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Realtors may look to courts to stop user ‘fee’

By KELLY NIX

DESPITE EVIDENCE this week of strong public opposition to a new user fee to pay for water supply projects, directors with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District voted to approve the charge, prompting a warning from a realtors’ group that it might use legal action to stop it.

While most of the 100 people at a water board meeting at the Hyatt Regency Monterey Monday evening were opposed to the fee, the water board voted unanimously for it, saying the \$3.7 million it would generate annually is crucial to fund much needed water-supply projects for the Peninsula.

However, in response to the board’s approval, Kevin Stone, government and community affairs director for Monterey County Association of Realtors, told The Pine Cone Thursday the group is pursuing all possible “legal remedies.”

“It could be that we file an injunction,” to stop the fee from being implemented, Stone said.

At Monday’s meeting, water board directors got an earful from members of the Monterey County Association of Realtors, the Monterey County Hospitality Association’s Coalition of Peninsula Businesses, and others, many of whom held signs stating “No Water Tax.”

“You know what we should do?” said a defiant Lawrence Samuels, who took the microphone and faced the audience, refusing to acknowledge water directors. “We should try to have a measure to put [the water district] out of business. Abolish this board!”

(In 2002, voters approved a measure calling for the water district to be disbanded, but the recommendation was ignored by the state Legislature.)

See **FEE** page 15A

P.G. council backs Agha desal plan

By KELLY NIX

INSISTING IT had “nothing to lose,” the Pacific Grove City Council Wednesday night voted to back a desalination plant in Moss Landing proposed by businessman Nader Agha.

In a 6-1 vote, with councilman Robert Huitt dissenting, the council voted to adopt a resolution establishing Pacific Grove as the lead agency for what Agha calls the “People’s Moss Landing Water Desal Project,” a plan he promises will be the least expensive project to deliver water to the Monterey Peninsula.

Before the vote, Agha offered to write a check for \$50,000 to cover staff and other city costs to get the project going.

“I will never let you down,” a delighted Agha told the council. “And you will never be disappointed.”

See **AGHA** page 9A

Poetry, jokes and accolades at swearing in

By MARY SCHLEY



PHOTOS/KERRY BELSER

Sue McCloud said farewell and (from left) Jason Burnett, Ken Talmage and Victoria Beach took office Tuesday after being elected by impressive margins last week.

MAYOR SUE McCloud was repeatedly heralded for her record-setting 12 years of service Tuesday as she made way for Mayor-elect Jason Burnett. He, along with city councilmembers Ken Talmage and Victoria Beach, took the oath of office in front of a standing-room-only crowd in Carmel City Hall a week after they were elected, while outgoing councilwoman Karen Sharp said farewell and also received accolades for her tenure.

City administrator Jason Stilwell presented McCloud with a big scrapbook full of letters, clippings and other memorabilia commemorating significant moments throughout her administration.

“I’ll probably be the only mayor who will have to ask for a variance” to make room for so many collectibles, McCloud said, before thanking the residents for making Carmel more than just a wealthy, isolated enclave.

“We are now more integrated — we are not known as the community on the other side of the hill — because the issues are so large we can’t face them by ourselves,” she said. “It’s important to be able to work with our neighbors.”

She commended city employees for being good ambassadors and said she wished she had kept all of the letters she received from people recounting their positive experiences in town. “I also got letters from people about parking tickets, and they were mostly not thankful,” she said.

McCloud expressed gratitude to her family for support and help along the way, particularly when it came to dog care, and finally answered the frequently asked question about why she didn’t run for reelection by reciting Ogden Nash’s poem, “Fossils”:

*At midnight in the museum hall
The fossils gathered for a ball
There were no drums or saxophones,
But just the clatter of their bones,
A rolling, rattling, carefree circus
Of mammoth polkas and mazurkas.
Pterodactyls and brontosaurus
Sang ghostly prehistoric choruses.
Amid the mastodontic wassail
I caught the eye of one small fossil.
“Cheer up, sad world,” he said, and
winked —
“It’s kind of fun to be extinct.”*

With that, she handed over the gavel to

See **SWORN** page 9A

FORMER SUPERVISOR SEEKS TO OUST POTTER FROM COUNTY BOARD

By KELLY NIX

CLAIMING THAT the current Monterey County Board of Supervisors engages in too many “secret, backroom deals,” a Pebble Beach attorney who served on the board from 1981 to 1993 is promoting “transparency and accountability” for his next run at the county seat.

Marc Del Piero, 59, will square off in the June 5 primary against Pacific Grove Mayor Carmelita Garcia and incumbent Dave Potter, who’s held the county supervisor seat since 1996.

“Monterey County government is not functioning either effectively or in the best interest of the general public,” Del Piero told The Pine Cone. “I think there is a real malaise that has fallen over county government, and I think the voters of the 5th District deserve better.”

As an example of what’s wrong with the current board, he cited the allegations against former county water board director Steve Collins, who last fall was charged by county prosecutors with several criminal conflict of interest charges related to the regional desalination project. Collins claims Potter and other county supervisors approved of the dual roles that landed him in hot water and encouraged him to undertake them.

Del Piero, who is chief counsel for a Mendocino County water district and also contracts with the district that operates the Carmel Highlands water supply, said he envisions a small desal plant, a reclaimed wastewater project and aquifer storage and recovery to solve the Peninsula’s water crisis.

“It’s a combination of projects that need to be brought on collectively to address the

10,500-acre-foot shortfall that was identified by the State Water Resources Control Board,” said the Pebble Beach resident. “The real tragedy is that it’s almost 20 years after the fact, and millions of dollars of ratepayer money have been squandered, and there is not a drop to show for it.”

For seven years, Del Piero was a member of the state water board and chaired its task force on desalination and water reuse. He served on the Monterey County Board of Supervisors for three consecutive terms and as board chair in the 1980s.

If elected, Del Piero said he would make it a goal to “create an atmosphere that encourages growth of new businesses and new jobs.” He also said he’s “seriously concerned” about the traffic problems on Carmel Valley Road and would address the issue if elected.

“I think that approving projects that continue to degrade the level of service on Carmel Valley Road with out any apparent mitigation or long-term planning for remediation is not responsible,” according to Del Piero, who said he’s equally worried about traffic on Highway 68.



Marc Del Piero

Writing Nepal’s constitution not for the faint of heart

By KELLY NIX

AT HIS Carmel law firm, Frank Hespe has handled some of the county’s most notorious elder abuse cases, coming to the aid of seniors who have been swindled by predators. But not many of Hespe’s clients know that he can casually claim the title of “international peacekeeper.”

The 51-year-old attorney recently returned from Kathmandu, Nepal, where he spent nearly four days in talks in an effort to forge agreements between former Maoist guerrillas and the Nepalese government over the war-torn country’s long-sought constitution.

“I had ex-Maoist guerrillas on one side, and at the other table there were two retired three-star Nepalese government generals,” Hespe told The Pine Cone.

“These guys a few years ago were shooting at each other, and

now they are sitting at the same table trying to enact a constitution,” he said.

Until a peace accord in 2006, Maoist rebels battled Nepalese government forces in an effort to overthrow the country’s monarchy. Since then, the country has failed to write a constitution and is facing pressure to come up with one.

During four days of workshops, Hespe and others — including Naval Postgraduate School professor Matt Vaccaro — were commissioned by the U.S. Department of Defense to hash out details of the document.

“It’s common after horrible civil war to figure out how to put the genie back in the bottle and form a government,” said Hespe, who is an expert in international law.

See **NEPAL** page 12A