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OJAI VALLEY NEWS

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Public urged to prepare for drill

Disaster response to be tested Sept. 17 in Ojai Valley

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The floods of El Niño, the Day Fire and the Zaca Fire, all of which occurred within a three-year period, served as ample reminder to Ojai Valley residents that a disaster could strike at any time.

With a 97 percent chance of a major California earthquake in the next 20 years, according to a U.S. geological study, and erratic weather conditions worldwide, city officials agreed at Tuesday night's Ojai City Council meeting, that there couldn't be a better time to get prepared for the next big event.

"One thing we noticed after the natural disasters that occurred these past few years, is that we have a communication problem," Police Chief Bruce Norris told the council.

In addition to Emergency Advisory Radio System, jump-started by the Ojai Police Department, Ventura County 1st District Supervisor Steve Bennett and a host of local volunteers have been working on improving the valley's disaster response system.

Bennett presented details regarding an upcoming emergency drill, scheduled for 7 p.m. on Sept. 17, that will test Ojai Valley's disaster preparedness and ability to communicate during an emergency.

A group of local Community Emergency Response Team volunteers will be circling Ojai's neighborhoods the evening of the drill, and counting how many families declare themselves "OK" in the event of a "disaster." The drill organizers are requesting that Ojai Valley residents review their own family disaster plans on the evening of Sept. 17, and then post a sign that reads "OK" from their windows.

When a real disaster strikes, an

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Musician instrumental in benefit appearance

Robben Ford and friends add second show on Sept. 21 to aid cancer victim

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A benefit concert for an Ojai woman battling cancer is offering a day of entertainment and education to local residents.

Guitarist Robben Ford and his band will appear at Matilija Junior High School Auditorium, 703 El Paseo Road in Ojai, on Sept. 21 at 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. The benefit concerts are to raise funds for friend Tara Jeffery's medical expenses due to breast cancer.

Jeffery is a member of the Ojai community who owns Ojai Pilates and Wellness Center and also performs as a singer.

Ford is to perform in his hometown between international

tours and will be joined onstage by his bandmates, Toss Panos on drums and Travis Carlton on bass. Ford is a five-time Grammy nominee and was named one of the Top 100 Guitarists by Musician Magazine. The opening act will be local guitarist and singer Jonathan McEuen.

"I had met Tara through my wife, Anne," said Ford. "Anne and she are good friends, so when this all happened, my wife asked me if I would be willing and interested in helping to raise benefit funds for Tara. I'm very happy to do it, but my wife is the one doing all the work. She's the one making all this happen."

"I take pilates from Tara and

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Photo by Allen C. Bertke

Perch Search

A rare white hummingbird has been visiting the backyard feeder of Persimmon Hill resident Allen Bertke in recent weeks. Bertke explained, "It is actually a very common Anna's hummingbird, but it has not developed any of the normal green

pigmentation usually seen in the species, leaving just a very slight rufous coloring underlying the white. It makes quite a contrast when seen perching with the other hummers on the feeder." Bertke is a past board member of the Ventura Audubon Society.

Q and A with new police chief

Dunn brings 20 years of law enforcement to new post as Ojai's chief of police

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Sheriff's Capt. Chris Dunn will officially begin his tenure as Ojai's police chief Monday, Sept. 22. He is a 20-year veteran law enforcement officer and Camarillo resident hand-picked by Ventura County Sheriff Bob Brooks to replace the outgoing chief, Bruce Norris.

Norris has managed the Ojai Sheriff's substation and Ojai Police Department since being appointed to replace Gary Pentis in March 2005.

We provided the questions addressing some key issues, and Dunn provided the following responses:

Q: As you know, yearly crime statistics can be misleading in



Outgoing chief Bruce Norris, left, with incoming chief Chris Dunn.

small communities. What do you see as the major crime issue in the Ojai Valley and how do you intend to address it? What are other issues of importance?

A: While the most recent crime statistics show the lowest crime

rate in the Ojai Valley area in years, I understand that there are still areas of criminal activity that need to be and in most cases are being addressed.

One in particular, is the ongoing gang activity. Gangs and the criminal acts they conduct affect everyone in the community. The gang-associated violence, graffiti, and intimidation affect every resident, business owner, and visitor. To address this issue, the Sheriff's Department has taken a very aggressive approach to identifying and tracking gang members and arresting those responsible for committing crimes. To that end, the Ojai Station has deputies assigned to

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Tibet to Ojai and return

Sept. 20 event featuring film about local couple's efforts to aid homeland

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In May 2006, Dorjee and Dolkar Tsewang of Ojai, traveled back to their homeland in Tibet for the first time in 14 years.

Local friend and acclaimed cameraman David Luckenbach accompanied them to catch the poignant family reunion on film. He also brought his daughter, Lindsay, along for the experience.

After cutting 17 hours of footage into a 25-minute piece, Luckenbach will screen the premiere of "An American Dream" at the Back Yard Ranch in Ojai on Sept. 20.

The documentary traces the summer trip which brought Dorjee's and Dolkar's families together for the first time.

The two men as Tibetan refugees in India years ago, where they had both arrived after fleeing Tibet. Neither of them had seen their parents in 14 years. Dorjee's and Dolkar's parents did not know, until that moment, that their children were alive and well. The parents were also introduced for the first time to their grandchildren, the Tsewangs' two boys, Tsering and Norbu.

"Every time we see parts of it we are all in tears," said Dorjee of the film. "It's heartbreaking to see our family members. We want to go back," he said.

The story of Dorjee and Dolkar's family reunion in itself is inspirational. But Luckenbach's documentary also traces the progress of the Chazhu Valley Clinic, built with funds raised by the Tsewangs' TibetanAid Foundation.

Four years ago, Dorjee and Dolkar, with the help of some friends, founded the federally recognized nonprofit organization which has been raising funds to help improve the

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Ojai Valley

neighbors

Linda Harmon
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Sara Benjamin gets around. An environmental project coordinator, she loves her job because she gets to teach by "stoking the fire, not filling a bucket."

"I lectured when I taught at Ventura and Oxnard Colleges," said Benjamin, "but I'd much rather inspire people to learn things for themselves."

She did just that when she moved to Ojai four years ago and got involved in environmental education around the valley.

Benjamin's mural project, "Once Upon a Wetland," graces the exterior wall of Andy's Liquor, on the corner of Lomita and El Roblar in Meiners Oaks. Area children painted the mural that pays tribute to the benefits of a healthy wetland. Now, instead of being a graffiti magnet, the mural brightens the cityscape.

That's the way Benjamin

operates. She works with the community to get things done. Benjamin and Becky Beckett, a fellow environmentally minded science teacher at Nordhoff, partnered with the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy for the "Once Upon a Wetland" project, which the mural represents.

"The project, on the Ojai Meiners Preserve and including the Ventura River Watershed, brought students from Nordhoff High, Oak Grove and Meiners Oaks Elementary into the field to learn about wetlands and held with the restoration of its delicate balance to connect them to the land itself.

"Ojai is the perfect place to do it," said Benjamin, who came to Ojai, like many, on a whim. "I had everything I owned in the back of my car. I didn't have a job or a place to live. I was just taken by it."

Born in Atascadero and raised in the Chico area, Benjamin has a master's in marine geochemistry, a bachelor's in earth systems with a minor in Japanese language



Sara Benjamin

studies from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

"It was hard for me to figure out what to study," said Benjamin. "I'm interested in the interconnectedness of everything. I studied the movement of tectonic plates, with the molten magma coming up and hardening to form the Earth's crust, and saw how it was like our bodies growing new skin when we get cut."

Benjamin has just received a grant to expand her project to include all fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders in the public schools within the entire watershed.

"I want to get the word out to the principals out there," said Benjamin.

News Briefs

WHEELER GORGE GOING BY THE NUMBERS: "Nature's Math: The Wonder of Numbers in the Natural World" will be presented by Barbara Baron, Wheeler Gorge docent, on Saturday at 10:30 a.m. at Wheeler Gorge Visitor Center, 17017 Maricopa Highway. Explore the Golden Mean, Fibonacci sequence, fractals and symmetries as seen in nature and expand to a new dimension of awareness. Donations: adults \$5, mature youth \$3.

SOLAR BENEFITS EXPLAINED: Explore the benefits of solar electricity with local customers on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Ojai Eco Village (Earth Play Ecostore), 501 E. Ojai Ave. Schedule: 10 a.m., solar electricity presentation and questions and answers; 11 a.m., video showing, local testimonials; noon, lunch and ZENN electric car test drives (local organic food provided); 1 to 3 p.m., solar electric local homes tour. Call Shawn Jacobson at 640-7903.

OBAMA OFFICE ON CALL: The Ojai for Obama campaign office, located at 323 E. Matilija St., Suite 116, now has a phone number; it is 272-8189. The web site is OjaiforObama.com.

FULL MEDITATION SET FOR SUNDAY: A solar fire festival and meditation at the full moon of Virgo will be held Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at Meditation Mount, 10340 Reeves Road in Ojai. Commentary and meditation with Roger and Katherine Collis and music at 7 p.m. and



Sports

Rangers rough and ready for season opener at home tonight. **Page B1**

Events

Mexican Fiesta kicks off Sunday at 11 a.m. in Libby Park. **Page A8**

throughout the evening by Richard Hardy. Donations are welcome. Call 646-5508 or visit meditation@meditation.com.

PESTICIDE FREE MEETING SET FOR MONDAY: Sacred Space Studio, 41 Bryant Circle, Ojai, will host a Pesticide Free Ojai Valley meeting on Monday from 7:45 to 8:45 p.m. All are welcome to join in creating a healthy, sustainable community. In Santa Barbara, 40 parks are pesticide free. The town of Fairfax has a successful pesticide free policy and municipalities all over the country have chosen to become pesticide free. More than 30 school in California are pesticide free. Meetings will be ongoing, most Monday evenings. Call 639-3764 or e-mail pesticedefree@ojaivalley@gmail.com.

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The Montessori School of Ojai will celebrate United Nations International Peace Day and our annual Book Fair at Barnes & Noble (Ventura). Join us for fun activities, art projects, and creating a peace mural. Come and read our students' visions for peace. Ask us for a voucher and your purchase will benefit our school. Call the school for more information (805-649-2525). See you there!

The Montessori School of Ojai

UN Peace Day & Book Fair *Sept. 18 & 19, 4-8 pm * Sept. 20 & 21, 12-5 pm

