



Holiday GUIDE

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Braving the Big Sur winter ...

In what may have been the most successful protest ever, a handful of Big Sur residents stood along Highway 1 under sunny skies last week to show their solidarity for activists opposing the construction of an oil pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North and South Dakota — nearly 1,700 miles away. The protest at Standing Rock had endured since April, often under brutal weather conditions, without achieving its aims. Yet, astonishingly, only four hours after the Big Sur crew planted their signs along the highway, the federal government handed the activists a major victory by announcing that the Army Corps of Engineers will conduct a more thorough environmental assessment and explore alternate routes for the pipeline. There's no word yet about what problem the Big Sur activists will solve next.



PHOTO/KODIAK GREENWOOD

Audit reveals dozens of problems in city accounting

By MARY SCHLEY

ACCOUNTS HAVEN'T been reconciled, there is a lack of checks and balances in payroll and other payouts, city fuel isn't properly accounted for, and there should be video cameras in the public works yard. Those were just some of the more than two dozen findings and recommendations the city's new auditors, Moss, Leavey & Hartzheim, made as part of their review of the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

They are also among the reasons the report, which was presented to the council at its Dec. 6 meeting, was eight months late.

After conducting a detailed review and accounting of the year's \$21,129,081 in revenues and \$18,125,001 in expenditures, the extensive report goes on to identify 15 "deficiencies" and nearly a dozen "other matters" the auditors found concerning.

"Some of them, we have already put the protections in place, but some of them are really basic," city administrator Chip Rerig told The Pine Cone Thursday. "Clearly our financial and accounting processes need to be brought up to more contemporary standards."

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Hotel partner quits, calls operation 'amateurish'

By KELLY NIX

THE FRONTMAN for the development team hoping to transform the American Tin Cannery outlet mall into a luxury hotel has resigned, and he isn't holding back about his for-

mer business partners, calling their management "amateurish" and "sloppy." And he said he's not confident the hotel will be built under their leadership.

Michael Crall told The Pine Cone Monday that he and partner Grant Sedgwick resigned their positions as officers of Domaine Hospitality Partners, the company behind Project Bella, and he offered a scathing review of how his former partners, retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark and president and CEO Ron Meer, are managing the development.

Crall said he and Sedgwick, Domaine's former executive vice president, quit because of "fundamental differences" with the Clark and Meer over the direction and operation of the company.

"I do not believe Mr. Clark and Mr. Meer are capable of completing Project Bella," Crall, Domaine's former chief development officer, said. "From my perspective, their handling of the project so far has been amateurish in several respects. Books and financial reports are late, sloppy, and incomplete. Accountability of funds is opaque."

Crall — who regularly appeared at P.G. City Council and planning commission meetings on behalf of the hotel proposal — said that Domaine's tax returns for 2015 have not been filed, and many local suppliers and service providers have not

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Water use goes down, so rates are going up

By KELLY NIX

RESIDENTIAL WATER customers on the Monterey Peninsula will soon see a roughly \$20 increase on their monthly water bills, while businesses and other non-residential customers will pay about \$40 more per month.

The California American Water rate increases, along with a new method for calculating water bills, were approved by the state's Public Utilities Commission Dec. 1. Customers will likely start seeing the higher water bills — which will be collected as a surcharge over the next five years — in March 2017, according to Cal Am.

"To customers concerned about the increase, I would say that we understand the impacts are substantial; however, the increase is needed to cover costs critical to maintaining and operating the water system," Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Stedman told The Pine Cone.

The "under-collected" sum Cal Am will make up via the

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First Presbyterian gets 'hybrid' pipe organ

By ELAINE HESSER

IT'S BEEN almost 20 years in the making, but Carmel Presbyterian has a new hybrid pipe organ. What's a hybrid pipe organ? It's what happens when a digital organ meets a good old-fashioned pipe organ.

According to organ committee member Ric Masten — a second cousin of the late poet of the same name — about 70 percent of the pipes came to the church around 2000. Then-organist Ted Dixon brought them here when he heard a church in Turlock, where he'd lived for decades, was getting

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LITERARY BIRDHOUSES HAVE QUITE A STORY TO TELL

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

IF YOU attended the Homecrafters Marketplace at Sunset Center a few weeks back, you may have noticed some unusual birdhouses for sale. But you had to look fast, because the birdhouses — each one made from a colorful children's or collectible book — were flying off the shelves.

The birdhouses are the brainchild of Monterey resident Bundy Goodman, who got the idea after seeing an online post about a school class on the other side of the country that had made birdhouses using Little Golden Books for the roofs. She thought, "Why not?"

Thus began a fundraising project for the Monterey County Community Partnership for Youth's literacy program — a project that has so far raised more than \$10,000 from the sale of birdhouses that are so delightful, most people who see them just have to have one, even at \$80 to \$120 each.

Purely decorative and not actually for housing birds, "Bundy's Birdhouses" are crafted from wooden forms, to which Goodman affixes or decoupages illustrations from each birdhouse's theme book. The roof is made from the book cover or the book itself, and each birdhouse also comes with a copy of its book.

Most birdhouses have a perch designed in keeping with its theme. The iconic red-and-white "Betty Crocker Cookbook" birdhouse, for example, bears a tiny red whisk as its perch. Winnie the Pooh's house has a honey dripper. A golf-themed birdhouse has a tiny golf club, and the chocolate-themed birdhouse has a small spoon dipped in chocolate sprinkles.

"I love making these bookish birdhouses," said Goodman. "I get the books from thrift stores or Amazon's used books or even donations. I call this project, 'upcycling,' because I'm

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PHOTO/PHILIP M. GEIGER

With its Dr. Seuss theme, this whimsical birdhouse is one of many that have raised money for charity.