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Water system wiring blamed for causing fire

By CHRIS COUNTS

NEARLY A year after the Pfeiffer Fire destroyed 34 homes and scorched more than 900 acres, the United States Forest Service announced this week the blaze was caused when electrical control wires belonging to the Pfeiffer Ridge Mutual Water Company ignited dry leaves and redwood needles.

The water company provided service to about a dozen property owners in the Pfeiffer Ridge area, most of whom lost their homes in the fire.

The report ruled out the possibility the blaze was caused by an illegal camper, a rumor that swept through Big Sur shortly after the fire started Dec. 15, 2013.

Three days after the fire began, investigators met with a homeless man and accompanied him on a visit to his campsite, which was located along the Buzzard's Roost Trail in the general vicinity of where the fire started. But after visiting the site, investigators determined it was a "significant distance north of the fire origin area," and its "fire ring was cold" and "did not show evidence of a fire escaping."

At least four other homeless people and two bicycle campers were interviewed by investigators as well.

Once investigators determined precisely where the fire started — at a spot near the Buzzard's Roost Trail between Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and Pfeiffer Ridge — they observed it was located "immediately adjacent to water lines operated by the Pfeiffer Ridge Mutual Water Company" and another local water company. They discovered "exposed

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City honors clerk who resigned in protest

By MARY SCHLEY

AGHAST AT the way Jason Stilwell was running city hall, she resigned in October 2013 and thought she'd never set foot in the building again. But Tuesday night, Heidi Mozingo received thanks from Mayor Jason Burnett and the city council for her eight years of service as city clerk and assistant city administrator.

"I'm sorry it has taken as long as it has for us to offer this recognition. We don't need to belabor the reasons why, but it is past due," Burnett began. "We wanted to recognize your service to the community. As I said upon your departure, you always exemplified a very professional and caring approach to your various responsibilities."

He listed several of her job duties, contributions and accomplishments, including being named Carmel Employee of the Year in 2010.

Mozingo thanked new city administrator Doug Schmitz "for making this recognition possible" and said it was an honor to serve the city for eight years.

"Frankly, when I submitted my letter of resignation a year ago to protest the lack of ethics and integrity rampant at city hall, I never thought I'd find myself here

again," she said.

In that letter, she wrote, "My resignation from the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea, though a very difficult decision, comes as the result of my extreme discomfort with current management practices. I can no longer ethically or in good conscience remain part of the city administration."

But the happenings of the past year, including the firings of several longtime employees and resignation of others, the granting of lucrative contracts that were paid far beyond their city-approved caps, and other wrongs, ultimately galvanized

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PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

More than a year after she resigned from her post as assistant city administrator, Heidi Mozingo received thanks from the city for her eight-plus years of service.

'Ambassadors' hit the streets as paid parking begins

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER PUBLIC works crews finished installing signs along Ocean Avenue Monday that describe how to use the 10 new kiosks installed along five blocks of Carmel's main street, the plastic bags shrouding the high-tech parking meters were removed Tuesday morning, and two red-coated "parking ambassadors" began strolling along the sidewalks in search of people in need of help operating them. The meters require payment of \$2 per hour for up to four hours of parking in any of the 90 spaces along Ocean between Junipero and Monte Verde streets.

The six-month experiment with parking meters will determine if they should become a permanent means of relieving parking congestion in the city's core commercial district, and the program — including the ambassadors helping to acquaint people with the machines — is being administered by National Parking & Valet.

City administrator Doug Schmitz said he had received comments both pro and con since the program began. "Those in support state that spaces along Ocean Avenue have opened up for use by visitors; those opposed do not like pay parking in town, as well as the appearance of the kiosks," he said. The council will receive a report on the parking experiment in March.



PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

'Parking ambassador' Guy Maggin shows Lily Odle of Augustina's how to use one of the new paid-parking kiosks being tested on Ocean Avenue.

Hanson named 'special projects manager'

By MARY SCHLEY

FORMER BUILDING inspector John Hanson came back to work Monday, after being wrongfully fired more than a year ago, suing the city, and accepting reinstatement and a cash settlement last week in exchange for dropping his lawsuit.

At Tuesday's city council meeting, city administrator Doug Schmitz apologized to Hanson on behalf of the city for everything he and his family had to endure in the past year, and at the same meeting, the council adopted the job description for the position he now holds — special projects manager.

ager.

"John is going to be working on capital improvement projects," Schmitz told The Pine Cone Wednesday. "We have a lot of plans and haven't had much implementation."

Hanson will be working on the plans to reopen the Forest Theater, which was red-tagged in April because of health and safety violations, and will also work on a shoreline assessment to see what work needs to be done on the rock revetments, walls, staircases, railings and trash-can enclosures.

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Judge to decide fate of Cal Am's test well

By KELLY NIX

A SACRAMENTO judge is expected to decide Friday morning whether Cal Am can begin drilling its desalination test well in Marina the week after next or will have to wait a lot longer — a grim possibility that would further delay a new water supply solution for the Monterey Peninsula.

On Dec. 5, Sacramento Superior Court Judge Shelleyanne W.L. Chang is set to hear a lawsuit filed by Marina Coast Water District last week that seeks a restraining order against the California Coastal Commission preventing it from issuing a permit to Cal Am for the test well. The commission unanimously approved the well at a Nov. 12 hearing in Half Moon Bay.

Jim Culllem, executive director of the Monterey Peninsula Regional Water Authority, said that based on talks with Cal Am officials, if the judge grants the restraining order and Cal Am can't begin drilling by Dec. 15 — the water company's proposed start date — it will have to wait until late next year to start drilling. The company needs about two-and-a-half months to drill the well.

"If there is any delay past Dec. 15," Culllem told The Pine Cone, "I would think the whole project is at risk of a one-year delay."

Cal Am needs to get the drilling done by the end of February before the threatened snowy plover bird begins breeding in the dunes adjacent to the test well site.

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Park district lands big chunk of pine forest

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE PURCHASE of the 851-acre Rancho Aguajito by the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District this week was celebrated by many open space advocates, including the woman the Joyce Stevens Monterey Pine Forest Preserve will be named after.

The park district agreed to pay \$7,450,000 to the Pebble Beach Company for the land, which is home to a particularly impressive stand of Monterey pines. The property is adjacent to 525-

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