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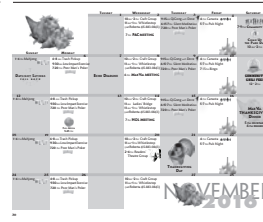
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SMART Start Date Extended



SMART's October 14th reporting of a new, late Spring 2017, target start date allows the plans for a contiguous quiet zone between Novato and San Rafael to proceed.

Seniors at Whistlestop More Than Just Riders

Whistlestop provides not only transportation services to residents at Marin Valley but, with over 500 trips a day to those unable to use public transportation, they are open for new drivers.

Almost 50 percent of Whistlestop drivers are 60 years or older. You won't just be given a bus, gas money, and \$14-\$15/hr. with benefits, you'll start with a two-week training program to become comfortable driving a vehicle a little larger than normal. If you have a good driving record, able to lift 50 lbs., can pass a pre-employment DMV physical, and are able to assist a client not quite as fortunate as yourself on and off your bus, you can enjoy a worthwhile and rewarding full-time or part-time job, getting people where they need to go, when they need to be there.

Please feel free to chat with John Garratt, 415-320-5064 cell.

2016-17 Directory Update

New Residents

Cynthia Smith

176 Marin Valley Drive
415-842-7929

Terry Patten

8 Wild Oak Drive
415-499-7737, 415-302-7671 cell
terry@integralheart.com

New Walking Path Installation



PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN FELD

Walking path completed by PG&E between Marin Valley and Panorama Dr., showing, below, a new dog station, and Fergie accompanied by Tom Bowlin.

THE ECHO

NOVEMBER 2016

MARIN VALLEY MOBILE COUNTRY CLUB

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www.mobilehomeboard.com/

MARIN VALLEY MOBILE COUNTRY CLUB

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Bill Davis, John Feld, Alan Gump,
David Gray, Carol-Joy Harris
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SUBMITTING ARTICLES

Email articles with "ECHO" as the first word of the subject line and a copy of the article in the body of the email to Erma Wheatley:
ermawheatley@gmail.com

Images should be as large as possible to enable a 300 ppi resolution (pixels / inch).

DEADLINE Everything is due the 8th of the month or sooner for the following month's edition.

Letter to Residents Management Update

Greetings from the PAC Board.

Our finances are in order. The debt service ratio on the bank loan financing the purchase of MVMCC is 2.59 as of August 31, 2016.

In conversations with City staff we have learned that their plan is to conduct a workshop by the end of the year concerning the rent differential issues at MVMCC and to explore options for rent subsidies for those residents in financial need. After this meeting, their intent is to bring the issue to the City Council and obtain approval for the direction to be taken.

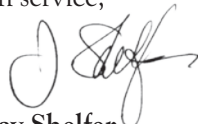
There are several pending issues concerning MVMCC that City staff must address. Their plan is to prioritize them after the rent differential issue. Currently, with the new City Manager coming on board at the end of October and with several key personnel moving on to outside positions, City staff is concerned with a multitude of pressing matters. One of those is the attempt to establish a quiet zone in Novato with regard to the SMART train. The City Council and staff are working diligently with the directors/manager of the SMART Train along with the City of San Rafael and Marin County to accomplish this. We will know a lot more next month.

Please pay careful attention to MVEST information and our Manager's advice pertaining to the recent grass fire. We narrowly missed a catastrophe. It was a major eye-opener to the problem of fires. The City of Novato, our Manager, and MVEST are working out strategies to better protect our community.

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be at **7 pm, November 2.**

In service,



Jay Shelfer
PAC PRESIDENT
jjshelfer@yahoo.com

Welcome to Fall. Management is busy directing Park improvement projects prior to winter weather, which include:

New flat-screen HD TV installed in Fireside Room. Separate cable outlet installed in Card Room. TV to follow.

Retaining walls: Nine retaining walls have been completed.

Drainage: Several French drains and tracks to evacuate standing water have been completed.

Asphalt maintenance: Twelve driveways overlaid or replaced with new asphalt. Seal coating with repairs applied to seven cul-de-sacs plus three extra driveways. Crack fill with hot tar applied to main road. Multiple street repairs have been completed.

PG&E path: Walking path and dog station installations have been completed (see opposite page). Landscaping to follow.

POOL CLOSED for repair November 1 – 15, 2016.

Fire Abatement: 88 days of labor logged in to the second phase of the fire abatement project.

MVMCC Grass Fire – Main Messages: Scary fire

No injuries / no structures damaged.

Response was effective in protecting the community.

Lots of effective prevention work slowed the path of the fire.

Meeting with City/Fire District leadership —
all on the same page regarding preventative fire abatement and education for the community.

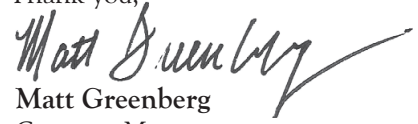
Continue work on defensible space in common areas.

City Authorization provided to Park Management:

Remove fire-prone plants around participating individual homes to create more defensible space, at no cost to residents. Call Matt for details.

Evacuation — only at direction of Incident Command Post during an incident. Stay off the roads during an emergency so as not to impact the first responders.

Thank you,



Matt Greenberg
GENERAL MANAGER
gm.mvmcc@gmail.com

415-883-5911, Fax 415-883-1971

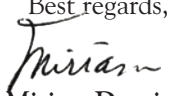
HOL Home Owners League Message

As the fire on the hillside overlooking the Park raged on Friday, September 30, residents were advised to shelter in place. Consider how smoke from the fire blackened the air, stung the eyes, and made breathing difficult. Residents I spoke with afterward reported chest pains and dizziness — frightening sensations many of us suffer every

winter as the air fills with wood smoke. I urge you to consider the blessings of good health and good cheer you can bestow upon your neighbors this holiday season by reducing your use of wood-burning devices.

On cold winter nights, wood smoke from residential wood burning accounts for a significant portion of the Bay Area's fine-particle particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution. Living as we do in a valley, wood smoke gets trapped, forcing those of us with lung diseases like asthma, COPD (*chronic obstructive pulmonary disease*), and lung cancer to hide in our homes. And it doesn't affect only people with lung diseases. According to the American

Heart Assoc., "Epidemiological studies have demonstrated a consistent increased risk for cardiovascular events (i.e., heart attack and stroke) in relation to both short- and long-term exposure to present-day concentrations of ambient particulate matter." For health effects of wood smoke see www.sparetheair.org/stay-informed/air-quality-and-your-health/pm-health-effects

Best regards,

Miriam Dvorin Spross
HOL PRESIDENT

Community Connections

by JOAN NELSON

Just-1-Hour

A bad neighbor is a misfortune. A good neighbor is a blessing. Which one are you?

You might have not noticed ... or perhaps you noticed but ignored ... a resident's need that's not being met. You may be a **volunteer** with skills and abilities you want to share. You may be a **recipient** (temporarily or permanently) unable to do an important task, but reluctant to ask for help.

By matching residents, the Just-1-Hour program helps create a community of care and concern.

Examples: rides ■ phone calls ■ meals ■ laundry ■ plant care ■ letter writing ■ sewing/mending/ironing ■ help with meals ■ spiritual or emotional support ■ shopping and errands ■ computer/office help ■ bookkeeping ■ handyman/woman ■ light housekeeping ■ trash take-out on Sunday nights ■ accompanying to appointments ■ visiting (with well-behaved pets...to read aloud...to make music...get creative!) Add your name to the volunteer list in the Just-1-Hour box on the clubhouse wall.

Additional Possibility

Have you considered asking a near neighbor to join you in our community's buddy program?

Your "buddy" is someone who is aware of your comings and goings and might help to prevent a small problem from becoming a major one. Of course, you might do the same for your neighbor.

Given the possibility of "the unexpected" (fire, at-home accident, or medical event), some of our Buddies have exchanged keys to their homes. Once you have arranged your buddy-to-buddy connection, Matt would like to have both of your names.

Another Layer of Protection

Quite a few of us have given ourselves and our adult children a greater sense of security by subscribing to one of the commercial electronic emergency alert programs. Brochures are on the clubhouse desk. (Most of us have signed up with **Lifeline**, which gives MVMCC a discount.)

Monday meditation meeting is on hold. Remember, the Thursday meditation 6:15 – 7 pm in the clubhouse downstairs.

Readers' Theatre meets on the third Wednesdays at 2 pm. For location and play title, contact Yvonne Devine 415-506 -1671, goddessydevine@gmail.com.

For details on any of these Community Connections, contact

Joan Nelson
figleafjoan@comcast.net
415-506-4166, 415-595-6221 cell



Calling All Park Residents

It's time for a
**CLEAN UP
THE PARK DAY**

**Saturday
November 5
10 am – 2 pm**

**Meet at the
clubhouse**

**HOL will provide
all supplies
and snacks**

Message from Mar Val

Dear Friends,

Mar Val joins with residents in expressing our gratitude for the remarkable efforts of the Novato Fire Protection District and the Police Dept., as well as Matt Greenberg in coordination with the MVEST team for their prompt, professional, and very successful management of the fire on September 30, 2016.

We are now entering the much-anticipated 2016 holiday season, which begins with our annual

Thanksgiving Dinner Saturday, November 19

This event has traditionally been our most popular and, therefore, best attended function. Occupancy of the Ballroom is limited to 140, and in order to ensure residents are given first

consideration, each residence will be limited to two reservations. In the case of a residence with only one occupant, that person may sign up for one guest. Please see the reservation form below for additional information.

Finally, we are pleased to confirm that the Christmas holiday party is scheduled for **Saturday, December 10.**

Although details will be included in the December *Echo*, you may wish to make note of this date since the deadline for signup will take place during the first week of December.

With warmest regards,
Kathleen Dargie

Kathleen Dargie
MAR VAL PRESIDENT
kfdargie@aol.com



Mar Val Thanksgiving Dinner

November 19, 2016 • 5 PM Cocktails • 6 PM Dinner

M E N U

TURKEY
DRESSING
SWEET POTATOES
GREEN BEANS WITH ALMONDS
MASHED POTATOES WITH GRAVY
CRANBERRY SAUCE
ROLLS
PUMPKIN PIE

NOTE: THERE IS NO SEPARATE VEGETARIAN ENTRÉE FOR THE THANKSGIVING DINNER

Thanksgiving Dinner Information

1. Limit of two persons per home.
2. Reservation deadline is **November 16** at 5 pm or when 140 reservations have been received.
3. Even if you have generously volunteered to cook a turkey, carve a turkey, sell tickets, or volunteer in any capacity, **YOU STILL NEED TO MAKE A RESERVATION** before the deadline of **November 16** or before 140 reservations have been received.
4. Checks only, please (payable to Mar Val). Payment is due at time of making reservation.
5. Questions? Please call Carolyn Corry at 415-370-6403.

Thanksgiving Reservation Form

Resident _____ Resident/Guest _____

Check (payable to Mar Val) for \$ _____ (\$12/per person)



MVEST After-Action Report

by JOHN HANSEN

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN GUMP



Executive Summary

The first major wildland fire the Marin Valley community has ever experienced was effectively and professionally managed by the NFPD (Novato Fire Protection District) with cooperation and assistance from NPD (Novato Police Department), Marin Valley Park Management, and MVEST emergency volunteers. Twenty acres of mostly grassland adjacent to the Marin Valley community was blackened, with no residential property damage or reported injuries. MVEST was demonstrably up to this challenge, but a number of both fundamental restrictions and procedural shortcomings have been identified that could have been problematic had the challenge been greater. Remedial measures to these issues are proposed.

Incident Overview

Shortly before noon on Friday, September 30, 2016, a fast-moving, wind-driven wildfire posed an

imminent threat to the Marin Valley community. The incomprehensible speed at which this threat was developing raised great concern among residents and provided the initiative for some MVEST personnel to self-organize and respond.

Objectives of Response

Responding MVEST volunteers had two successive objectives: to help ensure the safety of Park residents until NFPD arrived, and to facilitate conveyance of safety information and instructions from NFPD and NPD to Park Management and subsequently to Park residents.

Synopsis of Performance

Initial MVEST activities included observing the movement of the blaze advancing, notifying the more directly affected residents of the ensuing threat, and establishing radio communications within and among the more immediately threatened MVEST Block Captain Zones. Upon arrival of NFPD, MVEST personnel continued

to arouse residents, and in addition, received and relayed instructions from NFPD and NPD authorities to residents via radio, as per MVEST training, and to Park Management for automated broadcasts to residents by telephone, SMS, and/or email.

MVEST Zones 1, 2, and 3 were active during this incident, whereas Zones 4, 5, and 6 were not. Radio communications within the active Zones were reported to be very good by the respective Zone Chiefs. In addition, communication among Zone Chiefs and MVEST Command was instrumental. Communications of instructions from NPD and NFPD to the community were effective, albeit somewhat confusing as the instructions changed — as did the fire threat and the availability of Park egress — faster than communication could be relayed, until both NFPD Battalion Chief Tyler and the Park Manager had been issued MVEST radios and could communicate directly with one another.

September 30, 2016 Marin Valley Fire

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAN WONG



In the end, about 20 acres burned along the north edge of the Marin Valley community and the west edge of the adjoining Mar Vista community. Flames approached to within about 10 feet of several homes; however, property damage was prevented, and there were no reported injuries.

MVEST Critical Tasks

Critical tasks for MVEST centered first on quickly raising awareness of the more directly affected residents to the fire threat and coordinating among one another by radio; communicating public safety instructions from NFPD to Park Management and the community; and likewise communicating traffic management instructions from NFPD and NPD to Park Management and the community.

Successes and Lessons

After the precise, professional, albeit challenging and complex response by NFPD, the next most notable success was the “weed-whacked” buffer zone

provided by Park Management earlier in the year. The ominous approaching flames dwindled substantially upon contact with this buffer zone.

MVEST communications within Zones 1, 2, and 3 were effective. The presence of a Zone Chief is apparently critical to effectively mobilizing MVEST volunteers within the respective zones. Similarly, communication among Zones 1, 2, and 3 and MVEST Command was very effective. Radio communications among MVEST volunteers proved to be notably successful and instrumental in facilitating timely, critical emergency communications.

The critical chain of communication between NFPD and Park Management (de facto MVEST Command) was greatly facilitated by providing both NFPD and Park Management with MVEST radios.

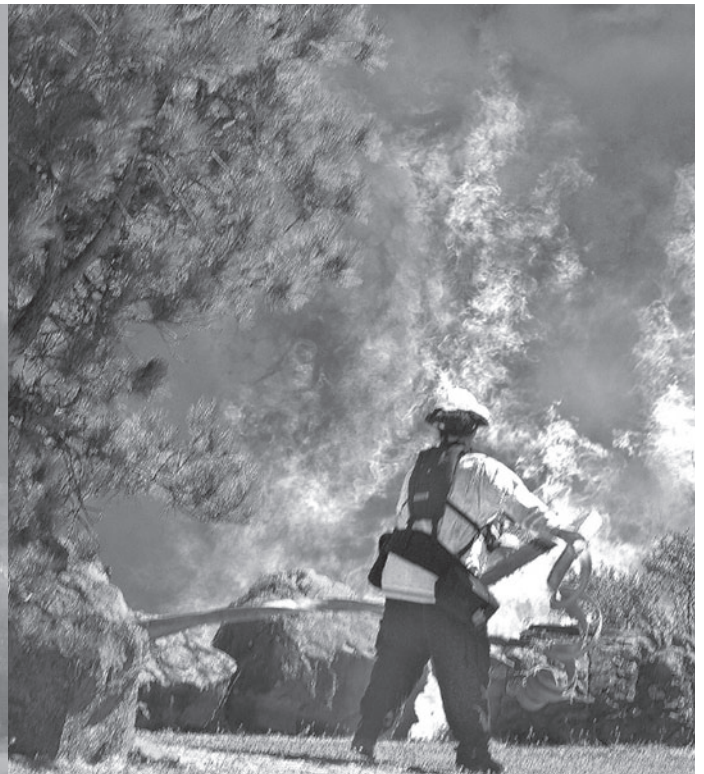
Zone Chief 1 was particularly instrumental in relaying traffic management information from NPD to Park Management.

Challenges and Resolutions

It was fortuitous that only Zones 1, 2, and 3 were at apparent immediate risk of the fire, as all three of these Zone Chiefs were present to mobilize their respective volunteers. As Zone Chiefs 4, 5, and 6 were neither present during the incident nor had preestablished plans to cover the Zone Chief function in their absence, there were no effective mobilizations or responses from these latter zones.

The overall Marin Valley community behavior was very responsible. However, NFPD instructions changed more quickly than the community could be informed to respond. This caused some confusion in itself, and exacerbated resident traffic that hindered fire apparatus mobility. This situation improved when Chief Tyler and Park Management were issued MVEST radios.

The central problem with regard to NFPD instructions was the rapid and erratic action of this fire. While



this situation might normally trigger an evacuation order, the main Park entrance was fully occupied by fire apparatus, making it inaccessible by residents. Meanwhile, the fire was in the process of occluding the emergency exit off Meadow View Dr. This presented the remaining option of congregating at the clubhouse.

The most elderly and fragile Marin Valley residents were also the ones most confused and disoriented by the incident. These interactions placed a high demand on volunteer time and patience at a time when both were in short supply.

Unresolved Challenges

MVEST has been operating under two restrictions, in the absence of which MVEST response and effectiveness might have been significantly improved. MVEST is currently without a means for quickly alerting the community in general — and the MVEST volunteer community in particular — of emergencies such as this fire. MVEST has twice requested,

and has twice been denied, the installation of a community siren or similar spontaneous community alarm mechanism.

MVEST has recently begun to consider establishing an account with *Dialmycalls.com* as one possible system for quickly alerting MVEST volunteers, but the details of this system have yet to be worked out.

MVEST has been specifically denied the capacity to “self-mobilize” by the City of Novato, yet this very first emergency response by MVEST clearly identifies the need for preauthorization to do so. As a consequence, self-mobilization has not been prominent in MVEST emergency planning and training, resulting in less preparation for this emergency among MVEST volunteers than might otherwise have been the case.

On-street parking was a hindrance to emergency apparatus in this incident. The issue of on-street parking has been addressed several times in the past by Park Management, the City of Novato, and PAC, yet the problem

persists and was a demonstrated liability on September 30.

Probably the most extraordinary events of the day were the ones that did not occur. The wind carried many live embers beyond the fire and into the Park. The entire community was **EXTREMELY FORTUNATE** that none of these embers came to rest in any of our many remaining juniper bushes. This incident could have easily and quickly taken a disastrous turn, even with the immediate presence of professional responders.

While MVEST and many Park residents have actively pursued removal of juniper plants and other “pyrophytic” vegetation, the Marin Valley community has much work ahead to mitigate the extreme hazard that those remaining plants pose.

Recommendations for Corrective Actions

- A “defensible space” must be established and maintained for every home in Marin Valley, due to the close



PHOTOGRAPH: MARIANNE YORK

Park Manager Matt Greenberg, center, Alan Gump, left, and John Hansen, right, both of MVEST

proximity of our homes to each other and for the community as a whole. The MVMCC community should work closely with the City of Novato, NFPD, and Park Management as partners to pursue “National Firewise Community Recognition,” the purposes of which include establishing and maintaining residential defensible space, along with other fire prevention, preparedness, and mitigation measures.

- Park Management should be assured of the full capacity to conduct and enhance the annual maintenance of the fire buffer zone for the full perimeter of the Park.
- Chronic on-street parking should be revisited regarding restriction and enforcement.
- As neither exit was available in this incident for Park evacuation, a third alternative should be identified and incorporated into emergency plans.
- The City of Novato should weigh its possible liability issues against the demonstrated health and safety

benefits of MVEST self-mobilization. All trained MVEST emergency volunteers should have access to DSW (Disaster Service Worker) protection, and MVEST volunteers should be able to perform the volunteer emergency services they are trained for, without the threat of forfeiting their DSW benefits.

- The City of Novato should reconsider the request by MVEST for a rapid community alarm system, or a suitable alternative.
- MVEST, while performing acceptably in this incident, needs to aggressively:
 - Pursue greater participation by the Marin Valley community for both volunteer members and for community acceptance, cooperation, and support.
 - Enhance MVEST structure, organization, and volunteer training to better accommodate the range of incidents likely to be encountered.

- Pursue better means and training for more efficiently interacting with our most elderly neighbors during an incident.
- Enhance community emergency preparedness and training.

Conclusions

The Marin Valley community is extremely fortunate to have the high caliber of professional emergency responders that we enjoy, yet an important if not critical role remains to be performed by trained emergency volunteer organizations such as MVEST.

The fire is out, no property was lost, and no injuries were reported. But the job is far from over and in some respects will never be. Many lessons were learned from this fire by all concerned, none the least by MVEST. We are committed to pursue and master these lessons and to prepare our community and ourselves for the next incident. ■

The MVEST Steering Committee

My Experience of the Fire

by ED COLLINS

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN WONG



I returned from doing errands around noon, just about the time the fire started, but did not notice the fire on my way over the hill. By the time I reached my home at the end of Sunrise, however, I smelled smoke. Going out into open space, I saw a huge plume of smoke rising skyward to the northwest. I jumped in my car thinking I would drive to the top of the hill to see where the fire was. When I got to the clubhouse I was shocked to see that the fire was on top of the hill! I drove over to Scenic to see the fire more closely and to warn people by honking my horn. I reached the top of Scenic and saw huge flames coming down the hill. I also heard sirens, so I knew the fire had been reported. I noticed that neither Larry and Anila nor Charles and Inga were home. A fire engine arrived about that time and stationed itself at the end of Scenic. They deployed a hose and were about to attack the fire, but suddenly decided to move to the end of Wild Oak.

That meant no one was there to fight the flames approaching Charles and Inga's home. It seemed to me that most of the Park was safe from the approaching flames but this home was not, so I chose to stay and wet down all the shrubbery and bushes surrounding the home with the garden hose lying there. I realized that if the two big oaks next to the

house caught fire, that what I was doing was probably useless, but I thought it might slow things down and prevent a fire from sparks and embers. As I sprayed the bushes and trees, flames as high as 6 feet with wind gust flare-ups of 10 feet or more continued to approach.

I kept thinking, "I probably shouldn't be doing this," while knowing I could easily escape if things got too intense. I experienced the emotional state that causes homeowners to stay with their homes to the last moment. This wasn't even my home, but it was a neighbor and friend's. I wanted to do whatever I could to protect it.

As the flames approached I was concerned about my safety but also aware that it would be easy to escape down Scenic if it got too hot. I was glad I stayed, because I got to witness the effectiveness of the fire break weed-whacked around the Park. Flames that were 4-6 feet high coming up to the break diminished incredibly when they reached the firebreak, so that the winds that were now blowing more to the north stopped the progress of the fire almost immediately. Relieved, I turned off the water and joined others at the clubhouse to cheer as air tankers appeared and dropped their loads of fire retardant on the northern edge of the fire! ■



COMMUNITY CHILI FEED



MVEST invites you to come and have lunch together!

**Saturday, November 12
Noon - 2 pm**

MVEST is sponsoring a free, social get together where you can find out more about MVEST and your block captains, see a demo of a well-equipped Go-Pack (1:30 pm), and, if you wish, see how you, too, can participate in MVMCC's overall safety. There will be an ongoing slide show of photos of our recent fire.

Firefighters from our local fire station and other members of the Novato Fire Protection District are also invited, so you will be able to personally thank them.

Please bring your neighbors.

**THANK OUR
FIREFIGHTERS**

Memory of Fire Rekindled

by DAVID KING

The fire on Friday, September 30 just outside MVMCC rekindled memories of the Berkeley-Oakland fire of 1991. It will be 25 years this October 19–20 that a fire raged in the hills of these cities. I lived on Grizzly Peak about 200 yards from Fish Ranch Road at the top of a hill, way above the Claremont Hotel and the Caldecott Tunnel. Late Sunday morning, October 20, while I was away, the place I was living in and all my belongings burned. I had my car and the clothes on my back (shorts, tank top and Birkenstocks) and one cup — that's it.

The fire was started, they speculated, on Saturday, October 19 by workers, and became a grass fire that the firefighters thought they had put out. Similar to here at MVMCC, the Berkeley-Oakland fire came to within 50 feet of where I was living. I came home that Saturday, observed the firefighters putting out the hot spots right in front of my place, and went and thanked each of them. Sunday morning I came out of the house and felt an eerie feeling. I walked down the driveway and there was a fire truck. I talked to the fireperson in charge and said, "Maybe I shouldn't leave; I have this weird feeling." He assured me that they would be patrolling for hot spots all day and convinced me it would be okay. That firefighter, I was told later, died trying to save a woman who lived down the hill from my place.

After the fire reignited, my immediate neighbors were trying to load a pickup truck with belongings when the fire picked up speed and headed for our houses. They ran down the driveway, leaving the truck behind, to a VW beetle parked at the bottom of the driveway. The husband ran faster than his wife, and the heat from the fire

caught her on her back. He managed to get her into the back seat of the car and get right to Alta Bates Hospital. She survived yet was in the hospital for months. He rebuilt the house, and the day they moved in, he died. It was so sad to learn that news.

So there I was, returning from Marin over the San Rafael Bridge, and I saw this plume of smoke coming from the Berkeley hills. In that moment my heart sank. I said out loud, "Oh, no," and raced to get home. I tried every way to get to my home, and every way was blocked. I found a pay phone and called my home phone, neighbors' home phones — no answer and no answering machines. I knew the worst had happened.

I went to a friend's house and watched the TV for any news of my place. I monitored the fire all day on the TV and from her balcony watched the smoke — totally in shock without knowing it. At least I had a place to sleep (shelter), water, and food. I woke up in the morning and realized I did not have a toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb or hairbrush, or breakfast food. My usual morning was already unusual, and everything from that day on for years — yes, years — became unusual. So I walked to the store and bought all the toiletries I used on a daily basis. No matter where I went, I met people who also had lost everything. I went to stores to get a pair of sneakers and clothes. The people at Macy's were absolutely wonderful. They gave each of the fire victims a personal shopper. We sat in a space they created by a fitting room, and the personal shopper took our sizes, wants, and preferences and brought all the clothes to us. I emotionally fell apart right there for the first time when the personal shopper brought those clothes to me.

This experience repeated itself in every store I went to, feeling so cared about, so taken care of by total strangers. Truly a humbling experience!

The next day, when I went to the local office my insurance company had set up. The agent was so empathetic. She listened, gave me a seat, a drink, and a check for \$5,000 just to get me going. That insurance company gave me every cent I was insured for.

Five days after the fire I still didn't know absolutely for sure that the house had burned. I went to a Berkeley Police post in the hope they would let me drive up to the house. A police officer had empathy for me and drove me to the house — only no house, just ashes and rubble. For some strange reason I went to where my bed had been, lay down in the ashes, and just started screaming "No! No! No!" over and over again. The officer came and got me, and I just cried in the police car with him. He was so sweet, understanding, and empathetic — a dear man. I wish I remembered his name to thank him again.



The sole surviving possession.

It took years to recover emotionally and to find a new place to live that felt like home. The trauma caused me anguish every time I would leave the house and still does today, 25 years later. I truly suggest to all my neighbors at MVMCC to heed the MVEST recommendations to minimize the risk to yourself and your neighbors of going through such an ordeal and trauma, especially at this stage in our lives. ■

Take a Hike

by MIKE HOLLAND

We need to double more! Let's bring the concept to the *Echo* hike article and offer a double hike. No, not double the distance, but two hikes that are close together (by car) and offer similar enjoyment. Let's hike **Bel Marin Keys** and the **San Pablo Bay Trail**.

These hikes are alike in many respects. They are both along water, dead flat, on easy terrain, and short, and they both abound with birdlife. The Bel Marin Keys hike starts at a dirt pullout on the right of BMK Blvd., just past the Anubhuti Retreat Center that is at the beginning of the residential neighborhood. If you pass any

houses, you've gone a bit too far. The hike is on a levee road along the waterway and goes about 3/4 mile out toward the bay. The highlight of this spot is the giant "bird tree" or the "Egret Retreat." I don't know what else to call it. It's a giant eucalyptus tree that sits in a grove on the grounds of the retreat center and seasonally has hundreds of nesting egrets in it. The sound can be deafening as the birds are continuously entering and exiting. Truly an impressive sight.

Now that you're warmed up from this short walk, it's time to jump back in the car and drive to Highway 37, go over the Petaluma River, and proceed



PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN FELD

Above, "Egret Retreat" at Bel Marin Keys. Right, San Pablo Bay Trail — new Eliot Trail.



*Do you remember when “double” was popular?
We used to double date.
We chewed Doublemint gum (as prompted by the Doublemint Twins).
We received double Blue Chip or Green Stamps on double coupon days.
We were assailed with “buy one, get one free” offers.
We drank doubles at local bars; if we doubled enough doubles we saw double.
We even doubled over if something was funny enough.*

to the stoplight at Lakeview Highway with the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge sign on the right. Turn right and drive about 1/4 mile to the parking lot that is the trailhead for the newest completed section of the San Francisco Bay Trail. The kiosk has brand-new instructional maps that show the entire 2.5-mile Eliot Trail.

Along the length of the trail are several information stations that fully detail how the trail was built, what wildlife and flora are about, and how this northern section of the San Pablo Bay was completely transformed to create a huge new wetland. What used to be farmland is now wetland and

bay, populated with numerous small, man-made islands that shelter birds and native plants. Good job, engineers! And yes, there are lots of birds. I ventured off-trail during a run and was immediately dive-bombed by two parents who let me know I was too close to their nest.

There is also a kayak put-in beach near the start if you feel like having a gentle pull among the islands.

And after these hikes? No restaurants are nearby, so I recommend packing a lunch with appropriate

refreshments; and pack a head cover. While you’re lazing on a bench and snacking on something tasty, see if you can figure out how they will finish the trail to completely encircle the bay. ■



California Towhee

by **BILL NOBLE**

Photographs by **DAVID GRAY**

If you leave your doors open to the world on one of our perfect California days, you're likely to get a visit from a plain, mouse-brown, rather Zen California Towhee. Unlike most birds, your towhee won't feel the least bit trapped in your house; it'll

hop from room to room, investigating, peering under furniture, cocking its head contemplatively toward windows, chirping his or her metallic *clink!* from time to time. After a while, it'll hop back out the way it came and continue foraging in your garden. This has



happened to me in almost every house I've ever lived in around the Bay Area.

California Towhees have one of my favorite "neighborhood names": they're light brown everywhere except for the fluffy feathered triangle half-concealed under their tail; that's a soft cinnamon color. For me and for many folks in rural California, they'll always be named Rusty Butts.

They're no nightingales, our Rusty Butts. The male's song, such as it is, is a long, increasingly hurried repetition of their usual solitary chip, delivered just before the morning's full light, usually one of the first songs of the day. Listen closely and you'll hear the competitive response of every other male in the 'hood — a good way to get a sense of just how many towhees live around you. Both sexes also have a sort of audio scrawl, a grumbly jumble of high-pitched worry-warting. Our towhees are monogamous and long-paired, and pretty sedentary. The

pair bouncing through your garden is the same couple who shared your yard last year and the year before.

They're unlikely suburbanites. Before we arrived and set up shop with our lawns and barbecues, they were inhabitants of the dense chaparral of our dry, hot hillsides; but they seem just as happy these days scratching for seed under your pansies. (Their strong, triangular beak betrays them as seed crunchers.) They're also quintessentially Californian, found from southeastern Oregon throughout California and all the way south to the very tip of Baja.

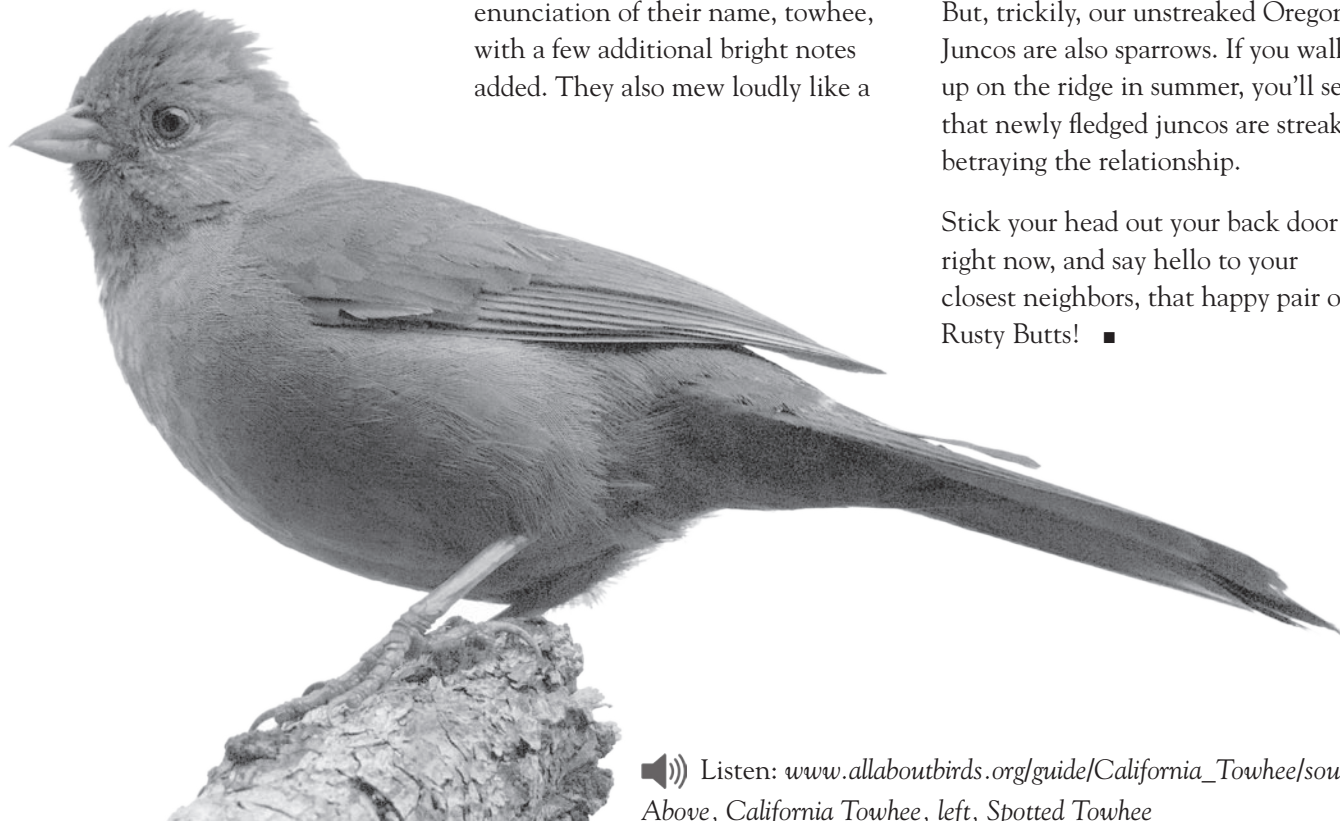
California Towhees are the plainest of their tribe. Here in the Park, we also have two or three pairs of their flamboyant cousins, the Spotted Towhee: crimson eyes, a glossy black hood, and a white breast bordered on either side by a splash of rich chestnut. Their tail is long and brightly black and white. They're more flamboyant vocally, too; part of their commonest song is a clear enunciation of their name, towhee, with a few additional bright notes added. They also mew loudly like a

twenty-pound cat, but you can listen for them in another, familiar way: feeding in the undergrowth, they leap forward, then scratch noisily backward through grass and dry leaves. That repetitive rustle is one of the easiest ways to find these birds when they're not vocalizing.

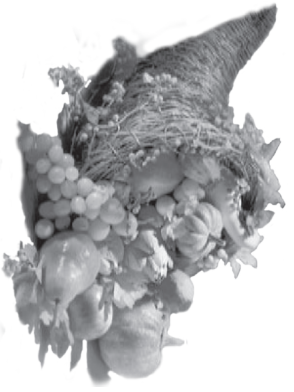
Our California Towhee has two close relatives, both birds of desert scrub and less-disturbed habitats: the Canyon Towhee and Abert's Towhee of the Southwest. The close and complex relationships between these forms have provided science with an excellent, well-exploited opportunity to study how speciation happens in birds.

Towhees—all of the various kinds—are genealogically simply very large, long-tailed sparrows, part of a bird family called the emberizids. Our New World emberizids are mostly small, streaked brown birds—think song sparrows and our ubiquitous winter friends, the White-Crowned and Golden-Crowned Sparrows. But, trickily, our unstreaked Oregon Juncos are also sparrows. If you walk up on the ridge in summer, you'll see that newly fledged juncos are streaky, betraying the relationship.

Stick your head out your back door right now, and say hello to your closest neighbors, that happy pair of Rusty Butts! ■



🔊 Listen: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/California_Towhee/sounds
Above, California Towhee, left, Spotted Towhee



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>1-4 PM Mahjong </p> <p>6-8 AM Trash Pickup</p> <p>9:30 AM Low-Impact Exercise</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>6-8 AM Trash Pickup</p> <p>9:30 AM Low-Impact Exercise</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p> <p>Full Moon </p> <p>5:45 PM</p>	<p>VOTE</p> <p>ECHO DEADLINE</p>	<p>10 AM -2 PM Craft Group</p> <p>11 AM -1 PM Whistlestop (call Roberta 415-883-0843)</p> <p>7 PM PACMEETING</p>	<p>9:15 AM QiGong with Dove </p> <p>6:15-7 PM Silent Meditation</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>4 PM Canasta </p> <p>5-7 PM Pub Night </p>	<p>7-9 PM COMMUNITY DANCE </p> <p>CLEAN UP THE PARK DAY 10 AM - 2 PM </p>
<p>1-4 PM Mahjong </p> <p>6-8 AM Trash Pickup</p> <p>9:30 AM Low-Impact Exercise</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>6-8 AM Trash Pickup</p> <p>9:30 AM Low-Impact Exercise</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>VOTE</p> <p>ECHO DEADLINE</p>	<p>10 AM -2 PM Craft Group</p> <p>11 AM -1 PM Whistlestop (call Roberta 415-883-0843)</p> <p>2-4 PM Readers' Theatre Group </p>	<p>9:15 AM QiGong with Dove </p> <p>6:15-7 PM Silent Meditation</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>4 PM Canasta </p> <p>5-7 PM Pub Night </p>	<p>THANKSGIVING DINNER 5 PM COCKTAILS 6 PM DINNER </p>
<p>1-4 PM Mahjong </p> <p>6-8 AM Trash Pickup</p> <p>9:30 AM Low-Impact Exercise</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>6-8 AM Trash Pickup</p> <p>9:30 AM Low-Impact Exercise</p> <p>7:20 PM Poor Man's Poker </p>	<p>VOTE</p> <p>ECHO DEADLINE</p>	<p>10 AM -2 PM Craft Group</p> <p>11 AM -1 PM Whistlestop (call Roberta 415-883-0843)</p>	<p>THANKSGIVING DAY </p>	<p>4 PM Canasta </p> <p>5-7 PM Pub Night </p>	<p>THANKSGIVING DINNER 5 PM COCKTAILS 6 PM DINNER </p>

NOVEMBER