



Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation, Inc.

Post Office Box 353, Agoura Hills, California 91301



*The **voice** and conscience of the Santa Monica Mountains since 1968*

November 2011 MEETING

Wednesday, November 16 at 7:00 p.m.

The Place – Diamond X – Take Las Virgenes to Mulholland; turn left on Mulholland. For the next 3/4 mile, the King Gillette Ranch will be on your right. After you've passed Stokes Canyon Road, in about 3/4 mile, you will see a sign on your right with "Diamond X" and the National Park Service logo on it. A short distance past the sign a narrow road goes south at a right angle. This is Wickland Road, and, at this point you are entering the King Gillette Ranch. Follow Wickland about 300 yards until the road forks; take the left-hand fork; keep bearing left to the lighted house on the right. Park; enter through the lit doorway.

Call to Order

Roll Call

Agenda Changes/ Approval

Correspondence/Announcements

Officer's Reports

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Old Business/ Reports

1. Agoura Hills Election Results – Champagne Toast – New Councilmember Illece Buckley-Weber!
2. OWTS State Hearing Report – OWTS State Standards Schedule
3. County Dark Skies Ordinance Update and Status
4. Dues & December Holiday Party

New Business

1. Malibu Lagoon Restoration. Guest Speaker - Suzanne Goode - State Parks. Delegate Dorothy Reik. Discussion.
2. Resource Conservation District – Melina Watts – Presentation. Discussion and input re: What do you want the Santa Monica Mountains to be like in 50 years? Watershed visioning – search for projects, programs, ideas, perspective and hopes.
3. Limited Service Agreements (LSA's) – Committee Report – Chair Don Wallace and Delegate Elizabeth Stephens. New potential action.
4. Calabasas' "Old West" Old Town Non-Conforming Project & Environmental Review.
5. Discussion re: initiating a potential - *Local* Eco Villain of the Year Award – modeled after Center for Biological Diversity's "most outrageous eco-villain." Process and public participation.

AGOURA HILLS COUNCIL REORGANIZES DECEMBER 6

Mark your calendars! On December 6, Agoura Hills Councilmembers-elect Illece Buckley-Weber and John Edelston will be sworn in. The Agoura Hills City Council reorganization meeting starts at 6 p.m.

Buckley-Weber placed first in the November 8 election, with 1,590 votes, or 31.82 percent, and incumbent Edelston placed second with 1,544 votes, or 30.90 percent.

Of the other contenders, Sue Lepisto placed third with 1,376 votes, or 27.54 percent, and Meril Platzer came in fourth with 487 votes, or 9.75 percent.

Illece will replace Mayor Pro-Tem Dan Kuperberg, a past Federation delegate and indomitable Agoura Hills City Councilmember, who opted to not run for re-election.

By resoundingly voting for Buckley-Weber, Agoura Hills voters have re-enforced their commitment to environmental values.

CALABASAS COUNCILMEMBER WOLFSON TO RESIGN FROM OFFICE

Calabasas City Councilmember Jonathon Wolfson is leaving office at the end of the year and moving to Bell Canyon. He will therefore no longer be a resident of the City of Calabasas and must leave the Council.

Wolfson has served almost two four-year terms and would have been up for re-election in 2013, along with Mayor James Bozajian and Councilmember Mary Sue Maurer.

His move creates a mid-term opening and an interesting quandary of what to do with an empty Council seat for 16 months.

We can hypothesize on how the vacated seat might be dealt with. We're thinking there are perhaps three options:

1. Leave it vacant until the next election.

2. Hold a special election, although this would be expensive.

3. Appoint the next largest vote-getter in the election just held last March. Former Councilmember **Bob Sibilis** was the next top vote-getter after Lucy Martin and Fred Gaines, coming in a very strong third place. Bob would be the natural choice based on the voice and vote of the people and could make a more seamless transition into Council.

DARK SKIES ORDINANCE MOVES TO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS County Wants Stars in its Skies...

At the Federation's October 19 meeting, County planners previewed the long-awaited rural outdoor lighting (dark skies) ordinance and took copious notes on delegates' comments and suggestions. Delegates were particularly concerned with language in the draft version that appeared to mandate placing streetlights in rural areas. Planners revised the draft, and, reflecting the Federation's input, the new version is more specific on when and why new street lighting may be required along County roads and at driveways.

The ordinance's goal is to regulate night lighting in unincorporated Los Angeles County in ways "that will permit reasonable uses of outdoor lighting for nighttime safety and security and promote dark skies for the enjoyment and health of humans and wildlife." It will protect residents from intrusive "light trespass" into their homes from poorly directed illumination, reduce the glare of excessive lighting and help preserve Las Virgenes' rural lifestyle.

The County Planning Commission approved the revised ordinance on Wednesday, November 9. Its next stop is the Board of Supervisors, but because there are usually 45 days between the two hearings, and the holidays are coming up, supervisors may not hear the ordinance until early next year, says Supervising Regional Planner Karen Lafferty.

Similar ordinances have cropped up nationwide. Calabasas took the lead in adopting one locally in 2002 with Councilmember Janice Lee as its forceful advocate. She was

supported by the late, great Lesley Devine and by James Bozajian, Michael Harrison and Dennis Washburn. "Calabasas has joined the growing number of communities worldwide that want skies illuminated by stars, not Klieg lights," said the *Los Angeles Times* at the time.

Calabasas' dark skies ordinance or standards have since been incorporated into the City's Land Use and Development Code - Chapter 17.27 Lighting. The Federation recently made a public records request to the City to see how its dark skies ordinance has fared.

In the last four years, there have been only about 9 complaints of light trespass, all from commercial night lighting. It may be that Calabasas residents don't know or don't remember that their City has this protective let-there-be-dark ordinance.

Educating the public is obviously an important facet of successful implementation of dark-skies standards.

(See article in Nov.14 Daily News: http://www.dailynews.com/ci_19330225)

CALABASAS COYOTES SAFER

A recent letter to *The Acorn* complained about "packs of coyotes" that "cry out ... scary loud and threatening sounds ... nearly each and every night."

We always thought those "loud and threatening sounds" were actually a form of group bonding, sort of like the sounds football players make when they're getting fired up for a big game, "Go get those rats and mice!," they seem to be saying to each other. They may also be howling to remind rival coyotes that this is their "turf." Making scary loud and threatening sounds in order to frighten or intimidate us humans safely ensconced in our beds is probably the farthest thing from their minds.

Most people seem to enjoy these nightly howling sessions. They serve to remind us that parts of Las Virgenes are still wild and free. But in some neighborhoods signs are occasionally posted on telephone poles that announce that someone's unfortunate cat is "missing" or "lost." Some of us who have been around a while read these notices and exchange knowing glances because we're pretty sure we think we know where that missing kitty can be found.

Calabasas has trapped “problem” coyotes for many years, without generating serious controversy, but last July several citizens asked the City to prohibit further expenditure of city funds on trapping coyotes. The Environmental Commission was asked to review issues involving coyotes. In a 4-0 vote, the Commission recommended the City Council adopt a public education campaign to encourage coexistence with coyotes and continue a suspension of trapping.

The October 3 City Council staff report contained a great deal of information about coyotes, and the Council ended up adopting a multi-pronged management strategy for dealing with them, putting its major reliance on education and public outreach: “This involves decreasing attractants, increasing pet safety and creating reasonable expectations of normal coyote behavior.”

“Education” means “the public should understand what normal coyote behavior is when living in close proximity to coyotes. For example, vocalization (i.e. howling) is normal acceptable behavior and does not indicate aggression...” “Education” also includes dissemination of information to residents, businesses, and schools...”

Coyotes live in family “packs” consisting of a mating pair and their pups. The group raises its young and defends its territory from other coyotes. Though coyotes live in groups, they are usually seen traveling alone or in pairs.

If members of a territorial “pack” of coyotes are exterminated, individual transient coyotes will move in to take their place. Thus, trying to eliminate all coyotes in a given area can be an exercise in frustration.

How can people tell if there are coyotes living around their property? Coyote tracks are very similar to dog tracks, but their scat, left around to mark their territory, is likely to contain rodent hairs, wild berries, the bones of small animals and other things that don’t normally come out of cans.

Thankfully, in October the Calabasas City Council decided it would no longer spend City funds on trapping coyotes.

Given that Las Virgenes lies within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, we are privileged to have real experts from the National Park Service—who shared their expertise with Calabasas officials throughout the process and at the City Council hearing—to show us how to live peacefully with our neighbors in the urban-wildland interface.

THERE GOES THE OLD WEST NEIGHBORHOOD

Threat to Old Town Calabasas is a Best-Kept Secret

Remember Old Town Calabasas? Take a good look because should an **appeal** filed last week to the Planning Commission and City Council fail, a new precedent-setting project will change the face of Old Town for good.

What took **decades** of careful oversight and dedication to protect could be shattered in an instant.



Old Town Calabasas

How, you might ask, could that be?

Haven't Calabasas residents spent millions of dollars over 20 years to preserve their Old Town area? Didn't they grant the Old Town Coalition review authority to protect Old Town's integrity?



Old Town

Hasn't the City adopted a Historic Preservation Ordinance, an award-winning **Old Town Calabasas Master Plan and Design Guidelines**, and even an historic "**Old West**" **Overlay Zone** to safeguard its cultural Old Town resource? You bet, and here are some of the definitive policies and goals excerpted from those guidelines:

"From the outset, community participation was a key ingredient to ensure the success of the Old Town Master Plan. City Council appointed a 25-member Steering Committee to work with the design team to achieve the design recommendations..."

"Old Town Calabasas is the historical and cultural heart of the community. Protection of the area's historical character is a critical part of Calabasas' vision of its future. In addition to preserving actual historic buildings...design Guidelines ensure that future development is compatible with its historic, small town character..."

"The Overlay Zone was enacted to ensure consistency with the "**Old West**" theme and



Leonis Adobe

compatibility with existing land uses within the Overlay Zone in terms of use, intensity, architectural design, pedestrian activity, and preservation of natural resources; specifically, oak trees and Calabasas Creek..."

“Goal is to preserve and enhance the existing historical "Old West" character and buildings in Old Town. Architectural theme: early western (early 1870's to late 1890's)...

“...establish the roots of the town's history and heritage, giving residents and visitors alike a view into the area's past. Maintaining this link to the past is crucial in establishing a true sense of community for residents of Calabasas...

“Primary building materials—**wood, brick, stone.**”



Historic Kramer building.

Site of new restaurant – see design below.

You get the picture. There's no question that the City of Calabasas has invested significantly in protecting its "Old West" Old Town cultural resources in every way.

So how does a project with a contemporary, two-story glass restaurant, which is inconsistent and incompatible with the Old Town Master Plan and Design Guidelines, get fast-track approval under the radar?



And the issue is by no means restricted to simply the restaurant's design and the planning process or lack thereof. The project also:

- has construction up to and onto the banks of an impaired waterway. Calabasas Creek, also known as McCoy Canyon Creek, has been identified and placed on the 2010 Clean Water Section 303(d) list as impaired by both pathogens and nutrients by the EPA, State Water Resources Control Board and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Yet these plans call for a large outdoor patio that spans the length of the building and out to the creek bank, with no setbacks despite the Development Code and Old Town Master Plan* that call for 100- and 40-foot setbacks respectively. There is no mitigation. No native-plant creek bank restoration requirements.



Calabasas Creek, also known as McCoy Canyon Creek, is an impaired waterway.



- includes constructing a **new** building, which will contain a bicycle repair shop sited adjacent to the creek, again in violation of watercourse setbacks in both the Development Code and Old Town Master Plan* and which could potentially put lubricant runoff into the impaired Calabasas Creek. Consideration of pervious surfaces is apparently exempt.

**The Calabasas Land Use and Development Code (Chapter 17.20.D) requires a development setback of 100 feet from the "outer edge of the riparian vegetation canopy of a perennial or intermittent stream."*

- is being *grandfathered* in and is therefore apparently not subject to certain codes despite the structure being vacant already for more than seven months, includes an addition and a significant remodel that will impact the City's Old Town historical resource, as well as a new structure (which obviously cannot be grandfathered in and also violates the City's watercourse setback requirements) and a new patio extending into the protected zone of an impaired creek.

- is a well known archaeological resource site, yet there will be no monitoring by an on-site archaeologist. Instead, workers involved with excavation/grading will receive "training" to recognize human and animal remains as well as cultural artifacts and, upon discovery, to notify City staff.



- calls for the future cementing over of a portion of the creek and the removal of the gazebo to create roundabout valet parking off Calabasas Road.



Gazebo to be moved to make way for valet parking.

- allows the Community Development Director latitude in making changes without oversight or future public hearings contrary to the Old Town Master Plan, which stipulates that "approvals require review and concurrent approval by the Old Town Coalition."

- is a discretionary project, conditioned to require permits and approvals from Fish & Game, Army Corps of Engineers, LA County Public Works and many others prior to commencement—and yet none of these permits have yet been obtained. Nor has the project had the benefit of **public hearings** before the City's Planning Commission, Architectural Review Board or City Council.

- **has not been reviewed by the City's Architectural Review Board (ARB)**. ARB review is standard procedure in other projects that come before the City. Why would a project of this significance get a bypass for *any* reason? Further, the Old Town Master Plan stipulates that "because the Old Town Master Plan and Design Guidelines require **detailed** review for both public and private improvements, the City should establish a Design Review Board as a review authority for Old Town."

- **has not been reviewed by the Planning Commission.** The Architectural Review Board is supposed to make design recommendations to the Planning Commission to incorporate into its consideration and oversight.

- **has not been voted on by Council.** A resource-altering project like this should be required to go to City Council for approval, but it did not.

Instead, the project was obscurely noticed as a “request for a certificate of appropriateness for a renovation and remodel with a 300-foot addition” and was approved by the Historic Preservation Commission, with no other oversight and virtually no public awareness.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) meetings are not televised or recorded, so the public has no idea what is being discussed or considered. HPC is an advisory body that typically sends recommendations to City Council on designating historic structures; sometimes it even approves signs.

Surely, good planning and a project with these potential impacts dictate that approval should require more than this Commission’s **sole** purview?

And why were Calabasas residents left completely in the dark? Staff reports and pictures were **not** published online, nor were they linked or attached to the agenda as is the City’s customary policy. Neither were they available at required postings across the city.

Two of the four members of the public who did show up at the HPC meeting to testify complained that they couldn’t get any information at all and had only found out about the project by chance. They were told they could have gone to City Hall to get the information.

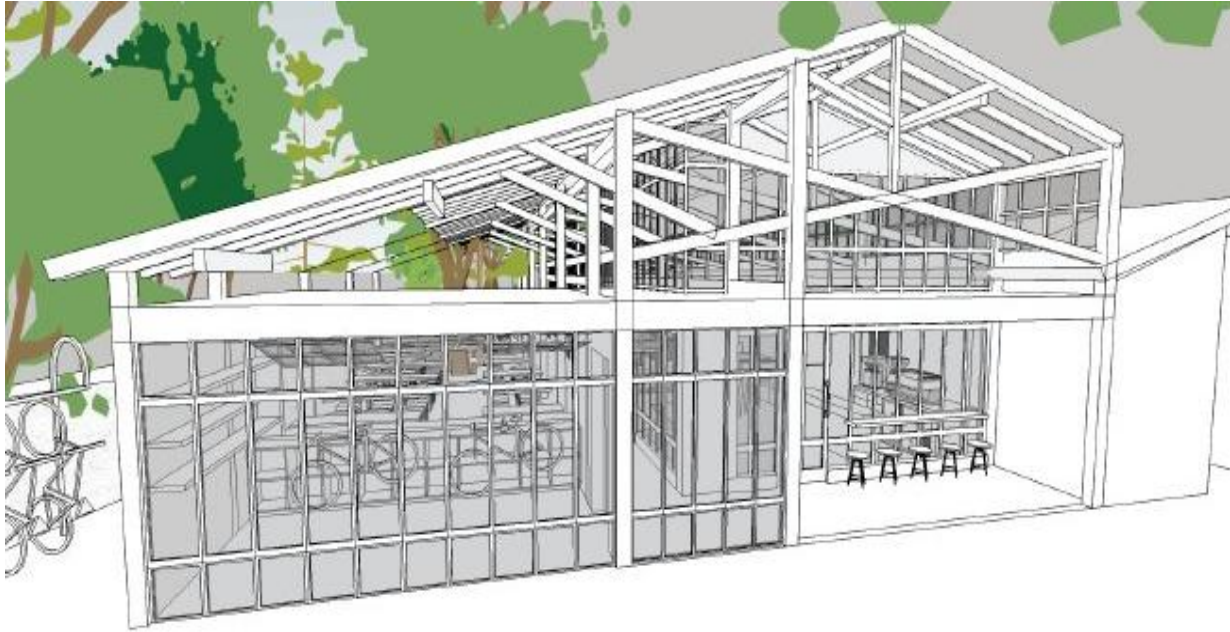
There were no working microphones at the meeting and it was a real struggle for those attending to hear the discussion or speakers.

One of the Historic Preservation Commissioners wanted to make sure the public wasn’t given too much time to speak, and one of the project applicants took it upon himself to instruct the Commission as to what it should be considering. The presentation was slanted with palpable pressure to support the project. Irrelevant issues like the type of food that would be sold, how beautiful the project was, and how much money was being invested were also brought up by the applicant as justification to garner approval by the Commission.

The famous “Old West” Sagebrush Cantina in Old Town.

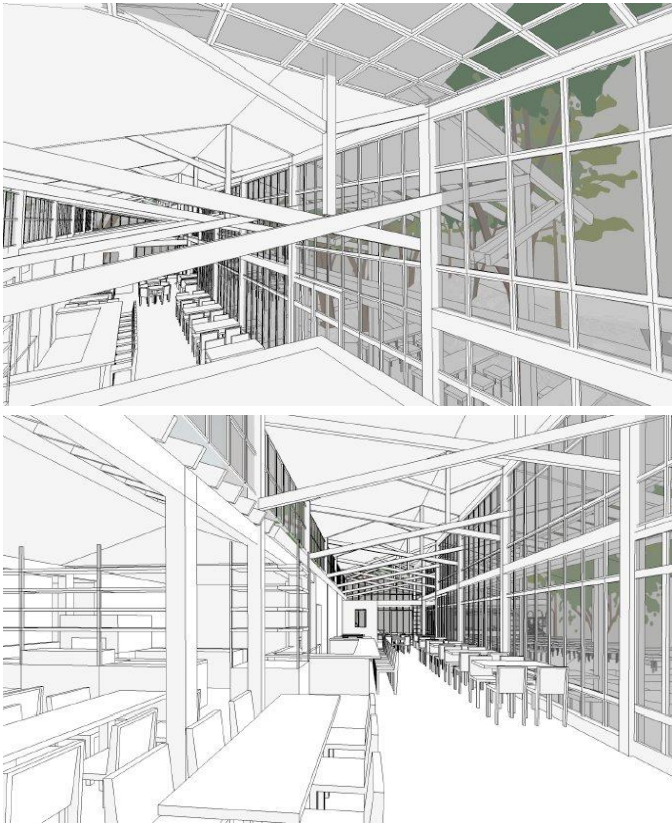


The project architects noted their plans were somewhat contemporary and had a modern edge but claimed they had achieved *their goal* of bringing the old building into the new century.



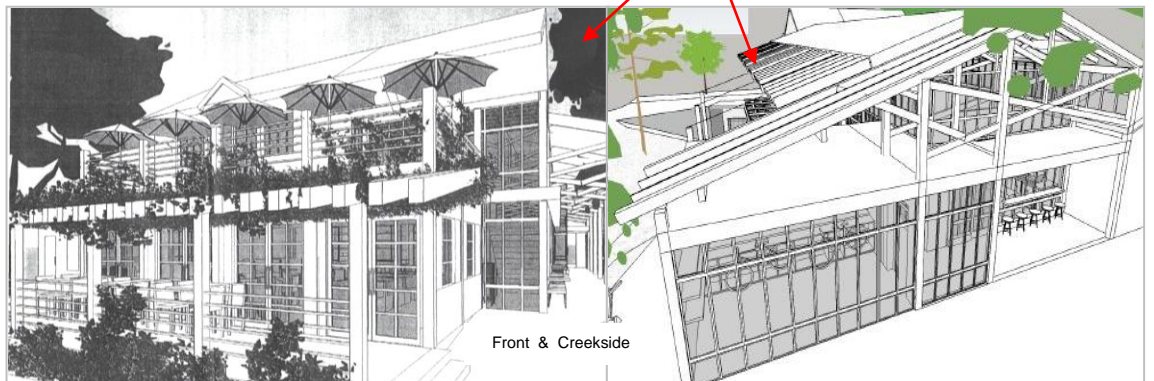
This remodel and addition above will replace the Old Town building below. The enormous, two-story wall of windows and the contemporary design are anything but “Old West” and are also inconsistent with the Old Town Master Plan.





Attempted justification for getting around the “Old West” Design Guidelines rely on what staff calls the “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties” to make the finding that the design *enhances* the character of Old Town because the renovation/remodel is so vastly different from the historic Kramer’s store to which it is attached. That finding cannot be made. That is once again inconsistent with and contrary to the “Old-West” Old Town Design Guidelines, which reiterate, “Existing buildings undergoing remodeling should be designed to harmonize and respect the historic buildings in Old Town.”

Clearly, the massive, two story wall of glass and modern design (above) do NOT harmonize and comply with the architectural requirements of Old Town.



Clearly replacing the “Old West” building with this precedent setting contemporary one, does NOT enhance the character of “Old West” Old Town!

The question to be asked is what interest does the Community Development Director have in fast-tracking this project? Why the lack of Planning Commission oversight, the apparent disregard for the City's cultural and natural resources and, most importantly, again leaving City residents out of the equation. Do you get the feeling that residents simply get in the way of what the Community Development Director decides to do?

This “dysfunctional process” doesn't work for anyone. Citizens have a vested interest in preserving the integrity of their 1890s “Old West” Old Town and their creek. And it surely doesn't work for property owners or, in this case, the lessee investors, who would have benefited greatly from community input from the outset. It doesn't work for the City's revitalization, restoration and enhancement of Old Town's business district either. Attracting investment is paramount, but it doesn't have to be done contrary to the best interests of the residents and the integrity of their Old Town resource.

Everyone benefits from a restaurant use here—it's a win, win situation—and these problems and impacts could easily have been avoided.

The stream is a resource and an integral part of the historic landscape, and the City missed a perfect opportunity for restoration and a chance to work with the investors to encourage passive recreation, as in a walkway along the creek. The Old Town Coalition Master Plan even considers a bridge to encourage foot traffic and attract people to the “Old West” Old Town businesses.”

The RRM Design Group created Calabasas' award-winning Master Plan, design guidelines, streetscape design plan, tree protection plans, construction documents and economic implementation program for the revitalization of Old Town Calabasas, **the oldest remnant of a western town in Southern California.**



According to the *Los Angeles Times* (November, 18, 1995), “The Calabasas Road Streetscape Improvements Plan is part of ongoing efforts to attract more shoppers/residents to the district, which is home to the Leonis Adobe* [the #1 cultural historic monument in Los Angeles City and a National Historic Place], a museum housed in a Spanish adobe built in the 1800s, and a Victorian-style park that opened in May. Officials say the **\$1.2 million project** calls for ... installing

old-time boardwalks, benches and street lights to enhance the district's quaint character.”

* As Los Angeles City Cultural Monument #1, the Leonis Adobe Museum is dedicated to restoring, preserving, and sharing the last of the old west. Here, you can experience California ranch life of the late 1800s... visit a Victorian-style early Los Angeles home... see what a jail was like in the Wild West...



Calabasas has spent significant resources to stay connected to its heritage and to overhaul and restore “Old West” charm to the stretch of Calabasas Road in Old Town. There are cobblestone and brick crosswalks and medians, boardwalks, reproduction antique street lamps, trees, a gazebo and even trash bins that all conform. To add a modern look to the current Kramer Store property with two stories of glass is **precedent-setting**; it changes the long-established and required “Old West” architectural theme the original Old Town Coalition worked so hard to establish and maintain. The Old Town Coalition passed its guardianship to the Historic Preservation Commission. The current modern design to

the project, while strikingly lovely in another location, takes away from the original goals of the Coalition, which the Historic Preservation Commission was entrusted to enforce.

Thanks to an appeal by a member of the public, the Planning Commission will finally hear the project on Tuesday, November 29.



Calabasas Creek Park in Old Town

WHO DISCOVERED LAS VIRGENES?

Ever wondered what Las Virgenes looked like to the first explorers at the moment of discovery? Father Juan Crespi, who had already discovered and named the Los Angeles River, was part of the first Spanish expedition to enter our area. He kept a diary describing the unspoiled landscapes he was passing through. Until recently, the only available English translation of Crespi’s diary was brief and incomplete. A more descriptive, detailed version was discovered in Mexico several years ago and then translated by the since deceased Professor Alan K. Brown of Ohio State University. While excerpts from his translation are quoted here, the entire translation is not available in publication.

Spanish explorers had sailed along the Malibu coast fewer than 50 years after Columbus' time, but they showed little interest in the mountains they could see from the decks of their ships, and certainly not in the Las Virgenes area, which was out of sight 10 miles inland. In fact it would be 230 more years before any Europeans got around to actually "putting boots on the ground" in the Las Virgenes area.

What finally convinced the Spanish to take an interest in the interior of California was the threat posed by the Russians, who had "discovered" Alaska around 1740 and were soon trapping sea otters along the California coast. Fearing the Russians might annex California and pose a threat to Spanish silver mining interests in northern Mexico, the king of Spain commissioned Gaspar de Portola to explore California's interior and establish Spain's claim to the land.

So it came to pass on January 14, 1770, after a breakfast of barbecued yucca prepared by friendly Indians, that a group of leather-jacketed Spanish soldiers, led by Gaspar de Portola and accompanied by Padre Juan Crespi and Sgt. Miguel Costanso, came down from the valley that is now filled by Lake Sherwood to "... a very large hollow...all grown over with a great many large white oaks, live oaks, and sycamores" and became the first Europeans to set eyes on the future site of Westlake Village. (The above quote describes the original landscape along Westlake Boulevard between Triunfo Canyon and Potrero Canyon Roads.)

Crespi's diary describes the land the expedition was seeing for the first time. Sgt. Costanso wrote about the direction of the expedition's march and the distance traveled each day, giving us clues to the route the Portola expedition followed as it passed through the Las Virgenes area, spending the night near an Indian village on what is now the south shore of Westlake Lake, stopping at another on the site of Agoura Meadows Shopping Center, climbing the Calabasas Grade, and stopping again along Calabasas Creek in what is now Old Town Calabasas.

According to Crespi, after passing through the "very large hollow," the expedition came to "...a village of some ten grass houses, where they had a good-sized stream of water close by...[Potrero Creek]. I called this handsome lovely spot, *la Rancheria y Canada del Triunfo del Dulcissimo Nombre de Jesus* (the Village and Hollow of the Triumph of the Most Sweet Name of Jesus). It being that day."

Padre Crespi didn't explain what sort of "day" celebrated the *Triumph of the Most Sweet Name of Jesus*, and a Catholic encyclopedia has provided no illumination to date, but the name "Triunfo" ranks right up there with "Los Angeles" and "Encino" as one of the very few place names in southern California that was bestowed by explorers at the very moment of discovery.

The “Triunfo” village site was destroyed during the construction of Westlake Village in the late 1960s, as were almost all of the “white oaks, live oaks, and sycamores” that filled the Triunfo Hollow when it was first described by Crespi in 1770.

Sgt. Costanso tells us the Portola Expedition spent the night of January 14 at the “Triunfo” village and then, “ ...set out early in the morning of the 15th [at about 8:30 a.m.] from this grand spot ... with two or three heathens ... guiding us through these mountains on a southeast course” (i.e. in the general direction of San Diego, their hoped for destination).

After traveling for “a league and a half” (a little over four miles), the expedition arrived at “another small village,” which Crespi describes as being “...in a little hollow in the mountains, which are quite high, broken, and cliffy.” This almost certainly refers to Ladyface Mountain, a prominent local landmark in Agoura Hills, which dominates the view looking toward the south from Portola’s probable route between the “Triunfo” village and the next “small village.” Portola’s probable route would have followed Lindero Canyon north and then turned east somewhere between the 101 Freeway and Thousand Oaks Boulevard.

The distance and direction the expedition would have traveled from El Triunfo to this “small village” leaves little doubt that this “small village” was the Chumash Indian village that once occupied the site of Von’s Market and the Agoura Meadows Shopping Center at the northwest corner of Kanan Road and Thousand Oaks Boulevard in Agoura Hills. This village and its cemetery were excavated in the 1960s, when Agoura Meadows was developed.

According to Costanso, “At this village they gave us other guides.” The expedition then continued in a generally southeasterly direction, possibly following the general alignments of either modern Driver Avenue or Agoura Road, either going over or around the 150-foot ridge between Liberty Canyon and Saratoga Hills. There are no entries in Crespi’s diary for the next five or six miles, but Costanso describes an incident that almost certainly took place somewhere in the Las Virgenes Valley and that sheds light on the stresses Portola and the expedition members were under. The Portola expedition had originally come north from San Diego by way of Sepulveda Pass, continued north through the Valley to the Santa Clarita Valley and down the Santa Clara Valley to the ocean. But running short of supplies on the return trip, they had taken what they apparently thought would be a shortcut up the Santa Rosa Valley, through the modern site of Thousand Oaks and through the “Triunfo Hollow” to the modern site of Westlake Village.

By the time the expedition reached the present site of Agoura Hills, the expedition had apparently become thoroughly lost in what must have seemed to them to be a complex maze of hills, valleys, rugged mountains and equally rugged canyons. To make matters

worse, the expedition was running out of food and was forced to eat one of its pack mules for supper every night.

Portola was trying to get back to San Diego, the expedition's original starting point, before his supply of mules ran out. He was hoping to find the large valley Crespi had called "El Valle de Santa Catalina de Bononia," which they had passed through on the way north. If they could find "El Valle," he hoped they could get their bearings and figure out how to get back to San Diego.

Crespi and Costanso left no record of it, but the expedition must have crossed Las Virgenes Creek, probably somewhere between the 101 Freeway and A.E. Wright, most likely in the vicinity of Steeplechase or the new A.E. Wright pedestrian footbridge.

Once the expedition had crossed Las Virgenes Creek, it found its way east blocked by the hills along the east side of the Las Virgenes Valley. Portola and his men apparently looked off to their right and saw this long, level valley leading off to the south and concluded that would be the shortest way to San Diego, but "[the Indian guides] leading us to the northeast caused us great uneasiness. In spite of all the signs we made to them to lead us east or southeast [toward San Diego], they persisted in refusing, telling us the country was impassible in those directions."

After making no headway persuading the Indian guides to lead the expedition south down Malibu Canyon, Portola and Costanso must have decided their best hope lay in trusting the guides and following their directions. Costanso tells what happened next: "...we had no reason to regret having believed them. A short time afterwards we turned to the east, ascending a long but gradual slope. From its summit we discovered what we were looking for, that is, the *Valle de los Robles*" (aka *El Valle de Santa Catalina de Bononia*).

The sharp "turn to the east" can still be seen today as a sharp curve in the Freeway just east of the Las Virgenes Road bridge over the 101 Freeway. The "long but gradual slope" is, certainly, today's Calabasas Grade, which climbs 300 feet in 1.3 miles, less than a 5 percent grade to the crest just short of the Mureau Road Bridge.

Of course, there was no road, or even a well-manicured trail in 1770, but the Chumash Indians; the Spanish explorers; the Mission Fathers who laid out El Camino Real; the later American travelers on horseback, wagon and Model T Ford; and modern highway engineers all understood the need to use the easiest, most energy-efficient route of travel available.

Well-fed modern hikers and bikers may climb up and down hills just to burn off calories, but if you're trying to feed a bunch of tired, hungry soldiers who have to hike or ride 30 or 40 miles up and down hills every day, you don't want to burn them out by forcing them to climb any more hills than absolutely necessary. That may be why the "most

energy efficient route of travel” followed first by the Indians and later by the Portola expedition in 1770 is often so close to the alignment of the 101 Freeway today.

Crespi made no entries in his diary after leaving the Agoura Meadows village until he had crossed over the crest of the Calabastas Grade. Then he wrote, “At about four leagues [11 miles] we came down from [the mountains] on the aforesaid [southeast] course, and at the foot of the mountains [we] came across a small creek with a great many willow, sycamore, and live oak trees and what must have been a naranja of water in it.”

Though the good padre seemed to really know his trees, we wondered at this point whether he could have made a mistake because California sycamore trees are usually found along rocky mountain streams like Cold Creek, not along grassy arroyos like the ones found in the freeway corridor. But the good padre turned out to be right. The banks of Calabastas Creek (also known as McCoy Canyon Creek), flowing next to the Sagebrush Cantina parking lot and the former Fin’s restaurant, are lined with willows, sycamores and live oaks today, just as Crespi described them 240 years ago.

Because it would have been about noon when the Portola expedition arrived at Calabastas Creek, it would be plausible to assume that Padre Juan Crespi had time to describe the trees along Calabastas Creek in detail in his diary and measure the amount of water flowing in it because the expedition had stopped there for lunch or at least for a rest after the long haul up the Calabastas Grade.

After the probable stop at Calabastas Creek, the expedition “...came into the large valley of Santa Catalina de Bononia, and on going another three leagues through this valley reached the good-sized pool of hot water which the valley has on the south side of it [Los Encinos State Historic Park], where there was a large village at the time we stopped there on the way up, and now there was not a single heathen. We had set out northward from this place on the way up....Now, on the way back we have reached it on a northwest to southeast course. Seven leagues march from the Triunfo Hollow [about 20 miles] course southeast.”

PADRE CRESPI PASSES THROUGH LAS VIRGENES AGAIN

On Saturday, April 28, 1770, Crespi was back in Las Virgenes, traveling light on a quick trip to San Francisco. He seems to have overcome the apparent trail fatigue that kept him from writing very much in January and tells us much more about what he is seeing.

“We set out at a quarter before seven in the morning from here at the pool and valley of Santa Catharina de Bononia [Los Encinos SHP again] taking a due northwest course. We crossed the valley in this direction, reached the mountains on going about three leagues [8.5 miles], and entered a small hollow all lined with a great many large white

oaks and live oaks and some sycamore trees. “[Sounds like Pumpkin Hollow and Calabasas Creek again].

“Soon we commenced climbing the mountains and here came across a small creek that had a good little flow of running water. We went up into the mountains over high big hill country and changed our course to the westward.” (The freeway corridor changes from a southwesterly to a west-northwesterly alignment about a half mile west of the Mureau Road Bridge.)

Crespi continues, “[We] came down to a small hollow [Las Virgenes Valley?], and then through little hollows [Saratoga Hills? Liberty Canyon?] and over the skirts of high hill lands [Ladyface?] must have gone a further four leagues [11 miles] through the mountains, which are all grown over with a great many large white oaks and live oaks.” (These oaks can still be seen on many of the hillsides along the south side of the Ventura Freeway.)

“At this four leagues [11 miles] we came to the tree-grown hollow of el Triunfo del Dulcissimo Nombre de Jesus’ [Westlake Village]. About half a league [1.4 miles] before reaching it, we came across a village of some twelve grass-roofed houses.”

“As we passed by the village, eight heathens came out, six of them carrying bows and arrows and the other two weaponless, in order to accompany us, and stayed with us until reaching this spot, where they themselves stacked up pieces of fallen white oak trees for us to make our fire with.”

“This hollow is a grand spot with a great deal of soil and many large white oaks and live oaks, and it has a very large deep pool with a great deal of tule-rushes around it. No other spot with an amount of wood like this has been seen in the whole country all the way to San Francisco...”

If the Westlake “hollow” once had more oak trees than any other place between here and San Francisco, what happened to all those oaks? Many of them were still around in the 1950s and into the 1960’, but the development of Westlake Village in the late 1960s combined with fungus infections from unnatural watering of the Westlake Village Golf Course in hot summer weather caused most of the oaks described by Crespi in 1770 to be removed and replaced with lush green lawns and fairways, paved boulevards and parking lots, office buildings, houses, and shopping centers. In those days Los Angeles County and the developer of Westlake Village were apparently not constrained by any oak tree protection ordinance.

“We reached this hollow at one o’clock in the afternoon on the same westerly course, having traveled six and a quarter hours and made seven leagues (about twenty miles).”
“Here I shall note that by failing to keep on this course and so getting deeper into these mountains, one would have great trouble getting out of them again, as they consist of great high cliffy hill lands, and had the heathens belonging to these spots not shown us

the way, we should have had a great deal of trouble in getting out.” (Was Crespi thinking of the Indians from Agoura who had kept the expedition “on track” three months earlier?)

“I went over to see the pool, which must be over a hundred yards long; and very deep. There are turtles in it, and fish. A large channel of standing water runs for perhaps three hundred yards. This spot seems to lie about opposite Point la Conversion [Point Dume?].”

Crespi does not identify the exact location of this large pool. Some maps show a pool that may fit Crespi’s description in Triunfo Creek downstream from Westlake Dam. Another possibility is that this pool and its rich aquatic fauna were buried during the development of Westlake Village and lake.

April 29th “... we set out from here at the large pool and grand hollow of the Triumph of the most sweet name of Jesus. On our going a short way this hollow turned west-southwestward. [Near Westlake Blvd. and Potrero Road]... The hollow came to an end at about three quarters of a league [about two miles] and we went over a gap in this same direction and down to the small-sized village of some dozen grass houses.” (This village was located on the north side of modern Lake Sherwood east of the Lake Sherwood Fire Station.)

NEXT CAME JUAN BAUTISTA DE ANZA

Though the Portola expedition made important discoveries, it did not create a large enough Spanish presence in California to deter a possible Russian takeover. Six years after Portola there were still only five missions and about 70 Spanish settlers in all of California, and access to those missions and settlers was by a long sea voyage up the west coast of Mexico.

In order to find an overland route across the desert and establish a large permanent Spanish settlement in California, the Spanish viceroy commissioned Juan Bautista de Anza to recruit a large number of settlers and lead what amounted to a “Latino Mayflower” from the town of Horcasitas in the Mexican state of Sonora over a thousand 1,000 miles over mountains and deserts to the San Francisco Bay area. The ancestors of at least two original settlers of the Las Virgenes area were members of that expedition.

De Anza left Sonora in October, 1775, leading an expedition of 240 men, women and children, plus their horses, mules, cattle, and other livestock. During the next four months, the expedition would ride north through the deserts of southern Arizona and then turn west into southern California.

Padre Pedro Font was the chaplain on the de Anza expedition. Like Padre Crespi, he kept a diary, which has been available in publication since 1930, but we now know Font also kept a more extensive personal field journal during the expedition, which was discovered only recently in a library in Rome. It has been translated into English, again by Alan K. Brown of Ohio State, and has been published by the University of Oklahoma.

After crossing the desert from Arizona, the de Anza expedition arrived at Mission San Gabriel on February 12, 1776 and stayed there for several days. On Wednesday, February 21, the expedition “... set out from Mission San Gabriel at half past eleven in the morning and halted at a half past four in the afternoon at the spot Font called El Puertozuelo [the pass] having traveled for five leagues [about 14 miles] following a west-northwestward course.” (El Puertozuelo was near Griffith Park.)

According to Font, “The land was very green and flowery and the route had a few hills and a great deal of miry grounds created by the rains. This is why the pack train fell far in the rear.” (This delay would throw the expedition off schedule and require it to spend the night of the 22nd in the Las Virgenes area, short of its planned overnight stop.)

Font’s journal continues: “February 22, Thursday. We set out from El Puertozuelo at eight o’ clock in the morning and halted at a quarter past three at a spot called El Agua Escondida [hidden water], which lies before the spot called El Triunfo [Westlake Village], where we hoped to arrive today. [The expedition had apparently been delayed by the “miry grounds” and failed to reach its planned destination at El Triunfo.] We traveled nine leagues [about 26 miles] on a westward course...”

“Shortly after setting out [on February 22] from the stopping place [El Puertozuelo], we came to a very spacious valley called Santa Isabel” [called Santa Catalina de Bononia by Portola and the San Fernando Valley by current residents) at the middle of which and at a little over three leagues [about 8.5 miles] is the place called Los Nogales [the walnuts] which is a small spring of water like a little lake, issuing in the midst of the plain.” This is the late Los Encinos State Historic Park, now closed due to the state budget shortfall.

Font continued: “...and at about seven leagues (20 miles) we came to the foot of the mountains...We went into a hollow which has a very small amount of water [Pumpkin Hollow and Calabasas Creek again?] and then spent about two leagues [5.5 miles] going over grades [Calabasas Grade, etc.] as far as the stopping place, which is also a hollow with little water and a good many live oaks [Las Virgenes Valley?].”

The “good many live oaks” in the “hollow” mentioned above are most probably the extensive oak woodland on the north-facing slope of “Firehouse Hill” above Fire Station 125 on Las Virgenes Road. Even today this wooded hillside dominates the view for

westbound travelers coming down the Calabasas Grade toward the Las Virgenes Interchange.

“Along the way we saw gentiles [Indians]...and they were naked and entirely weaponless. Even so, they refused to approach us.”

Try to imagine the reaction of those unclad “gentiles” when the peaceful valley they had known in all their lives was suddenly filled with the clamor of hundreds of mooing cows, braying donkeys, neighing horses, noisy children and the tramping feet of 240 soldiers and settlers. In the morning they would all leave, but things would never again be the same for these “gentiles” and their peaceful valley.

SO WHERE WAS “AGUA ESCONDIDA”?

Padre Font tells us the de Anza expedition spent the night of February 22, 1776, at a place called Agua Escondida, believed to be somewhere in the Las Virgenes Valley, but his field journal doesn’t give us much more information than that.

What little information Font’s journal does provide points to a hollow with little water at the western end of the Calabasas Grade. As mentioned above, the “good many live oaks” he says the expedition saw could be the large oak woodland on the north-facing slope of Firehouse Hill above Fire Station 125, which the expedition would have seen coming down the Calabasas Grade. But in a valley that reportedly had “little water,” where was “Agua Escondida”?

Two springs on the west side of the upper Las Virgenes Valley were bulldozed during the construction of Mont Calabasas. There is another spring on the slope of the 700-foot mountain on the Messenger property—which is being proposed for development—near the old sheep pen east of Las Virgenes Road.

But the most likely location for Agua Escondida is embodied in the name of one of our local communities: Deer Springs. Before it became Deer Springs, this property was an alfalfa, tomato and pumpkin farm known as Sampo Ranch.

Former Federation delegate from the Cold Creek Community Council and longtime vice president of the Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council, Linda Palmer, remembers riding her horse onto Sampo Ranch on a dry summer day many years ago and seeing an area of natural stone slabs that formed a depression in the ground, a sort of a shallow basin. Water was seeping up through the ground into the basin and staying there, but it was clear water rather than stagnant water covered with algae, as you might expect of standing water in hot weather. This shallow stone basin full of clear water in the middle of summer seems the most likely candidate for Agua Escondida, though Linda claims the amount of water seeping up into the basin was not large.

Unfortunately, the stone basin and its clear spring water were apparently bulldozed during the development of Deer Springs, so we will probably never know if this spring was actually Agua Escondida, but if we had to make an educated guess, that would be our first choice.

The 240 members of the de Anza expedition, according to Font, "...set out from El Agua Escondida at eight o'clock in the morning [of Friday, February 23] and...we reached the Santa Clara River after nightfall, having traveled fourteen leagues [40 miles]."

Font's diary echoes Crespi's description of the hillsides along the route of travel through the Las Virgenes area six years earlier. "The mountains hold a great many white oaks, live oaks, and other trees, and also some watering places, such as the ones at El Triunfo and at Los Conejos..."

"At the start the way consisted of a good many hills and grades, then there followed a level route for some leagues [Conejo Valley?], ending with a very steep grade [Conejo Grade], the big grade from which the sea and the first islands of the Santa Barbara Channel can be seen. On going down it one finishes crossing the mountains I spoke of yesterday..."

"...Upon the plain before reaching the [Santa Clara] river we saw an exceedingly big herd of antelope close by, who fled like the wind as soon as they sighted us and seemed like a cloud moving over the ground as they vanished from our sight..." Pronghorn antelope, or wapiti, were common in California in those days. That they inspired such poetic words from priests and ordinary settlers, who were undoubtedly saddle sore from riding all day, testifies to the emotions stirred in the priests and the settlers by the untouched landscapes they were passing through.

BUT WHAT DID DE ANZA HAVE TO DO WITH MODERN LAS VIRGENES?

Most of the 240 Mexican settlers who camped with de Anza at Agua Escondida on February 22, 1776, ended up settling elsewhere in California, but a couple of descendants of those early pioneers eventually became part of the Las Virgenes community.

A few old timers may remember Julian Alvarez, who drove a school bus and trained new bus drivers for the Las Virgenes Unified School District from 1947 until he retired in 1976. Julian, who lived in Calabasas all his life, was a direct descendant of Felipe Santiago Tapia, a soldier on the 1776 De Anza expedition, who brought his family of nine children with him on the expedition. The Tapias were among the 240 settlers recruited by De Anza in Sonora who arrived in the Las Virgenes Valley on the

afternoon of February 22, 1776, and camped that night at the place Font called Agua Escondida.

José Bartholomé Tapia, Felipe Tapia's 10-year-old son, was, according to Tapia family tradition, so impressed by the land he had seen while camping in the Las Virgenes Valley as a boy, that he told people he was going to come back when he grew up and obtain grazing rights to the valley where he had camped that night.

In 1800 a grown-up José Bartolomé Tapia did return to the Las Virgenes area. He applied for a land grant from the Spanish governor of California, and in 1804 Governor José Joaquin de Arrillaga granted José Bartolomé Tapia 13,316 acres of land as compensation for his military service. Unfortunately, José's descendants were unable to perfect their title to the land after the American conquest, and it ended up falling into the hands of others.

However, Julian's grandparents later homesteaded the land that would one day become Tapia Park. It is named for Julian's grandmother's family and is now a sub-unit of Malibu Creek State Park.

Julian Alvarez learned to drive by taking his family's Model T to dances in Santa Monica, the nearest city of any size in those days. An article in the *Las Virgenes Enterprise* at the time of Julian's retirement claimed he had driven his school bus 500,000 accident-free miles by the time he retired.

Did Julian ever express any feelings about the land his 10-year-old ancestor had first seen two hundred years before? Yes. The article in the June 17, 1976, edition of the *Enterprise* quotes him as saying, "He [Julian] is...thankful the state purchased Century Ranch [now Malibu Creek State Park] and plans to leave it virtually untouched."

Another local resident who reportedly had ancestors on the de Anza expedition was Pedro Alcantara Sepulveda, who built the 150-year-old adobe that still stands on the north side of Mulholland just west of Las Virgenes Creek in Malibu Creek State Park.

OLD TOWN BACKGROUND

Most commercial areas in Southern California are marked either by excessive, unsightly signage or by a modern, standardized sameness that denies those businesses any special character or any connection to the heritage of the site. Old Town Calabasas is an exception to this rule. It has real character and variety, and that is part of its attraction, especially the area around the Sagebrush Cantina.

Before the present crowd took over at City hall, Calabasas used to call itself, “The Last of the Old West”. This was not just mindless hype. Unlike most modern shopping centers in southern California, Old Town Calabasas has a long and colorful history, which includes outlaws, ranchers, “wild west” landowners, colorful characters, a 170-year-old adobe, and a stream described by the first Europeans to explore the interior of California.

Mc Coy Canyon Creek (also called Calabasas Creek), which crosses Calabasas Road in the center of Old Town and the sycamore, live-oak, and willow trees that line its banks were first described at the moment of discovery by the diary of Padre Juan Crespi, who accompanied the expedition of Gaspar de Portola – the first Europeans to explore the interior of California. Padre Crespi’s diary describes how the Portola expedition came up the Calabasas Grade from the west in the late morning of January 15, 1770 and, around noon, “ ... came across a small creek with a great many willow, sycamore, and live-oak trees, and what must have been a naranja of water in it.”

Mc Coy/Calabasas Creek is the only stream along the entire Ventura Freeway Corridor that is lined with native California Sycamore trees. Sycamores are especially common along the creek in the vicinity of the former Fins restaurant property south and upstream from Calabasas Road, as well as on the east side of the Cantina parking lot downstream from Calabasas Road.

Six years later Juan Bautista de Anza led 240 settlers through the modern site of Old Town on the way to the San Francisco Bay area to establish the first Spanish settlement in California.

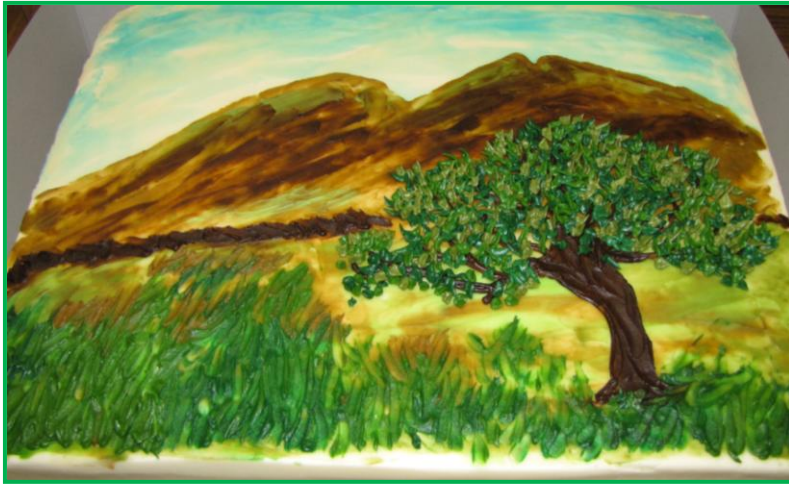
A foundation has preserved the historic 170-year-old Leonis Adobe, and keeps it open to the public as a living history museum. The Monterey-style adobe was built by Miguel Leonis, known as the “King of Calabasas”, one of the most colorful characters in the history of any community.

In 1962, when the Adobe was about to be torn down to make way for a parking lot, local resident Kay Beachy mounted a campaign that led to the Adobe being preserved as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1.

For years we have had a legend about a hanging tree in Old Town and arguments over whether any outlaws were ever actually hung from it. We’ve been told the original hanging tree was cut down to make room for a Cold War Era Nike missile to be moved through Old Town to its destination on Saddle Peak.

WHAT...WERE YOU THINKING?

Federation Celebrates 3rd District Redistricting Win



At our October 19 meeting, Federation delegates and community members gathered to celebrate the recent Los Angeles County 3rd District Redistricting win - with a big cake, and a toast to our terrific Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who once again stood by our communities to fight for our 3rd District and for the future of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Fabulous Santa Monica Mountains celebratory cake! Thank you, Carol Elliott.



Top: Federation delegates in force at the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Redistricting Hearing. A packed Federation bus departs from Calabasas to downtown.

“What were you thinking?” That phrase, conveyed by the Federation’s own Monte Nido resident and activist Joan Kay at the County’s redistricting hearing, will remain in our memories for its undeniable impact and for espousing our sentiments exactly.

Supervisor Gloria Molina, whom we have much appreciated over the years, stunned our communities by proposing a Redistricting “T-1 Plan” which sliced off the Santa Monica Mountains from the 3rd District, taking them away from our Supervisor, Zev Yaroslavsky, and putting them into the 4th District, governed by Supervisor Don Knabe.

Nope....we’ve been there, done those 4th District boundaries before. Twenty years ago, to be exact. It didn’t work then and certainly wasn’t going to work now. We didn’t breathe a sigh of relief until Supervisors Zev Yaroslavsky, Mark Ridley-Thomas, Mike Antonovich and Don Knabe voted to adopt “A-3 Plan” maps that left the supervisorial district boundaries virtually intact, with only minor changes.

It was an exhilarating finish to an incredibly stressful and contentious battle to save our 3rd District and the future of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Thank you, Zev, for saving our mountains — again!