

OJAI VALLEY NEWS

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Good to know

Seasonal year-to-date rainfall totals (from Oct. 1)	
Wheeler Gorge	24.34"
Soule Park	9.35"
Lake Casitas	12.39"
Oak View	11.14"

Lake Casitas	
Current volume	109,916 Acre feet
Capacity	44.9 percent

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Broken-pipe dream City will draft letter asking CPUC to intervene in Playhouse drama

Bill Warner
bwarner@ojavalleynews.com

Keywords: Ojai Playhouse, CPUC damage, investigate

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) could be weighing in on the fate of the Ojai Playhouse theater if the city of Ojai has its way. Meeting in regular session Tuesday, the Ojai City Council authorized sending a request for the CPUC to look into the incident.

Ojai Mayor Pro Tem William Weirick recommended the council enlist the services of Ojai attorney Ryan Blatz, of Ryan Blatz Law, to draft a letter requesting the investigation and to handle any subsequent negotiations with the CPUC.

"Given the complexity of interacting with the CPUC and given our hopeful intent to have success with this rather than just submitting a letter, I'd like us to consider ... a person who's been dealing the most on behalf of the city with the CPUC, and that is Ryan Blatz," he said.

Blatz also has been instrumental representing Ojai Friends for Locally Owned Water, also known as Ojai E.L.O.W., the grassroots group that organized much of the effort for bringing a buyout of the Golden State Water Company's (GSWC's) Ojai service area to public referendum in 2013.

His father, Ojai Mayor Paul Blatz, recused himself from the issue during Tuesday's meeting.

Councilman Severo Lara asked for clarification of any possible conflict of interest arising from Ryan Blatz Law's representation of Ojai E.L.O.W. and the city alike. Ojai city attorney Matthew Summers replied that a conflict of interest should not exist, in part because the city and Ojai E.L.O.W. consistently have been on the same side in matters concerning GSWC.

Council members were unanimous in their vote for the contract with Blatz, for which Interim City Manager Steve McClary would be authorized to spend up to \$5,000.

The Council's action was based on a passage from the California Public Utility Code: "The commission shall investigate the cause of all accidents occurring within this State upon the property of any public utility or directly or indirectly arising from or connected with its maintenance or operation, resulting in loss of life or injury to person or property and requiring, in the judgment of the commission, investigation by it, and may make such order or recommendation with respect thereto as in its judgment seems just and rea-

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Ojai resident Russ Baggerly tells the Ojai City Council Tuesday that when a guideline is inconsistent with part of the county's General Plan it is illegal.

Ojai Valley News photo by Kimberly Rivers

Clearing the air Council expresses concern over oil drilling proposal

Kimberly Rivers
Ojai Valley News correspondent

Keywords: Mirada Petroleum, drilling request

In a three-to-two vote Tuesday, the Ojai City Council elected to send a letter to the Ventura County Planning Commission expressing concern regarding inconsistencies between air emission rules in the Ojai Valley Area Plan (OVAP) and the Ventura County Air Quality Assessment Guidelines (AQAG). City Council's concerns were raised during review of a proposed oil and gas project near Koenigstein Road in Upper Ojai.

The Agnew Lease project, put forward by Mirada Petroleum, asks to extend a Conditional Use Permit (C.U.P.) for 25 years, add three new wells, re-drill an existing well and allow the use of Koenigstein Road for tanker trucks removing oil and waste water from the site. The current permit prohibits the use of Koenigstein Road, which Mirada has been using since 1995 when the approved truck route was washed out in a flood.

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Nordhoff graduate earns Fulbright fellowship

Andra Belknap
abelknap@ojavalleynews.com

Keywords: Kelly McCormick, Fulbright fellowship

Nordhoff graduate Kelly McCormick recently received word she is a recipient of a sought-after Fulbright fellowship to Tokyo, Japan.

McCormick, a doctoral student at UCLA with a focus on modern Japanese history, admitted the news "felt like an amazing stroke of good fortune ... it's very competitive."

McCormick will leave the United States in September to work on her dissertation for one year at Tokyo University.

The 2003 Nordhoff graduate received a bachelor's degree from the University of

California at Santa Cruz in 2008 and completed a master's degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University in 2012.

McCormick said she has long held an interest in Japan and Japanese culture — her grandmother is Japanese-American and her parents lived in Tokyo earlier in their lives.

Her particular interest in Japan stems from a passion for language and international travel.

"I studied Spanish, I studied French, I studied Italian, I even studied abroad in India and studied Hindi," said McCormick.

She got a job in southern Japan after finishing her undergraduate work, and im-

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Photo submitted

Kelly McCormick will conduct research at Tokyo University for one year beginning in September.

County rolling on marijuana issues Sheriff taking \$80,000 from DEA

Kimberly Rivers
Ojai Valley News correspondent

Keywords: DEA, eradication, federal lands

On Tuesday, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to authorize the Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO) to accept \$80,000 in federal award money for Domestic Cannabis Eradication Suppression (DCES).

The item was approved, as part of the consent calen-

dar, there was no discussion. The supervisors followed staff's recommendation to authorize the VCSO to accept the funds.

"The DEA funds approved for use by VCSO can only be used to investigate/eradicate marijuana grows on United States Forestry property," said Capt. Robert Thomas, supervisor of the VCSO narcotics units.

The Department of

See DEA Page A12

Stakeholder group in the works

Kimberly Rivers
Ojai Valley News correspondent

Keywords: Medical marijuana, advisory role

The Ventura County Board of Supervisors has directed staff to proceed with plans for a public forum or workshop regarding medical cannabis issues in the county. The goal is to inform Ventura County Planning staff and the Board on this issue as they move forward in creating medical cannabis legislation.

"The city of Ojai unani-

mously voted to assign one of its Council members to form a stakeholder group in Ojai," said Jeff Kroll to the board during public comment.

Kroll, an Ojai Valley resident, is a co-founder of Shangri La Care Cooperative. An Ojai-based nonprofit horticulture club, which is currently the subject of an ongoing Ventura County Sheriff's Office investigation. No charges have yet been filed in the months-long investigation

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Ojai woman begins county's first fermentation CSA

Andra Belknap
abelknap@ojavalleynews.com

Keywords: Produce, CSA, Fermentation

Michelle Lopez-Dohrn was inspired to start her new business, Wild at Heart, by the natural abundance of Ojai farms.

"I got a CSA (community

supported agriculture) share through Farmer and the Cook and found that I had this abundant amount of food ... I had to figure out a way to preserve the food," said Dorn, who grew up in Ojai. "After doing lots of different preservation techniques, from canning to dehydrating, I found out about fermentation. I

was just blown away. The fact that it is the only method of preservation actually that increases the nutrient value of food."

Lopez-Dohrn claims Wild at Heart, which launched last week, is the first CSA in the state of California to solely offer fermented products.

"I'm the first licensed fer-

menter in the county of Ventura," added Lopez-Dohrn.

Lopez-Dohrn currently sells Wild at Heart sauerkraut at Westridge Midtown Market. The "wild" variety, one of two offered, consists of red cabbage, beets, carrots, rainbow chard, onions,

See Ferment, Page A3

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Ferment:

Continued from Page A1

garlic, caraway seed and pink Himalayan salt, according to Lopez-Dohrn, who noted, "All the veggies are local and organic."

She looks forward to delivering her first batch of CSA shares in mid April, she said.

"(CSA members will) get to see what it really feels like to be eating in season, with these very high nutrient-dense foods," said Lopez-Dohrn. "We'll be doing things like spicy carrots, fermented ketchup, pickled beets, things that aren't your normal grocery store shelf stuff."

Lopez-Dohrn sources her food from local farms, including Earthrune Farm, Rancho del Pueblo Farm and Mano Farm.

"I'm willing to accept produce that doesn't look perfect and ferment (it), and transform it into something else," said Lopez-Dohrn.

Wild at Heart was born from a desire to eliminate food waste. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "Food loss and waste in the United States accounts for approximately 31 percent ... of the overall food supply available



Photo submitted.

Westridge Midtown Market now carries all Michelle Lopez-Dohrn's fermented products.

to retailers and consumers."

Food makes up 21 percent of municipal solid waste in the U.S., according to the EPA.

In addition to reducing waste, Lopez-Dohrn was motivated to learn about fermenting by her pickle-loving daughter.

"She's eating all these pickles, there's all this vin-

egar in her body, that can't be good," she recalled thinking. "I learned how to take the whole cucumbers that I was getting from my CSA and turn those into fermented pickles. I'm actually giving my daughter something really healthy for her."

Those interested can visit <http://www.wildatheartojai.com> to learn more.

Stakeholders:

Continued from Page A1

and all search warrants remain sealed.

"The average age of our members is in their 50s," Kroll noted. He supported the idea of an "educational-type platform" for the board and the public to "understand what this medicine is really about."

"In December (staff) prepared an amendment to the zoning (code). The primary purpose was to be a placeholder to maintain local control. In January, you adopted those amendments and again stated your (the Board's) desire for a long-term framework to make medical marijuana available to those in need," said Chris Stephens, director of the County's Resource Management Agency, which oversees the Planning Department.

He was speaking to the board Tuesday during a public hearing requesting direction from the board about whether to form a more "formal advisory committee" or to "hold open stakeholder meetings."

While some members of the public asked for the more formal approach, to ensure local experts are able to provide quality information, staff suggested to the Board they go with the open stakeholder meetings, which may

include a sort of workshop-process with certain identified experts asked to give presentations.

Supervisor Steve Bennett mentioned the more formal process would invoke the Brown Act and stricter meeting rules.

"I very much want to resolve some issues (we) left hanging," said Supervisor Linda Parks. She said the previous regulations approved by the board were "done in a hurry to meet a certain (deadline). I wish I hadn't had to jump that fast." She said she wants to ensure that someone who needs medical marijuana is able to get it.

"I do support going with something less formal," said Bennett. "The focus for us is how to get medical marijuana to the people who need it and not have negative effects from making it rampantly available, with illicit use. What is the best way to accomplish that?"

He said conversations about taxing medical marijuana are premature at this point, and the state may take care of that issue.

"The Ventura County Cannabis Alliance (VCCA) came together to work with elected officials on common-sense regulation over prohibition,"

said Mari Scott with VCCA. The group formed last year to help local operators prepare for changes with new legislation. She said her experience is based in food security, cold storage and has worked in the past with regulatory agencies on those topics. Those types of issues are important in the medical cannabis industry.

"With the current bans in place, there are three forms of access — drive to Los Angeles, a street dealer (and growing your own). It is unrealistic to think all patients can grow their own plants in their closet or their back yards," Scott said. She points to statistics showing cannabis seizures in the United States are at their lowest level. But the current bans encourage illegal growers, like Mexican gangs, to ramp up growth. With the bans, "you support their efforts (leading to) growing in the National Forest. The way to combat that is legalization not prohibition," she added.

Chelsea Sutula, industry chair with the VCCA, joined Scott in supporting experts weighing in. Sutula suggested a working-group structure to move toward legislation. "You are not going to write (good) regulations with 50 people in the room." She encouraged the board to seek out information from experts. "I would be happy to conduct a mini-industry workshop (providing) information to know how the industry is working."

"We are trying to move as quickly as possible to clear the air for those who are legitimately using medical marijuana," said Supervisor Kathy Long.

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