

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## PG&E reassures about gas tanks near CHS

By CHRIS COUNTS

LOCATED JUST steps away from Carmel High School, three large tanks will supply residents with natural gas while PG&E conducts strength tests on gas mains beneath Highway 1. But one resident wonders if the methane gas — which is stored in liquid form — poses a public safety threat.

“This is crazy,” suggested Carmel Valley resident Frank Koucky, a financial advisor who told The Pine Cone he once worked as a fire safety officer for an industrial welding company — and as a result, he said, is well versed on the risks of storing and using large quantities of gas.

“Methane is very scary stuff. Why would they put this next to a school, a highway and hundreds of residences? This is a disaster in the making,” Koucky said. “I don’t know why Carmel isn’t up in arms after the house blew up on Guadalupe Street.”

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PHOTO/CHRIS COUNTS

Just a short walk from a resident’s mail box near Carmel High School are three large methane tanks PG&E officials say pose no safety risk.

## Corruption alleged in Monterey public works

Workers accused of stealing signs, poles, metal for scrap

By KELLY NIX

TWO MONTEREY public works department employees have been placed on administrative leave amid allegations they were involved in an illegal scheme to peddle city-owned street signs, poles and other scrap metal parts for cash.

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## Mayor defends city as some ask for recall

By MARY SCHLEY

AS THE petition calling for the resignation of city administrator Jason Stilwell gains signatures, and a march is planned on Carmel City Hall before the Aug. 5 council meeting, some residents are discussing a recall election of Mayor Jason Burnett and the city council — especially in light of Burnett’s repeated comments that he and the council should be held responsible for the problems in town, including secrecy, the withholding of public records, wholesale personnel changes at city hall and the bungled criminal investigation of a department manager.

“I think people are getting tired of being patient and wait-

## Lawyer forces P.D.’s hand in McInchak case

By MARY SCHLEY

WHY DID the city announce last week it was dropping the investigation of IT manager Steve McInchak?

According to McInchak’s attorney, Richard Rosen, the move came because he was getting ready to ask a judge to order the city to return McInchak’s property seized by the city during a raid of his house more than a year ago.

“I sent a letter to the Carmel P.D. telling them that more than a year had passed since they served the search warrant and seized McInchak’s property, and there had been no charges,” Rosen told The Pine Cone. “And I cited the case law that says they can’t just hold onto it without cause — there has to be some criminal action pending.”

Since no charges had ever been filed against McInchak, despite a long and expensive investigation, Rosen said the court has the authority to issue an order compelling the police department to return a person’s property.

“I demanded they return the property or we were going to court to get an order requiring them to return it,” he said.

Last Thursday, Calhoun issued a statement announcing the investigation was closed because computer expert Mark Alcock couldn’t find evidence of any criminal wrongdoing.

“The investigation concerned allegations that Steve McInchak unlawfully gained access to personnel files and information,” according to Calhoun’s statement. “The examiner was unable to provide sufficient information to proceed further with the investigation. Based on the inability to further the investigation, the police department has closed the case.”

Rosen said the case “also raises a lot of questions about this private forensic computer examiner, Alcock, because he was the one who looked at McInchak’s computer and said that he thought there were signs of wrongdoing. It was based on those allegations of Alcock that [the city] was able to get

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ing for answers,” said Paula Hazdovac, who was a member of the city council that hired Stilwell in 2011 but has since left the council after 18 years in office. “And it didn’t help to hear the mayor saying it’s wrong to blame it on an employee. That’s pretty much fueling the fire for a recall election. The subject definitely comes up.”

But Burnett, who has steadfastly supported Stilwell’s per-



Jason Burnett



Jason Stilwell

formance as city manager, said his point is that people should come to the council with their concerns so the governing body can take whatever action it deems necessary to correct them.

“I understand that people are concerned, people are upset, and the city council very much wants to hear those concerns in whatever way people feel best communicating them to the council, and we’ll work diligently to address them as best we can,” he said.

“The main pushback that I have had is that I don’t think it’s generally productive to take issue with the staff that serve this community,” Burnett continued. “The council was elected to represent this community, and it’s our responsibility to make sure we’re reflecting the entire community and to make changes if things are not going appropriately.”

Former Mayor Clint Eastwood agreed with Burnett that the council has to be the place where all the controversy is settled, but he also criticized it for not taking action sooner.

“I don’t know why the council doesn’t get together on it,” Eastwood told The Pine Cone. “I’m sure their hearts are in the right place, but they’ve got to take command of the ship.”

Longtime businessman Jody LeTowt also agreed that Burnett is responsible — but perhaps not in the way the mayor would hope.

“I don’t know Mr. Stilwell, but I do notice the mayor tends to defend him, saying he’s only doing what the council tells him to do,” LeTowt said. “Well, then, maybe the problem is Burnett, not Stilwell.”

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## WHERE’S THE BEEF? FOR CONDORS, IT’S IN THE HILLS JUST OUTSIDE TOWN

By CHRIS COUNTS

EIGHT MONTHS after the Ventana Wildlife Society announced plans to establish a feeding site for California condors at the Mitteldorf Preserve, the massive birds

have been photographed there having a meal.

The Mitteldorf Preserve is located south of Carmel Valley and west of the Santa Lucia Preserve. The 1,057-acre property, which features Monterey County’s largest redwood tree, is owned by the Big Sur Land Trust.

The VWS, which introduced condors to the Central Coast 17 years ago, is setting up a number of feeding sites from Carmel to San Simeon in an effort to attract the endangered birds to coastal areas where dead marine mammals can provide them with an

ideal diet.

When they travel inland to find food, they are more vulnerable to lead poisoning, which is their leading cause of death.

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A condor discovered a new feeding site July 17 at the Mitteldorf Preserve in Carmel Valley (left photo). The following day, she returned with some of her friends (right).

PHOTOS/COURTESY VENTANA WILDLIFE SOCIETY

