

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Construction crew causes gas leak that shuts down highway

By MARY SCHLEY

A BULLDOZER moving earth on private property adjacent to Highway 1 between Del Monte Center and Highway 68 struck a 10-inch high-pressure gas main Saturday about 11:40 a.m., sending out a hissing cloud of natural gas that was soon detected by motorists passing on the highway. The leak led to the evacuation of six nearby homes and the shutdown of the highway, tying up traffic for hours.

Coming nearly a year after a gas leak resulted in the destruction of a house in Carmel, the leak raised fears of another explosion.

As calls poured in from residents throughout the area reporting the smell of natural gas, and of hearing a hissing

sound, crews from Monterey Fire and Cal Fire honed in on the source, first believing there were multiple leaks. They worked together to close roads, evacuate residences, set up an incident command post at a nearby church on Aguajito Road and collaborate with PG&E and police.

Just from the sound, a fire command officer could tell a major gas line was involved, and soon after the leak started he told an emergency dispatcher, "I recommend we shut down the highway in both directions."

Meanwhile, a Cal Fire battalion chief figured out that the gas pipe in question was a major pipeline that runs north to south near the highway. A Viejo

See **LEAK** page 27A

## Test well to produce results by end of month, Cal Am says

By KELLY NIX

MOST OF the construction on California American Water's test well in Marina is completed, and the engineer leading the project said he expects the facility to produce its first water quality results in a matter of weeks.

Cal Am engineering manager Ian Crooks said drilling of the well and its major components are finished, and construction crews are wrapping up the final portion of the project to install the "guts" of the slant desalination test well.

"I would expect us to turn the pump on and have results from the well by the end of the month," Crooks told The Pine Cone this week.

Monitoring wells are finished, the power for the test well is hooked up, and its control panels have been completed, he said.

The \$4 million test well will provide volume and salinity data for Cal Am's proposed full-scale desalination plant. The test well, expected to operate for up to two years, is necessary since slant wells are largely unproven for desal plants, though the technology is preferred by the California Coastal Commission. The test will also determine whether water pumped in that location impacts the Salinas Valley groundwater basin.

The test well is about 720 feet long and reaches beneath the Pacific Ocean to a depth

See **WELL** page 13A



PHOTO/COURTESY CAL AM

Crews are finishing up installation of the desal test well in Marina and expect water quality and quantity data soon.

## Tired of the poop, P.G. officials hire raptors to chase away gulls

By CHRIS COUNTS

FED UP with the mess created by hundreds of gulls in downtown Pacific Grove, city officials are evicting some of the pesky birds. And to make sure they get the message, officials have brought in some heavy artillery — a trio of raptors.

The birds of prey, who were introduced at this week's Pacific Grove city council meeting, include Owsley, a male spectacled owl, Mariposa, a female Harris' hawk, and Shadow, a falcon.

The handsome trio has spent the past week scaring the daylight out of the gulls,

See **RAPTORS** page 24A



Kate Marden (left) and her falcon, Shadow, have been hired, along with an owl and hawk, to help rid downtown Pacific Grove of gulls.

## Groundbreaking for \$30M veterans cemetery

By KELLY NIX

GROUND WILL be broken March 13 for the long awaited Fort Ord cemetery for military veterans and, two days before that, a huge donation for the second phase of the project will be unveiled, officials told The Pine Cone this week.

Many of those involved in the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery will be on hand for the Friday ceremony that will mark the beginning of construction of the burial ground, which is located at the intersection of Normandy and Parker Flats Roads.

"It's been 20 years in the making, from the

closing of Fort Ord to making good on the promise," Carmel Mayor Jason Burnett said. "It's been a huge community effort. People have been working at this for many years."

The first \$10 million phase, which is fully funded, includes \$6.8 million from federal taxpayers, \$2 million from state taxpayers and more than \$700,000 raised through individual donations.

The first phase calls for 5,000 niches for cremation remains on 17 acres. When fully built, the cemetery — at the intersection of Normandy and Parker Flats Roads — will be 78 acres and include

See **CEMETERY** page 12A

## Student scientists up against the big dogs in contention for \$750k prize

By MARY SCHLEY

A GROUP of Carmel High School kids competing for a \$750,000 prize in a contest focused on ocean health is traveling to Seattle this weekend to collect data from the invention they hope will win: a highly accurate pH sensor. Calling themselves Team pHine Scale, Jack and Bridgett Maughan, Ethan Kurteff and Benek Robertson are competing against teams of professional engineers, scientists and innovators in the \$2 million Wendy Schmidt Ocean Health XPrize competition.

Their task is to invent a sensor that reliably and consistently indicates precise levels of ocean acidity — a challenging but crucial aspect of determining ocean health, since rising levels of atmospheric CO2 lead to more CO2 dissolving into seawater, where it becomes carbonic acid, lowering the ocean's pH. Some organisms, espe-

cially those with calcium shells, like coral and crustaceans, are sensitive to such changes — and coral reefs account for about half the oxygen in the atmosphere, according to CHS science teacher Michael Guardino.

Typical pH instruments can easily be calibrated to measure a 0.1-unit change in pH, with a bit more accuracy in the lab. But the XPrize challenge is to develop a sensor and calibration procedure that can achieve accuracy within 0.001 pH units.

See **PRIZE** page 23A

The Carmel High School students of Team pHine Scale have spent countless hours in the lab refining the pH sensor they hope will change ocean science — and win them a cool three-quarters of a million.

