean and Seventh avenues.

The final forum, organized by The Carmel Pine Cone, will take place Tuesday, March 13, at 7 p.m., also in Carpenter Hall.

In conjunction with the March 13 event, resident Richard Kreitman is organizing a Locals Night, wherein downtown restaurants and other businesses will offer deals, such as a free glass of wine, to entice residents — primarily voters — to eat and drink downtown before and after they build on their political knowledge during the Q&A with the candidates. Kreitman undertook similar efforts in 2005 and 2008 and hopes they will become a regular occurrence.

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Water district's user fee may be added to property tax bills

■ Timetable doesn't include public vote

By KELLY NIX

THE MONTEREY Peninsula Water Management District is getting flak for its efforts to collect a disputed user fee from water customers in a way that a prominent realtors' group contends "circumvents" the voting process.

At issue is an 8.325 percent user fee that for years the district got from 40,000 Monterey Peninsula water users to help pay for Carmel River environmental work, salaries and other projects. In July 2009, the fee, which had been tacked on to customers' California American Water bills, was removed after Public Utilities Commission judge Maribeth Bushey told Cal Am to find another way to fund the water district's work.

While the water district has been struggling for the past two years to pay for its projects, officials received more bad news Feb. 8, when Bushey declined to reinstate the fee on an appeal.

Now, the district is taking heat for trying to collect the user fee through property taxes instead of putting the issue to a public vote — which some believe violates Proposition 218, a measure voters passed in 1996 to curb perceived abuses in the use of assessments and property-related fees.

"This is a total circumvention of the fair and ethical way

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NOAA FISH LAB IN P.G. MAY CLOSE

By KELLY NIX

THE FEDERAL fisheries lab in Pacific Grove that's been the focus of a lot of fuss in the past two years because of towering lights the government installed on the oceanfront property is slated to be shut down to help trim the federal budget.

As part of his fiscal year 2013 budget unveiled last week, President Barack Obama is proposing that the Southwest Fisheries Science Center's Pacific Grove laboratory, along with others in California, be closed and consolidated.

"We recognize that facility closures are extremely difficult on all involved, partic-

ularly our employees, and also our colleagues and partners," according to Cisco Werner, director of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center, which also includes the NOAA facilities in Santa Cruz and La Jolla.

The closure of the NOAA building might be music to some people's ears, though. In March 2010, NOAA installed a half-dozen towering light poles with attached solar panels. The lights have drawn harsh criticism from residents who say they create light pollution and don't fit in with the coastal environment.

The Pacific Grove building recently sparked the interest of U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, who called the lights "visually intrusive" and "starkly institutional." He also took issue with an unsightly chain-link fence that surrounds the building.

In a Feb. 2 letter to NOAA chief Jane Lubchenko, Farr criticized the agency for not notifying P.G. officials or the California Coastal Commission before installing the \$36,000 light poles. Both agencies complained about them.

The NOAA facility also made news in 2008 when NOAA paid more than \$120,000 for a loud mural depicting marine life around the top of the building.

Werner, who sent a one-page letter to Pacific Grove city officials outlining the possible closure, didn't say what the government — which owns the NOAA building and the land it sits on — would do with the building or property if it's vacated.

In the event the NOAA facility is eventually torn down, Pacific Grove City Councilman Dan Miller proposed using the property to benefit the city.

"Open space would be a good thing," Miller told The Pine Cone. "And if we can

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\$28 million tear-down in Pebble Beach

By KELLY NIX

TAKING A wrecking ball to the most expensive home ever sold in Monterey County would be unthinkable to most people. But that's exactly what the owner of a Pebble Beach estate has done.

The stunning oceanfront estate at 3294 17 Mile Drive — which sold for a record \$28 million in 2000 — achieved another milestone recently when it became the county's priciest tear-down.

The owner of the property, Blossom Cove LLC, in Burlingame, razed the distinctive Cape Cod-style house on the property — which includes a private beach — in order to build a

larger home and other amenities.

"They are constructing a 7,059-square-foot single-family dwelling with a 3,508-square-foot basement," Monterey County planner Ramon Montano told The Pine Cone. "It also has an attached, 650-square-foot, three-car garage and a 425-square-foot guest house."

On Thursday, scores of workers were at the homesite, where the charming yellow house, owned for decades by the Devlin family, is no more. The property offers magnificent views of Stillwater Cove, Carmel Bay and the Pebble Beach Golf Links and is just short jaunt to The Lodge at Pebble Beach.

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Dry weather brings risk of winter wildfires

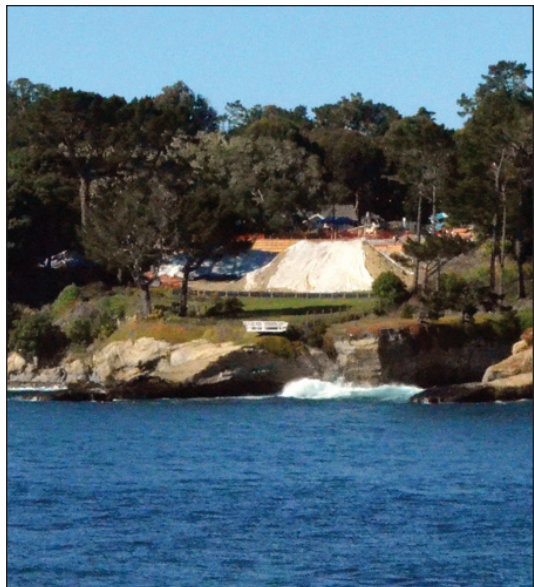
By CHRIS COUNTS

DESPITE THE fact that February is typically Monterey County's wettest month, a brush fire on the South Big Sur Coast Feb. 7 reminded Big Sur, Carmel Highlands and Carmel Valley residents that wildfire season has arrived — or perhaps never went away.

There's a dangerous flip side to the glorious weather we've been enjoying.

"Plant moisture levels are historically low for this time of year," reported Andrew Madsen, a

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PHOTOS/PAUL MILLER

For 70 years, the mansion at 3294 17 Mile Drive (left) was a familiar sight from the Pebble Beach golf course and Stillwater Cove. It also set a local record when it sold for \$28 million in 2000. But the house was recently torn down (above).