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Caltrans gets creative to save highway

By CHRIS COUNTS

AN EXTRAORDINARY collection of erosion-control projects — some looking like fine-art installations and others resembling medieval torture devices — has sprouted up like mushrooms along the Big Sur Coast as the California Department of Transportation gears up for a winter of mudslides.

At Grimes Creek and Highway 1 — less than a mile from where a June 21 lightning strike ignited the devastating Basin Complex Fire — Caltrans workers recently installed two erosion-control systems that dramatically illustrate just how worried officials are about the effect of rain on hillsides stripped bare of vegetation by the fires.

The installations along Grimes Creek provide two dis-

tinct lines of defense against debris flowing downstream toward the highway. The first system, known as a debris flow barrier, resembles a volleyball net strung up across a creek. Located about 120 feet upstream from Highway 1, the net is actually made up of flexible metal rings of various sizes, which often form interesting patterns that could pass for abstract art. But despite their attractive shapes, the barriers are supported with concrete footings and steel posts, and can withstand a tremendous impact.

“The barriers are designed to absorb the energy associated with a large debris flow,” explained Steve Balaban, major damage coordinator for the San Luis Obispo Caltrans office.

Balaban said Caltrans began experimenting with the barriers in 2003 after a major wildfire in the San Bernardino Mountains.

“We learned a lot that winter because our barriers were being hit,” he said. “We modified them with what we learned.”

According to Balaban, the concept of the barriers dates back to World War II, when a similar system was devised to stop submarines.

Closer to the highway is the second project, which is known as a riser system. A 10-foot-tall corrugated metal tube rises from the entrance to a culvert under the road. Meanwhile, two 40-foot corrugated metal tubes protrude from the first tube at opposite 45-degree angles. The tubes all have “windows,” which allow



PHOTO/CHRIS COUNTS

A barrier designed to stop World War II-era submarines has been erected across Grimes Creek and nine others in Big Sur to stop a winter's worth of mud and debris.

See **EROSION** page 12A

Potter's stalker stockpiled guns

By KELLY NIX

A CARMEL Valley man who for years has been “fixated” on 5th District Supervisor Dave Potter has been stockpiling firearms and obtained a dozen “high-end” handguns in the last year, according to police.

Two weeks ago, Potter obtained a restraining order against David Fairhurst, 47, who has allegedly left dozens of threatening and harassing phone messages at Potter's Monterey office through the years.

“I am fearful because of Fairhurst's behavior and his possession of numerous firearms ... that he will escalate his behavior to actual violence soon,” Potter said, according to the restraining order.

The order requires Fairhurst to stay at least 200 yards away from Potter, and Potter's home and office, and not con-

See **STALKER** page 19A

Neighbor complaints delay school classrooms

By MARY BROWNFIELD

WHILE MANY bond-funded improvements at Carmel's public schools have been completed or are under way, work at River School is behind schedule. Although the state architect — which has dominion over development at public schools — signed off on the plans for a three-classroom wing and a new multipurpose room, a neighbor's complaints have forced delays as officials commission studies and seek county approval.

The resident, whom district officials would not name, first

See **CLASSROOMS** page 16A

Schools to wage bloody competition

By MARY BROWNFIELD

RIVALRIES AMONG high schools are common, most often involving sports, but a newly established three-way battle between Carmel High, Pacific Grove High and Stevenson involves blood. Not spilling it — giving it.

Organized by longtime blood donor and CHS teacher Therese Strutner, who is also

the advisor of the school's student Red Cross club, a Battle of the Blood Drives will kick off when Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula parks its Bloodmobile outside the Ocean Avenue campus Dec. 1 and 2. RLS and PGHS are set to counter with blood drives at their schools sometime after that, and whichever brings in the most donations will win a trophy. Strutner envisions the Battle becoming an annual contest akin to the Shoe Game between the CHS and PGHS football teams.

As someone with the relatively rare O-negative blood type, Strutner has been a devoted donor and long recognized the importance of routine contributions, considering how perishable blood is and the vast quantities in which it is sometimes needed. “I'm a universal donor,” she explained.

If Strutner ever needed a transfusion, her life would depend on an equally generous donor with the same rare type.

“It's hard for me to find blood, but I can give blood to anyone,” she said.

But it was a recent incident involving her husband, Phil, that inspired the idea of the Battle of the Blood Drives.

He had undergone a routine colonoscopy late one recent

See **BLOODY** page 13A

HOTEL PLAN STILL ‘TOO MASSIVE’ FOR SOME

By MARY BROWNFIELD

THE BOUTIQUE hotel slated to replace the Carmel Sands Lodge will either bring new life to a lackluster part of town by doing away with an ugly motel and asphalt parking lot at San Carlos and Fifth, or it will block views and cost people jobs, according to comments made during the Carmel Planning Commission's second hearing on the proposal last week.

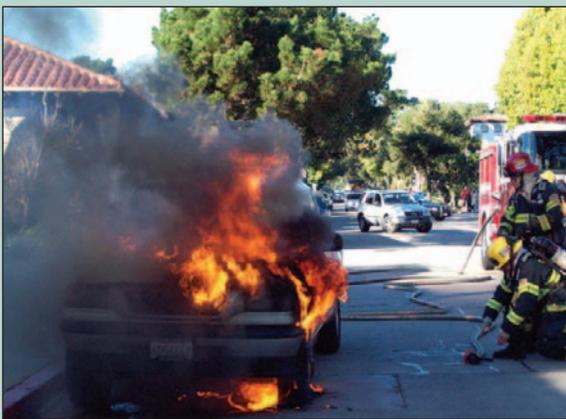
Architect Eric Miller described changes made to the proposal in since it was introduced in August, but commissioners made no decisions Nov. 12, instead opting to wait until after Dec. 3, when the public-comment period closes on an environmental study of the 58-room hotel.

Business partners David and Harry How hope to tear down the 42-room Carmel Sands motel and Kurt's Carmel Chop House restaurant to build a 58-room hotel (including one manager's unit), day spa, tapas bar, rooftop deck and 68-space subterranean parking garage.

In August, the commission requested changes, including a public walkway that would encourage people to explore the property, no buildings larger than 10,000 square feet, a more inviting Mission Street frontage, preservation of more trees, a wider range of materials and styles among the buildings, lower heights and as many green practices as possible.

See **HOTEL** page 14A

Truck fire on San Carlos Street



PHOTO/BERNARD MARTINO

An electrical problem sparked the fire that destroyed a pickup truck on San Carlos Street last Friday. Fortunately, the driver escaped. See the story, page 3A.



A pair of businessmen want to replace the outdated Carmel Sands Lodge with an upscale hotel, but some residents contend it would be a poor fit for the corner.

RENDERING/COURTESY ERIC MILLER ARCHITECTS