

Walk-to-school program off on right foot Tri-Valley students vying for bike-shop gift certificate

By Eric Louie, Valley Times

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008

Students at Country Club Elementary School in San Ramon on Wednesday kicked off their school's participation in a new Tri-Valley-wide effort to celebrate International Walk to School Month.

Also participating in the Walk 'N' Roll to School Program is Lydiksen Elementary in Pleasanton and Dougherty Valley Elementary in Dublin.

The monthlong program has students tracking the number of days they walk or bike to school instead of being driven to class.

For each walk, bike or roll to school, they are entered into a drawing to win prizes. The grand prize at each school is a \$200 gift certificate to a local bicycle shop, said Lisa Adamos, an economic development specialist for the city of Pleasanton.

"We hope they will try it and keep going," Adamos said.

The program is sponsored by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's local resource team and Kaiser Permanente, Adamos said.

Besides Pleasanton, the resource team includes representatives from Alameda County, Dublin and Livermore. Private businesses are also involved.

While the program is new, individual cities have had events as part of Walk to School Month in the past. Adamos said organizers will evaluate the effectiveness of the new program and available resources before deciding whether to continue the program next year.

Parents, kids hit sidewalks for Walk to School Day Cars, buses swapped for sneakers to promote health, environment.

By Fermin Leal

The Orange County Register, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008

Hundreds of students, parents, teachers and principals ditched cars and school buses this morning and slid into their sneakers and other comfortable shoes to pound the pavement on International Walk to School Day.

Schools across the country and throughout the world encouraged students and others to walk to school in an effort to promote children's health, environmental awareness and a sense of community.

Local campus that participated today included Sonora Elementary in Costa Mesa, Bathgate Elementary in Mission Viejo, Linda Vista Elementary in Yorba Linda, Garfield Elementary in Santa Ana, Pacific Drive Elementary in Fullerton, Beswick Elementary in Tustin, and three schools in San Clemente, Marblehead Elementary, Concordia Elementary and Las Palmas Elementary.

Local businesses donated bottled water for the kids and coffee for the grown-ups, while police officers joined in the walks to encourage safety and awareness along the roads.

At Linda Vista Elementary, dozens of students started arriving at the campus starting at 7:30 a.m. They carried balloons and ribbons and held up signs that read "Find a friend, walk to school," "Watch out for kids, we're little," and "We love walk to school day."

"We have such a great turnout," said Wendy Williams, a parent who helped organize her school's walk. "People are really getting behind this effort as you can see from everybody here today."

Williams and other parents spent the past few days calling other parents, creating a Web site for the walk, posting flyers and soliciting support from area residents and local business.

Principal Jackie Howland said she encouraged her students to participate because the day fit well with the school's new green "reduce, reuse and recycle" theme.

"There are definitely fewer cars driving up to drop off students today," she said. "It's amazing to see how just one day can have such an impact."

More than half the 700 students who attend Pacific Drive School in Fullerton took to the sidewalks Wednesday morning to celebrate the third annual International Walk to School Day.

The elementary school was chosen by the Orange County Department of Education and Federal Express as the featured campus in the county.

Andrea Torres, 10, took advantage of the special day to walk her chihuahua-mix, Warrior, to school where her mother walked the family pet back home.

"This is good exercise and my Dad saved gas," said Trisha Pernito, 10, who normally gets dropped off on her father's way to work.

But Angel Vizarraga, 5, wasn't happy as he shuffled along with his mother. Shrugging his shoulders, he said he didn't like walking to school.

A representative of Safe Schools, a nonprofit organization in Van Nuys, held two assemblies to teach the children street safety.

Fifteen of the 20 schools in the Fullerton School District chose to participate, spokeswoman Kathy Ikola said.

San Clemente's Marblehead Elementary School celebrated International Walk to School Day this morning by kicking off a "walk pool" at the Reserve gated community on Camino Vera Cruz. Parents and students joined Principal Jackie Campbell and school mascot Danny the Dolphin in a group walk to school.

Julie Hatchel, spokeswoman for the Capistrano Unified, said walk pools provide a way to avoid heavy morning school traffic and are great for exercise.

"And you can fit more kids into a walk pool than in a car," said Hatchel. "We're hearing from the community that walk pools are successful. People are enjoying the time outside and the increased awareness of health."

In Costa Mesa, students at Sonora, Kill Brooke, College Park and Pomona schools participated in National Walk to School Day while Davis School students will hold the event on Friday.

Costa Mesa police were at Sonora Elementary in Mesa del Mar to dole out stickers, pencils and free Slurped coupons to students who took an active approach to getting to school, and students received a free breakfast.

Determination borne of tragedy

By Ted Sillanpaa

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008

Gina Reyes-Woo did everything a mother could to protect a child from the devastating effects of asthma, but the disease still claimed her son Jason's life.

Jason Reyes was a 12-year-old Alameda resident who had suffered the effects of asthma from the time he was diagnosed with the problem when he was 6 months old.

"I was constantly pulling up his shirt to see if he was getting enough air," Gina Reyes-Woo recalled. "I was in constant contact with physicians. I administered his medications until he was old enough to do it himself. I even slept by his bed when he was young to make sure I could hear him breathing. There were so many trips to the emergency room."

By the time he was 12, Jason was living a normal life, tending to his asthma.

"He always had his medication and his inhaler. Asthma didn't keep him from doing anything he wanted to do," his mother said. "He loved school. He had so many interests and lots of friends."

Jason was spending the day in Vallejo with Reyes-Woo's brother in 2006 when her sister-in-law telephoned to say the boy's asthma seemed to be acting up.

"She said he was having a difficult time breathing," Reyes-Woo said. "It was early in the day, so I told her to call 911. She said she did, but she didn't know why they hadn't gotten there yet."

Asthma took Jason's life that day.

"I didn't know how to hear or how to respond to the gravity of what happened," Jason's mom remembered. "It's the most devastating thing any parent could ever hear."

Reyes-Woo, a Concord resident, doesn't want any other parents to have to feel what she felt that day, so she'll be taking part in the Healthy Air Walk on Saturday along Lake Merritt in Oakland which benefits the American Lung Association.

"Jason's father got involved in the walk last year and that prompted me to do it," Gina said. "It's something I can do for Jason and to help other families. My ex-in laws and friends all walk in Jason's memory."

Gina and Jason's father, Alec Reyes, lived with Jason's asthma from the start.

"Jason's father has asthma and it's in his family," Gina said. "Jason had some other ailments like hay fever and food allergies. By about age 6, it was a constant challenge to get him comfortable. By the time he was 12, he was using an inhaler and took medication."

The family initially resided in Vallejo.

"We didn't realize that Vallejo's about the worst place you can be for poor air quality," Reyes-Woo said. "We moved to Alameda. I was always on Jason's case to take his medicine and use his inhaler. Lots of people mistake using the inhaler as the best way to care for asthma, but it's not a long-term fix."

"Jason had to take his medication. I never forgot to tell him to take his medication. I don't know if he forgot that day with my sister-in-law or not."

She said it's important to take asthma very seriously.

"I told Jason he had to take his medicine," she said. "I told him he had a life-threatening problem."

She also mentioned the importance of making sure others know that an asthma attack could be tragic.

"His teachers and others at school knew of Jason's condition," his mother said. "He loved school. I used to have to force him to stay home if he was sick."

Reyes-Woo, who has raised more than \$1,000 for this year's Healthy Air Walk, said she and her husband, Randy Woo, were amazed at the support and love shown by Wood School students, teachers and administrators after Jason's death.

"I was astonished by the outpouring of love. They held a school dance in Jason's honor," she said. "They gave an award to a student with similar challenges to those Jason faced. When they gave the award, my 18-year-old son, Ryan, gave a nice speech about his brother."

"To this day, kids still come up and talk to me about Jason and how nice he was and he always had kind words for others."

Still, Reyes-Woo and the rest of Jason's family had to cope with the tragedy.

"I joined a group called 'Compassionate Friends' for parents who lost children," she said. "Randy, who was my fiancé at the time, was a great help. We were all just devastated."

"I had to learn to get by each day without knowing the why or how "... did he take his medicine? Why didn't the ambulance get there sooner? We'll never get the answers. We just knew we all had to go day by day and get by the best we can."

With her participation in the Healthy Air Walk, Reyes-Woo said she will do anything she can to help raise funds for the American Lung Association.

"I raised \$500 last year," she said. "I talked to friends and family about sponsoring me in the walk. The outpouring of support is great."

Reyes-Woo never misses a chance to remind others of what she learned living with Jason's asthma.

"You can't take it lightly," she said of the disease. "It's not just about using an inhaler. You have to go to the doctor. You have to get treatment. You have to take your medication. You can never disregard it. It's a daily thing."

State prisons going green with solar panels, other improvements

By STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield California, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008

State corrections officials will gather at Wasco State Prison today to announce energy-saving upgrades at 16 prisons statewide and the construction of solar power projects at six facilities.

The initiative is the first phase of a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation plan to reduce power consumption at the state's 33 prisons, according to spokesman Seth Unger.

In correctional facilities, lighting in the gyms and the dormitories stay on 24 hours a day. Security features like electrical fences and guard towers are also require power to operate on a continuous bases.

"When we're able to reduce the amount of electricity pulled from power grid, it makes more available for surrounding communities, particularly during peak hours," he said.

Wasco State Prison will undergo energy-saving retrofits and receiving solar panel installations. North Kern State Prison, in Delano, will also receive lighting upgrades.

Energy-saving projects will also include the installation of more efficient heating and cooling systems, and kitchen and laundry appliances. Those improvements, combined with the six planned solar projects, are expected to save \$3.2 million dollars annually and reduce power consumption by 28 million kilowatt-hours a year, according to the department.

The changes will also prevent 22.5 million pounds of carbon dioxide from entering the air — the equivalent of removing 4,000 vehicles from the road.

The conservation program was developed in response to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2004 Green Building Initiative, which requires state agencies to become 20 percent more efficient by 2015.

Two prisons in the Southern California desert already have solar panels that offset 20 percent of the facilities' power usage during peak demand times, Unger said.

Southern California Edison, Pacific Gas and Electric and other utility companies have contributed \$6.5 million toward the project.

Growth plan to be delayed for review

By Garth Stapley

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008

A first-of-its-kind growth scenario covering all of Stanislaus County will wait at least an additional month to become official, planning leaders agreed Wednesday.

The delay will give officials with the county and its nine cities time to review the newly crafted, historic vision, watered down though it may be, before the Stanislaus Council of Governments meets again Nov. 12.

Six counties to the south, joined in a San Joaquin Valley-wide partnership, have produced their own countywide growth scenarios, all calling for higher home densities in hopes of curbing [climate-changing emissions](#). They've waited months for Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties to do likewise before creating a valleywide vision in the Blueprint process.

Stanislaus leaders, some openly suspicious of state leadership and the idea that global warming can be slowed, previously frowned on a version featuring higher densities.

The new scenario they'll take to their respective city councils abandons progressive change, calling simply for construction to adhere to densities already cited in general plans of the 10 agencies. They range from 4.5 units per acre to 30, StanCOG's Vince Harris said.

"I think we want to be on record that we are concerned about proper planning and we are concerned about regional planning," said county Supervisor Jeff Grover, asserting that leaders have not abandoned the Blueprint process. Several had snickered moments earlier at the suggestion that the other counties would have to wait longer still for Stanislaus to produce its growth scenario.

The approved scenarios will satisfy one aspect of a new state law, Senate Bill 375, the only in the United States linking land-use decisions to climate change, California Senate consultant Bill Craven told Stanislaus leaders during a contentious discussion Wednesday.

He said state transportation money should favor sprawl-curbing projects that bring homes and jobs closer to each other. But any county not meeting its emissions goal would be allowed to create an alternative growth scenario, keeping the money flowing, Craven said.

Some Stanislaus leaders acknowledged skepticism about state officials.

"I appreciate your fear," Craven responded. "I'm painfully aware that the valley does get the short end of the stick on various things. I could eat my words, but I'm not thinking that's what we're going to see on this."

Supervisor Jim DeMartini scoffed at the idea of climate change, as he has in previous meetings, saying two related state laws and the Blueprint process "use a series of scare tactics and junk science to promote a political agenda."

DeMartini called Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an idiot.

Oakdale Mayor Farrell Jackson noted that Stanislaus County voters already have assured more compact growth by recently approving Measure E, which directs subdivisions into cities instead of unincorporated areas.

Ceres Mayor Anthony Cannella said many people will continue driving to Bay Area jobs regardless of lawmakers' good intentions.

"We all can wish for jobs, but all the wishing and all the state laws in the world are not going to make those companies come to Stanislaus County," Cannella said.

Nobel Prize winner throws his support behind Obama

By Ellen Wulffhorst

Reuters

Washington Post, Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

NEW YORK (Reuters) - A winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry on Wednesday said one of his first tasks was to join a group of Nobel winners who endorsed Democrat Barack Obama for president.

The 61 Nobel winners published an open letter last month saying the nation "urgently needs a visionary leader who can ensure the future of our traditional strengths in science and technology" to address issues such as energy, disease and economic competitiveness.

"We really need to have more support for science in the White House, and we haven't had that in the last eight years," said Martin Chalfie, a professor of biological sciences at Columbia University.

The Bush administration has come under criticism from researchers and former government officials for meddling in science and for mixing science with politics.

Chalfie shared the Nobel Prize for chemistry with two other scientists for their work with a green fluorescent protein that glows and allows researchers to illuminate tumor cells, trace toxins and monitor genes.

Upon learning he won, Chalfie said he contacted a friend, Robert Horvitz, who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2002, to join the Obama supporters. Horvitz was one of the 61 Nobel winners in medicine, physics and chemistry to sign the letter.

In the letter, the Nobel winners wrote that during the Bush administration, "vital parts of our country's scientific enterprise have been damaged by stagnant or declining federal support" and "the government's scientific advisory process has been distorted by political considerations."

"As a result, our once dominant position in the scientific world has been shaken and our prosperity has been placed at risk," they wrote.

"Sen. Obama understands that presidential leadership and federal investments in science and technology are crucial elements in successful governance of the world's leading country," they wrote.

Others who have accused the Bush administration of political interference include Dr. Richard Carmona, the former U.S. surgeon general, who said his speeches were censored and he was prevented from speaking publicly on issues such as contraceptives and abstinence-only sex education.

Earlier this year, watchdog groups said Bush's decision to intervene in setting [air pollution](#) standards was part of a long-standing pattern of meddling in environmental science.

[Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Editorial, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008:](#)

Schwarzenegger wrong to veto port air bill

MediaNews

GOV. ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER's stance on cleaning up the environment suddenly took a U-turn when, among hundreds of pieces of legislation, he vetoed a bill that would have imposed a pollution fee on cargo ships at California's ports.

The fee was designated to pay for clean-air programs. Written by state Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, the legislation would have imposed a fee of up to \$60 for each 40-foot cargo container moving through the ports of Oakland, Los Angeles and Long Beach. The bill could have brought in as much as \$300 million a year to fund programs that clear the air around port communities. However, some Republican heavyweights got into the mix, such as Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska who urged Schwarzenegger to veto the bill with fears of potential rising costs to her constituents.

Schwarzenegger has claimed to be for cleaning up our air and he championed landmark legislation to combat greenhouse gas emissions. But he went off path with the ports. State regulators say 3,700 premature deaths each year can be attributed to pollution at California's ports.

Locally, there is great concern in West Oakland neighborhoods that border the port with ships and trucks going in and out of the area spewing diesel exhaust in the air. We are sure those concerns exist in the communities near the ports in Long Beach and Los Angeles.

Schwarzenegger claims the bill failed to direct money to the Central Valley where much of the port traffic comes and goes. He also said it failed to assure this was the most cost-effective way to reduce emissions. These excuses are debatable, but even if his points are good, a congressional delegation from Hawaii and Alaska, who joined Palin in opposition, wanted to modify the bill to exclude domestic commerce between U.S. ports.

The bottom line is that despite pressure from a vice presidential candidate or that the economy is struggling, Schwarzenegger should have taken action. Cleaning up the ports wasn't going to be a free ride in any economic time. California needs to implement a plan to cut emissions at its ports, and even a modified plan would've been a start.

We understand times are tough, but we can't take our eye off the future. Schwarzenegger made a mistake when he vetoed this bill.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008:](#)

Condors and cattle both need better management

BY LOIS HENRY, Californian staff writer

I don't think I've ever seen so many cowboy hats in one place without a major piece of meat on the grill.

Cattle rancher Art Steinbeck is one of the ranchers who can no longer graze their cattle on Bitter Creek condor refuge land. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to reduce or stop altogether and instead manage the refuge by burning, mowing and poisoning thousands of acres of grassland.

But there they were, more than 120 cowboys and cowgirls (even a few cowgrammas and grampas too) crowded into a tiny hall above Frazier Park on the last day of September waiting to have their say.

It had been a long time coming.

This was the first — and only — public meeting held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service inviting open discussion of its plans for managing the Bitter Creek Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge.

The refuge is 14,000 acres of hilly grasslands above Maricopa that was home to a working cattle ranch for more than 100 years before the government bought it in 1986 as California condor habitat.

It's closed to public use but had allowed limited cattle grazing, for a fee, to keep down fire hazards and encourage native grasses.

About three years ago, however, Fish and Wildlife managers kicked the cows off entirely while they crafted a new management plan. The options were outlined in a draft environmental assessment released last spring.

The "preferred alternative" in that document would allow some seasonal grazing.

In case grazing doesn't work, and ranchers told me restrictions included in the plan would make it infeasible, [the preferred alternative also calls for burning on up to 9,000 acres of the refuge. Great idea in this air basin, huh?](#)

In my last column on this issue, I railed about how this plan came to fruition without a public hearing and not even any notification to Kern County.

Well, turns out this lone wolf act is par for the course with the Ventura-based Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which oversees Bitter Creek and the entire Condor Recovery Program.

And it's not just me saying that.

A lengthy and thorough audit of the condor program commissioned by Audubon California and released this August describes an archaic and autocratic management style by Hopper Mountain that is plagued by poor communication and operates under a Byzantine structure that makes information sharing difficult, if not impossible.

Sounds familiar.

To be fair, the condor audit and its lead author, Virginia Tech biology professor Jeff Walters, told me Fish and Wildlife has been operating in such a crisis mode to try to save the condors it hasn't had time to step back and assess whether the recovery program's structure is optimal.

True enough, they started in the mid-1980s with 22 birds left on earth. Twenty-two!

Through a lot of hard work and incredible determination, there are now about 300 condors either in captivity or swirling around California, Arizona and Mexico. (The audit is clear, though, that unless lead poisoning from hunter's ammo is brought under control, there won't be much more forward movement for the condors.)

Fish and Wildlife's efforts so far truly deserve praise. And the audit gives that praise. But it also doesn't stint on the problems.

"Program inequity and lack of shared and effective leadership make new partners feel uninformed and undervalued. They often feel out-of-sight and out-of-mind when it comes to programmatic decision-making and coordination. Similarly, stakeholders outside the program must navigate a confusing programmatic structure to voice concerns and remain informed about recovery."

The Bitter Creek area ranchers can surely relate to this, having to get a congressman and the newspaper involved before Fish and Wildlife would deign to hold a public meeting about how our own public land should be managed.

In the case of the condors, Fish and Wildlife's arcane management style, particularly in regards to Bitter Creek, has led to high turnover among field personnel, worsening communication between the zoos that breed the birds in captivity and the field workers who release them into the wild and monitor their nesting.

"The panel found this situation shocking ..." the audit says.

The overall lack of leadership has also created a dearth of independent scientific evaluation from outside the condor program, according to the audit.

Another familiar ring.

The environmental assessment on managing Bitter Creek similarly lacked a lot of scientific backup, prompting Congressman Kevin McCarthy, who attended the public meeting, to call for a full environmental impact report if Fish and Wildlife insists on keeping burning as an option.

The audit doesn't conclude that the situation is hopeless and neither do I.

It does, however, make numerous recommendations to open the recovery program to outside expertise and create a streamlined structure that allows more input, information sharing and consensus.

Coincidentally, that's all the ranchers at that Sept. 30 meeting wanted as well.

Before opening the meeting to public comments, Marc Weitzel, the Hopper Mountain project leader, said he was astounded by the turnout.

Considering Fish and Wildlife did everything to keep turnout low — even picking a tiny public hall in a remote location despite an offer, in writing, to use Maricopa Unified School District's 300-person capacity hall right there in town — Weitzel's comment wasn't surprising.

This agency isn't exactly a shining example of collaboration, though perhaps things are changing.

"Hindsight is 2020, and we do realize now that we should have held a workshop at the beginning of the scoping process to reach out better," Fish and Wildlife spokesman Chris Barr told me. "We regret we did not do that."

At least we agree on that.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the urgency for "green" areas to give children a perspective on life in California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Urgen áreas verdes para dar una perspectiva de vida a los niños de California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticier Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, October 9, 2008

La región con el aire más contaminado en Estados Unidos, el sur de California tiene al mismo tiempo la menor proporción de áreas verdes en el país.

El área de Los Ángeles padece igualmente una disparidad entre vecindarios pobres con muy pocos parques y suburbios ricos con más zonas verdes.

De acuerdo con un estudio de la Universidad de California, los parques cambian las vidas de los niños; tienen mejor salud, menos obesidad y menos asma.

Las comunidades sin parques tienen más delincuencia, desempleo, pobreza y problemas de salud.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California Lung Association initiates a walk to raise funds that will be used to finance programs that help reduce air pollution and implement preventive measures for respiratory diseases.](#)

Convoca a caminata en California la Asociación Americana del Pulmón

Manuel Ocaño

Noticier Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, October 8, 2008

La Asociación Americana del Pulmón, o de salud pulmonar convocó a una nueva caminata en California con el fin de reunir fondos para financiar programas que reduzcan la contaminación del aire y instaurar medidas preventivas contra enfermedades respiratorias.

La asociación informó que la marcha será el 19 de octubre en San Bernardino, y busca sentar un precedente nacional porque ese condado tiene el aire más deteriorado en el país, aunque California es vanguardia nacional en lucha contra la contaminación.

El proyecto de caminata se enfocará principalmente en informar sobre los niveles de asma en California.