



The news and more for rural West Sonoma County

WEST COUNTY BUZZ

By Elisabeth Parker for the *Russian River Monthly*, March, 2009

Into each life some rain must fall. It's hard to enjoy this winter's unusually sunny weather, with the threat of drought looming above like a non-existent rain cloud. Luckily, Forestville newspaper publisher and local rainmaker, Vesta Copestakes, took action. "My personal philosophy is that there's nothing you can't do something about," Copestakes brightly asserts. In her Feb. 12 issue of the "West County Gazette", Copestakes exhorted readers to "Think Rain", posted messages online, and donned bright yellow rain gear (with a matching set for her dog). She even asked local Native Americans to perform a rain dance, but tribal representatives explained that rain dancing is a Plains Indian tradition.

The power of positive thinking. On Feb. 8, the Ocean Song Farm and Wilderness Center in Occidental hosted the rain dance, and the first drops fell that evening.. Led by Cho'Qosh Auh'Ho'Oh, a Coastal native elder, 100 participants from three tribes, Pagan groups, and nearby communities coaxed rain from the clouds with a ceremony, dances, songs, and poetry. A potluck supper concluded the evening. "It's just wonderful that all these people came together," exclaims Copestakes.

Coffee Bizarre and the spontaneous combusting vest. No rain fell on the bright morning of Jan. 22, when an unidentified woman's vest caught on fire as she nodded off in front of Guerneville's Coffee Bazaar with a lit cigarette (someone please tell Scotty the Barista to go light on the de-caf!). Mike Millar saved the day with his resourcefulness and the DVD he was returning to the Guerneville Library. Astonished onlookers gawked as Millar vigorously smacked the flames with the DVD, jolting the woman awake into a state of uncomprehending terror. "It was the funniest thing," laughingly recalls an anonymous woman.

No news is good news. Meanwhile in Camp Meeker, "Things are dead quiet since the conflict over the cell phone tower," reports Tom Austin. "Dead quiet" aptly describes a town with no cell phone reception. Verizon's proposed cell phone tower on Morelli La. triggered acrimonious infighting, as residents craving cell phone service clashed with activists concerned about alleged health hazards

posed by radio frequency radiation. In August 2008, an anonymous neighbor launched Fight the Tower, a Web site and blog (www.fightthetower.com).

Fear and loathing ... Tensions increased in the following weeks, culminating with angry reactions to a vicious Sept. 16 post likening Fred Meyer – a respected Camp Meeker Parks and Recreation Dept. board member and tower proponent – to Marie Antoinette. Meyer’s wife, Dani Sheehan Meyer, retorted, “This has got to stop.” Things finally simmered down when Verizon backed out of negotiations with CMPRD following a jam-packed town meeting on Oct. 22. Over 325 Camp Meeker residents (out of a mere 425 souls) had petitioned the Board to decline the proposed contract.

When beseeched for even the tiniest snippet of more recent news, Austin paused and then exclaimed, “Well, we’re happy about the rain!”

How many Sonoma County sheriffs does it take to *not* catch the “Guerneville Archer”? Apparently, an entire SWAT team. On Jan. 28, an arrow struck Monte Rio resident James McNeill on the head, launching a siege on the suspect’s home on Mill St. 29 hours and several canisters of tear gas later, law enforcement discovered that the suspect – 30-year-old Shaun Gallon – had flown the coop. A trained survivalist, Gallon remains at large with a \$75,000 arrest warrant out for attempted murder.

Reign of error. Meanwhile, Capt. Matt McCaffrey evacuated the neighborhood, triggering mixed reactions from residents and business people. A local employee who requests anonymity, declared, “It seemed kind of stupid. They used all this high technology and none of it worked.” Amon Sharkey from the West Sonoma Inn reports, “I was working that day. We couldn’t leave because they were shooting tear gas, so I stayed at the front desk and booked reservations.” Jill De Proto of D&G Property Management found things to be a bit more interesting. “We were not evacuated, because we are located behind Bucks,” she explained. The phone rang off the hook with people asking for news updates, while folks from the SWAT team came in and out for water and bathroom breaks. De Proto was happy to help. “It was exciting. We were the ‘Hot Line’ for two days.” Dejah Dorantes of Forestville jokingly inquires, “How would the Sheriff of Nottingham handle this situation?”

Miscellaneous tidbits. Speaking of Jill De Proto (who also serves as president of the Russian River Rotary Club), the wildly successful annual Valentine’s Day Crab and Pasta Feed attracted 250 hungry locals and completely sold out. “This was a very proud moment for the Rotary,” exclaimed De Proto. Proceeds from the dinner and silent auction will provide \$1000 scholarships for graduating high school students. John Chapman (AKA “Milo” from KGGV FM) also reports that Herman Hernandez from Russian River Parks and Rec. debuted his striking new haircut which resulted from the donation of his locks at this event. “He looks like a skinhead,” laughs Chapman.

The following evening, Coffee Bazaar hosted the second annual “Love and Loathing on the River” poetry contest and reading. The winners were Christopher “Oak” Reinier (Guerneville), Deanna Hopper (Santa Rosa), and Shellee Harper Post (Monte Rio). Organized by Terri Carrion from Hemp & Chocolat, the event drew a lively crowd . “It was great,” enthused Barista Angelina Greep. “We had a big turnout with lots of people from all over the county. The poetry was eloquent.”

Efren Carrillo looks forward to “spending Valentine’s Day at the Russian River Rotary’s Annual Crab Feed. I look forward to seeing many of you there!” Local celebrity Vira Burgerman (the California Mermaid) has moved her hair salon to downtown Guerneville. Rio Nido will soon have an organic community garden, thanks to a persistent band of neighbors and the Russian River Parks and Recreation department. Guerneville’s Kings and Queens vintage clothing shop is about to break Memories that Linger’s record for longest going-out-of-business sale ever. Last month, the “Going out of business sign” was joined by a smaller sign announcing, “Gone for Jan. Back in Feb.” Guerneville writer Lynn Millar exclaims, “I love that! We’re going out of business but now we need a month off!”