

The Portola Valley Post

Spring 2010

Neighbors!

By Peter Steiner

(As a retired college administrator and consultant to a variety of nonprofits (including cities and towns), and as President of the Portola Valley Ranch Homeowners, Peter Steiner is often asked for tips to manage conflict among individuals and groups. The focus of this article is a topic that affects all of us at one time or another: neighbor relations.)

It is safe to venture that most of us have positive relations with our neighbors most of the time. But when that is not the case, life can become uncomfortable, and in more extreme instances, even unpleasant. In this article, I will offer some suggestions on how to deal with neighbors should difficult situations arise.

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In Love with Anna

By Nick Neeley

I'm standing in the lemon bushes below the adobe retaining wall of our garden. The lemons are soulful, aromatic, so close their waxy, puckered surfaces fill my peripheral vision. But I'm peering through the deer fence into a ramble of chaparral: coyote brush and poison oak, mostly. I'm birding, I think—looking through square wire windows for California quail or thrashers. Or hummingbirds.

It's often at a fence line, some edge, that we shape our strongest memories; that we discover where our madeleine moments will sweep us, years later. Suddenly, Anna whirs in from behind. My body startles, my brain struggles to quiet it. I held my breath with a hummingbird, as it dangled inches from my face. I imagine its black, wiry toes clasp the bridge of my freckled nose. It twisted slightly, shifting as if to see its reflection in the serrated leaves. It hangs there, in my lemon-bush bower—then *whir*. Away.

More than any other animal, a hummingbird is at once present and past: even as it lingers, you anticipate its departure. This was in middle school, a time when, if I wasn't practicing a sport, I often slunk semi-reclusively through our backyard in Westridge, with binoculars. Maybe it was because I couldn't yet drive, a blessing for a young naturalist near woods and birds. We had a view to the crest of foggy Skyline from our

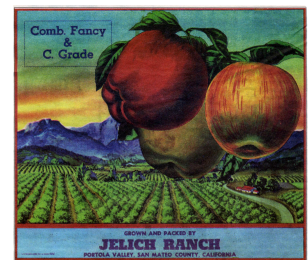
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What Treasures Do You Have Tucked Away?

If you have not yet visited the Town Heritage Center, please stop by the next time you're at the library. The display room, adjacent to the library's front door, is open whenever the library is. The backroom archive with its extensive collection of photos, maps, clippings, and documents is available on Thursdays from 3 to 5 pm or by appointment.

Meanwhile, the committee is searching for: neighborhood/event photos from the last 50-plus years, books by local authors for the collection in the display room, subdivision documents, display items...all those items tucked into boxes and drawers at your house that will make our era come alive for future residents.

Please contact us at historicrosources@portolavalley.net.



Ormondale Named 2010 California Distinguished School

When Ormondale Principal Dr. Jennifer Warren's phone rang April 16th, she picked it up to discover California State Superintendent Jack O'Connell personally calling with congratulations. Ormondale had just been named a 2010 California Distinguished School.

In announcing the news to staff, students, and parents at a surprise celebration, Dr. Warren noted, "This is a tremendous honor for the entire community and reflects the incredible level of dedication and support students, teachers, parents, and community members contribute to our school every day."

Ormondale was one of twelve San Mateo County schools named California Distinguished Schools. This year's Distinguished Schools were selected based upon academic achievement and signature practices. Ormondale is one of California's top-performing schools with an Academic Performance Indicator (API) of 948. Ormondale was honored for two signature practices – exemplary programs that can be shared with other schools. Superintendent Anne Campbell noted, "The two signature practices for which Ormondale was recognized – Investigative Learning and Comprehensive and Integrated Reading Instruction – reflect our school community's commitment to a strong foundation in the basic skills as well as to innovative instruction."

Dr. Warren and representatives from the Ormondale staff will attend a special celebration in their honor at Disneyland in June.

Anne Campbell

Friends of the Portola Valley Library

"The real purpose of books is to trap the mind into doing its own thinking." Christopher Morley

The Portola Valley Library, in its fourth incarnation, continues to enjoy its pride of place in a community of bibliophiles. Now that the new digs have been infused, patron by patron, with our community spirit, and every square inch of it has been baptized in one way or another, we've settled into the comfort of routine.

It appears, from current stats, that we *love* our mysteries, fiction, cook-books, fine arts and history, not to mention our children's books, which represent 15% of annual circulation. (We instill library-habits early on...which justifies the recent increase in hours of operation, noted below.)

Some new embellishments to services and aesthetics include:

- Open an additional hour every day of service (11-7 M-Th; 11-5 Fri-Sat)
- New "check-out" computers, which eliminate waiting and free staff to answer more pressing literary demands
- Laptops for check-out (limited to *in-house* use & roosting)
- Rotating artwork from local artists displayed in our Friends' Corner (Ann Hogle's donated painting, "Windy Hill from Mapache Drive," located behind the service counter, is one such example of PV's community talent and continuing generosity to our common wealth).

KIDS-TEENS-ADULTS: "Make a Splash with Reading!" is this year's theme for the Summer Reading Program, with prizes for each age group. Look for details in the library.

Lenora Ferro



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The Portola Valley Post

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Mayor's Letter

I have a confession to make.

My wife and I are not ready for the Big One.

I'm embarrassed to admit this. The mayor should be setting a good example. The San Andreas fault runs right through the middle of town. There have been major earthquakes in the news this year, and the images are grim. One day the Great Quake will come to Portola Valley, and no one needs to tell me how bad it will be.

But I'm unprepared anyway. Well, not entirely. Bookshelves and dressers are bolted to the walls. We know how to turn off the gas. There are food stuffs in the carport closet (although the expiration date on the sardine cans has faded, which is probably not a good sign). Gas pumps may not work after a quake, so I make sure one of the cars is always at least half fueled. I join in the neighborhood disaster drills. We're empty nesters, so I don't have to worry about a rendezvous plan for the kids. Last month I finally got around to telling my brothers back East how we expect to respond to a quake, to ease their worries when communications go down for three days.

So what's missing from our preparations? A lot of things. I can't seem to find those batteries I bought for the flashlights and the radio (come to think of it, where is that radio?). I don't have sturdy shoes by my bedside. My wife has raided the emergency supply of bottled water for her daily commute (note to self: stop buying her favorite brand). I really should stash away some cash since ATMs and credit card transactions may not work after a big quake. As for wildfires, I haven't dealt with the decking, the patio furniture, and the old juniper hedge that could provide the ignition for my house. Nor have I figured out what to do with our German Shepherd if we have to evacuate to a shelter with a wildfire approaching. I learned just recently that one of the best things I can do to keep my house from igniting is to put mesh screens on all the roof vents of my house.

In short, our preparations are spotty. But we're not alone. The experts tell us that only 10 percent of Bay Area households are fully prepared for a natural disaster such as an earthquake or wildfire. This is not much consolation to me, and I think it's high time I gave some serious attention to the emergency information on the town website at www.portolavalley.net (see the menu under the "For Residents" tab). There's a lot we can do now to take care of our families and our homes and reduce the loss that lies ahead. I'm determined to do better.

Cultural Arts Committee Plans More Events

The Art Faire held during the holiday season at the Historic Schoolhouse was wonderfully received with many local and non-local folks stopping by on foot, bikes and in cars. The Faire's focus was to bring all age groups together through art awareness and to build a sense of community at the new Town site.

This event did just that and due to its' success will become a yearly tradition. The Faire attracted 20 artists with wide ranging collections of art including paintings, jewelry, clothing, baked goods, photography, wood products, sculpture, books, skin products and children's goods. Twenty percent of the artists' profits were donated to the charity of their choice: PV open space, Friends of Sausal Creek, PV schools or the 8th grade field

trip.

Future goals of the CAC include movie nights, music nights, displaying on a rotating basis art accompanied by an artist's reception, and the placement of children's historic ceramic tiles at the Town Center.

The committee is comprised of twenty plus members with various artistic interests. If you are interested, please attend one of our monthly meetings, which are held the second or third Thursday at 1 pm at the Historic Schoolhouse. For more info call:

Deirdre Clark 218.8563
dcdesignz@sbcglobal.net or Susan Thomas
 464 0645 (poodlest@sbcglobal.net)

In Love with Anna

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lawn, next to which grew a native manzanita with dainty, pale bell-flowers, and an ungainly Australian bottlebrush. Anna loved them both, especially the bottlebrush. She has a taste for the exotic. A thing for red.

Anna, of course, is a species: *Calypte anna*, named for a Duchess of Rivoli. But the Anna's hummingbird is a resident of this coast and, each spring, thousands of brilliant ruby-hooded males rise slowly into the air, fifty, one-hundred feet, higher and higher. Lost in the platinum California sky, down they dive at over 50 miles per hour, breaking at last with a staccato *pik*—the sound of their tail splaying—in front of a perched female.

I've seen this display hundreds of times. Thousands, in my mind's eye. How many afternoons have I stood on that lawn, watching one loopy-loop before an inconspicuous sweetheart sitting in the bottlebrush? Or three or four Anna's might dart overhead, clanking in their high-pitched way like cans behind a marriage carriage. They defended and furiously defended their territories in a yard I eventually learned wasn't really mine. Then, exhausted, they fell away to their separate twigs.

There, the males warbled. They're the only North American hummer with a bona fide song. Once I started hearing them, I heard them constantly. *Listen*—they'll squeak into your memory from the crown of an oak, where they look like a gall, with a bill. But as often, I've spotted them singing from a sapling in a planter, in a parking lot, at the Town Center, say, or deep in the big, noisy city: Palo Alto. They absolutely belt!

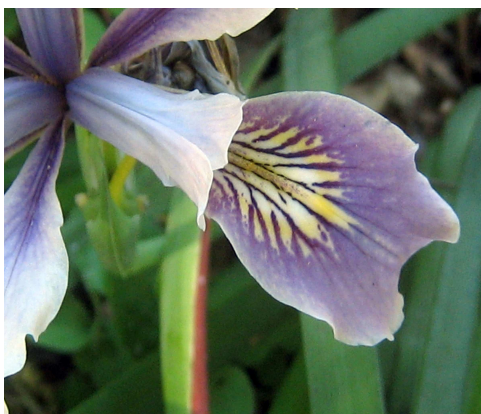
At home, I discovered many of their routine singing perches. The most prominent lay beyond the deer fence in the live oaks that leaned over the chaparral wilderness. When I was little, my father built us a tree house in one of those trees. Two parallel planks ramped up the trunk. From there, a few wooden rungs nailed to the bark took us to a deck with railings. The canopy was our roof. In middle school, following the hummers, I crept carefully out onto a branch, and with one hand, took some of the most rewarding photographs, and moments, of my life: a male Anna's crooning at the edge of the tree, half in shadow. I'd snuck up on him at last.

Portola Valley is my hummingbird now: Small, green, zipping through me. Iridescent, in certain lights. It seems unlikely that I will live there again—here—nestled against Skyline. I'm twenty-five-years-old. But, Anna, we'll always have this.



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Go Native



The goal of the Conservation Committee is to preserve the natural flora and fauna and open space of Portola Valley and to help maintain the Town's tranquil, rural quality for generations to come. That includes encouraging residents to plant native plants, brush and trees which attract local birds and pollinators and at the same time help reduce water usage. Another task of the Committee is to review landscaping and outdoor lighting plans recommending groupings of natives for natural looking gardens that fit well into a more rural setting.

Documents developed by the committee are available at the Town Center including a list of "strongly discouraged plants" that are invasive and/or highly flammable. Last year the Committee held a Native Plant Workshop to teach maintenance of a successful garden with native plants. This year's workshop topic was Living with Wildlife, held in early May, its focus was how to create a garden that attracts native birds, bees and butterflies and how to get acquainted with the mammals and insects that share the neighborhood.

Committees at Work

Geological Safety Committee

During the past year the GSC met to:

1. Review the latest (interim) version of the Town Geological map and,
2. Review and report back to the Council on a possible incorrect location of the Woodside (active) trace of the San Andreas fault in the vicinity of Alpine Road and Willowbrook Road. The GSC is recommending that the Town authorize the digging of a trench and paleo-geological analysis of the subsurface evidence in it at a probable location of that trace on Portola Valley Ranch property near Alpine Road.

Nature and Science Committee

The Nature and Science Committee is planning another of the popular star parties in August. Please check portolavalley.net for the exact date. Other plans for the near future include a talk on insect-carried diseases of man and beast. Further info will be posted when it's available.

Parks and Recreation Committee: Tennis!

The Town's recreational class offerings have been steadily growing since the opening of the new Town Center campus, and the Town is pleased to announce that group tennis instruction will now be offered, beginning in May.

The initial sessions to be held this spring will be geared toward adults only, with the program being expanded in the summer months to include programs for children 5 years and up. Corinne Mansourian, an experienced tennis pro skilled at teaching at all levels, will be teaching the sessions.

For more information or to register for classes, please visit the Town's website at www.portolavalley.net and click on *Community Classes*, then view the *Current Class Catalog*.

Spring Down Master Plan Committee The Spring Down Master Plan Committee continues its review of the Town owned six acre parcel on Portola Road. The property is classified as a Greenway and is identified in the General Plan as both a Community Preserve as well as a long-time Stables Preserve.

Responding to these General Plan designations and in concert with a hydrologist and a biologist, the Master Plan Committee is reviewing different uses and features for the property including paths and trails, benches, use of the pond, and vegetation alternatives prior to finalizing a recommendation to the Town Council.

How To: The NEW GreenWaste "Compostables" Bin

There has been a lot of interest in the new GreenWaste Recycling Guide!

We just wanted to clarify one issue – placing your food waste in the "Compostables" bin is optional! Find out more on the Town website www.portolavalley.net - search for GreenWaste FAQs.



Neighbors!

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My comments are made with full recognition that even in the small community of Portola Valley, a wide range of living arrangements exist from planned communities such as The Sequoias, to Portola Valley Ranch, to small neighborhood streets, to multi-acre spreads. Some neighbors belong to highly structured homeowners associations with professional staff, while many others are pretty much on their own. Some neighborhoods have many renters; others are comprised primarily of homeowners. Mindful of these differences, I recognize that not all of the suggestions that follow apply to every situation.

1. *When contemplating a move, do your homework.* For new homebuyers/renters or those thinking of relocating within the Town or elsewhere, try to learn about the new neighborhood. If CC&Rs exist, review them carefully with your realtor. Walk the neighborhood and

try to meet your new neighbors. Before making a decision, you may even consider knocking on a few doors to introduce yourself and ask about the neighbor's impression of the area. Some people will be welcoming, others may be shy, others outright unfriendly. If the latter is the case, remember that is the person you may be sharing a driveway with!

At the very least, spend some time looking carefully at the area at different times of day. Are there children and animals around, how do people drive, are trailers and boats parked in the street? Are yards and homes well maintained? Down the line, some of these entities may be sources of conflict.

2. *When issues with neighbors arise, deal with them directly and in a timely manner.* Whether you have a complaint about a neighbor or he/she about you, it is usually best to immediately define the issue and deal with it.

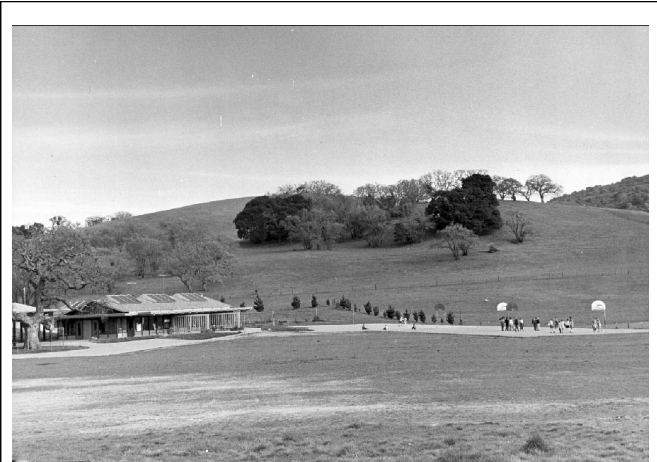
I know that some situations are relatively minor, but because they have existed for a long period of time, they become areas of dispute as they become more and more of an irritant. Suppose that your neighbor leaves his garbage cans out several days running. You decide not to say anything, because you don't want to be a nag, but each time it happens you become increasingly irritated. When you finally mention it to your neighbor you may be less tactful than if you had said something early on and your neighbor may react in kind. Off you go, and suddenly it's a big deal. This unpleasantness could have been easily avoided if you had spoken up sooner.

3. *Beware of emails.* When dealing with neighbors, it is preferable to speak in person or by telephone than by email. Email is one-way communication until someone responds. Too much is left to interpretations by the reader. You may think you are being tactful but the reader may think you are being harsh and unreasonable. Furthermore, the reader (in this case your neighbor) can easily "bump" or forward your message to others, effectively ending any chance of dealing privately with a problem. You have no way of knowing who may end up involved in a matter which should be between you and your neighbor.

4. *Use available resources.* Once you and your neighbor have defined the problem and agreed to disagree, you may have resources nearby to help you resolve your differences. If you belong to a homeowners association you may find that the issue at hand has been dealt with in the past. As a resident of Portola Valley and San Mateo County, there are resource which you can utilize. Try to maintain cordial relations with your neighbor as you go through the process, and once the situation is settled, put it behind you and move on.

5. *Think of the glass as half full.* Before you embark on any neighbor dispute, remember the good things about your neighbor. If you have a solid, cordial relationship, discuss problems in a friendly way and exercise good listening skills.

One of the best parts of living in Portola Valley is the quality of our neighborhoods. In most cases, issues can be resolved satisfactorily without rancor.



*Bear Paw area above Corte Madera school
1970*

SmartMeter – a Tool to Reduce Energy Use

Increasing numbers of Portola Valley residents are making a nearly invisible leap into the digital era as PG&E methodically swaps out the old analog meters, designed during the Kennedy administration, for new, wireless, two-way SmartMeters.

This is part of PG&E's efforts to modernize the power grid. Meter change-outs take less than 15 minutes and are a critical first step in helping California develop a smart grid that will allow PG&E to identify and correct power outages without leaving the plant. Say goodbye to your old meter reader, since PG&E will no longer need to send flesh and blood to your home to know how much to bill you. But how does this change impact you?

In fact, SmartMeters are providing PG&E's customers with a benefit that can be said to be *truly* measurable: homeowners can have immediate, near real-time access to their energy usage through the PG&E website, whether you are home, at work or vacationing in Huahine.

How many of us take the time to study our bill from PG&E? If you had, you might have noticed that PG&E's 5-tiered pricing has become increasingly progressive. For users in the top tier, rates have surged a whopping 26% annually, rising from \$.13 ten years ago, to \$.47 per kilowatt as of PG&E's most recent rate hike in January.

Let's say you are at work and no one is home. You can log into your PG&E account and check the usage status: your empty house is humming away at a steady 1,200 watts per hour! What's going on? Assuming you turn off lights and your kids are not actually home having a party, this is your electric "base load." Just for this, you are likely paying between \$400 and \$500 per month, and much of this energy is simply being wasted!

Research indicates that only measurable problems can be fixed. For those in Portola Valley who are not happy about paying thousands of dollars for their energy, the new SmartMeters

provide a big step forward in energy measurability. There are many easy ways to reduce your home energy use and especially to reduce wasted base load energy. The fastest way to fix this problem in your home would be to bring in an expert to do an energy assessment. If your PG&E bill is over \$1,000 per month, this could save you a lot almost instantly.

Another Great Tool to Reduce Your Consumption

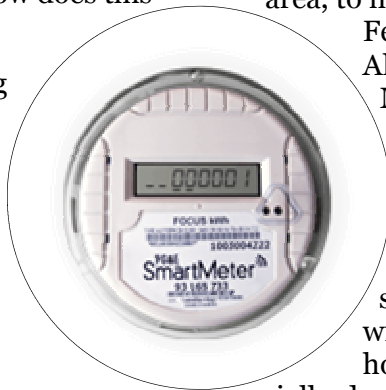
Another way to reduce your home energy use will be to participate in the Town of Portola Valley's upcoming home energy assessment program.

Portola Valley selected Acterra, a local non-profit with a 40-year history serving the mid-peninsula area, to help it submit a joint application for

Federal Stimulus Funds along with Los Altos Hills, Woodside, Atherton and Monte Sereno, all towns that share Portola Valley's high energy home profile. Acterra will receive funding from the California Energy Commission to design and implement a program, anticipated to start later this summer/fall. The Acterra program will provide detailed analyses of a home's energy use by utilizing specially-developed energy diagnostics to review SmartMeter data to pinpoint areas of greatest savings at the least cost to homeowners.

Portola Valley's portion of the Federal Stimulus Funds—\$25,000—will fund detailed analyses and efficiency programs for approximately 10% of Portola Valley homes. The Town is also working with San Mateo County to take advantage of the new Residential Energy Action Program for home retrofits and the CaliforniaFIRST financing program, also funded by Stimulus money.

You can check up on the latest information and status about the upcoming programs and find resources on home energy assessment providers by visiting the Town's website, www.portolavalley.net. If you are interested in the Acterra program, send an email to Brandi de Garmeaux at bdegarmeaux@portolavalley.net and you'll be contacted once the program is launched.





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Newly Adopted Water Conservation Ordinances

We Encourage Everyone to be Water Conscious

In an effort to continue to promote and ensure water conservation as well as to comply with State regulations, two new water conservation ordinances went into effect on April 9th.

The Landscape Ordinance requires the installation of water efficient landscaping in all new development and permitted projects. The Landscape Ordinance is designed to achieve a 25% savings on outdoor water use. The Landscape Ordinance limits the allowable turf area to 25% of the irrigated area or 1,000 sf (whichever is smaller). It also requires that at least 80% of the plants in non-turf landscape areas be native plants, low-water using plants, or no-water using plants.

The Indoor Ordinance requires the installation of water efficient fixtures and appliances in all new development and permitted remodels. The Indoor Ordinance is designed to achieve a 20% savings on indoor water use.

There were two main reasons why the Landscape Ordinance and Indoor Ordinance were adopted:

1. Without additional conservation, the water demand of the Bay Area Water Conservation Agency (BAWSCA) agencies is projected to exceed supplies by 2015. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) made the unilateral decision to limit water supply available from the San Francisco Re-

gional Water System to BAWSCA member agencies to 184 million gallons per day until at least 2018. As a result, based on current projections, and in absence of increased water conservation, water demands within the BAWSCA service area will exceed available supplies by 2015.

2. The Landscape Ordinance and Indoor Ordinance provide tools for compliance with new State Legislation and changes to the Plumbing and Building Codes that mandate changes to indoor and outdoor water use efficiency. There are efforts at the State level to reduce water consumption throughout California. The Governor has called for a 20% reduction in per capita water use by 2020, and, recent legislation adopted by the California State Legislature target water-use efficiency to meet these goals.

Both new Ordinances allow flexibility and coincide with Build It Green and the Green Point Rated Checklist. The Town's Architectural & Site Control Commission has found that residents are already taking these measures into consideration when designing their new landscape projects by utilizing more native grasses into their meadow areas and limiting the amount of turf.

The Town is in the process of creating a native grass test plot at the Town Center. Staff will post a note on the Town's website when the native grasses have been installed, so that everyone can come by and see how they perform.

Leslie Lambert