

Congressional Candidates' Forum

7:30 p.m.

Monday, October 23, 2000

Gunderson High School Theater

Everyone is welcome—Bring your friends.

Congressional Candidates' Forum

Both **Jim Cuneen** and **Mike Honda** have accepted an invitation to participate in a congressional race Candidates' Forum cosponsored by VEP, the Almaden Valley Community Association, Pinehurst Residents Association, and the Thousand Oaks Homeowners Association. This forum will be held in Gunderson High School's Theater beginning at 7:30 PM on Monday, October 23. Both Jim and Mike have been honored guests at VEP meetings in the past.

According to KQED radio and National Public Radio, the race between Mike and Jim is one of six congressional seat races nationally that could change the balance of power in the US House of Representatives for the coming years. These candidates and this race are getting national attention. And, YOUR VOTE DOES COUNT!

So, please mark your calendar and plan to join VEP, AVCA, Pinehurst, and Thousand Oaks neighbors. Meet the candidates, hear their views, ask them questions that are important to you, then cast an informed vote on November 7th in this race of national importance.

Register to Vote... *Do it today!*

-Dave Fadness

VEP has always worked to help its members vote smart. No matter how well informed you are, though, you can't vote at all if you're not registered.

If you've moved since the last election, if you or one of your family members just reached voting age, if you want to change your party affiliation, or you're simply not sure about your voter status, call the Registrar of Voters during normal business hours at (408) 299-8302. Please be sure to get a registration form and return it to the registrar.

President's Corner

-Greg West, VEP President

This issue of the VEP News focuses on a something that concerns us all: Walter Lester's dream of turning his land, the **Lester-Cottle Ranch** on the corner of Branham and Snell, into a park for the enjoyment of all. This is such an important concern that we are mailing this VEP News issue to the entire VEP area, not just to our membership.

As you are all well aware, Mr. Lester has had the unselfish dream of turning his land into a park for years. However, with the passing of his sister and the resulting inheritance tax burden, his dream may be fading quickly. Mr. Lester may have to break up his land and sell a substantial portion of it to pay the tax man.

In addition, our city council member, Pat Dando, has proposed a change to the San Jose General Plan that will remove the Vista Park Drive and Chynoweth Avenue extensions across the Lester Property (the GP Plan change specifics may be viewed on the VEP Web site). The changes come before the Planning Commission on November 8th at 6 p.m. and before the City Council on November 21st at 7 p.m. VEP will be there to support these changes. I encourage you to attend these meetings, as well.

We need your help and active participation to let our local, state, and, especially, federal elected representatives know how you feel about Mr. Lester's dream; to encourage our City Planning Commission and City Council members to approve the General Plan change; to encourage our elected officials to find a way to relieve Mr. Lester of part or all of this tax burden; and to ask them to help us and Mr. Lester keep his property whole and keep his dream alive for our enjoyment and for the enjoyment of future generations.

Within this issue and posted on our Web site (<http://sites.netscape.net/vephoa/>), you will find sample letters that you may use as a guideline for writing your own personal letters. I encourage you to relate your own personal feelings and suggestions on this matter to our elected representatives. Please encourage everyone in your household (even small kids) to get involved and to write to our representatives. In addition, we have included the names, mailing addresses and email addresses of our elected representatives for you.

If you are a VEP member and have responded to our email asking for your help, thank you! But, please don't stop there. If you sent an email to our representatives, please also mail them a piece of paper as well (your letters can be typed or hand-written). If you sent them mail, please email them, too! If every member of your household has both mailed and emailed our representatives, outstanding! Now, please do it again!

Given the federal budget surplus and recent congressional debates on the federal inheritance tax, NOW is the time to raise this concern. I ask you, **please act NOW!** Don't put this off until next week, or even until tomorrow! Also, if you wish, please copy VEP on your letters and emails.

I thank you in advance for your effort and help.

GP Hearings on Vistapark & Chynoweth

-Dave Fadness

Subject to annual public review, the adopted San Jose General Plan (GP) is our city's guide for future land uses through the year 2020. The current GP includes plans for future extensions of Vistapark Drive and Chynoweth Avenue across the Lester property.

At our request, City Council member Pat Dando has submitted a request (GP00-10-03) to eliminate those planned extensions. At our September 26th meeting, VEP members unanimously adopted the following resolution in favor of Dando's proposal:

“The members of VEP Homeowners Association are resolved to support GP00-10-03, proposed by Councilperson Dando, eliminating from the San Jose General Plan the extension of Vista Park Drive and Chynoweth Avenue across the property of Mr. Walter Lester. It is Mr. Lester's plan to donate the property to the people of Santa Clara County to be used as a public park. Extension of these streets across the property would severely damage its integrity and usability as a park. We urge the San Jose City Council to approve GP00-10-03.”

The City Planning Commission will make its recommendation on this proposal in public hearings at 6 p.m. on November 8th. Their recommendation will be acted upon by the City Council at 7 p.m. hearings on November 21st. All hearings are held in City Hall Council Chambers, 801 N. First Street (at Mission Street), San Jose.

It is important to note that, as a part of negotiations to eliminate the extension of Vistapark and Chynoweth across his property, Mr. Lester has agreed to donate approximately 10-acres of land to accommodate full-width improvements of Snell Avenue and Branham Lane.

Make your feelings known. Write, email, and/or call council members and the mayor—they work for YOU. Let them know what you think about this. Get everyone in your family to do so. If you can, please join us at the public hearings. Your help will be appreciated. Please do it today!

Office, Council Member, Phone, Fax, Email (all are @ci.sj.ca.us)

Mayor, Ron Gonzales, 277-4237, 277-3868, mayoremail@

District 1, Linda LeZotte, 277-5438, 277-5192, linda.lezotte@

District 2, Charlotte Powers, 277-4282, 280-6562, charlotte.powers@

District 3, Cindy Chavez, 277-5231, 271-9692, cindy.chavez@

District 4, (Vacant)

District 5, Manny Diaz, 277-5157, 277-5192, manny.diaz@

District 6, Frank Fiscalini, 277-5166, 277-5192, frank.fiscalini

District 7, Geo. Shirakawa, 277-5226, 277-5192, george.shirakawa@

District 8, Alice Woody, 277-5242, 277-5192, alice.woody@

District 9, John Diquisto, 277-5275, 277-5192, john.diquisto@

District 10, Patricia Dando, 277-5251, 271-9807, pat.dando@

Mail to: City Hall, 801 N. First Street, San Jose 95110

Help Keep Gunderson Area Clean and Safe

As a result of a request at our September VEP meeting, **Jeri Arstingstall**, **Debra Suydam**, and **Greg West** met with the Gunderson High School Administration to discuss the trash left on their sports fields after weekend recreational use. We found that Gunderson has the biggest high school campus in the San Jose Unified School District and that SJUSD, not the school, is responsible for approving and scheduling weekend field use. We also found out that there is a significant amount of dumping happening on campus in areas not easily seen from the street.

The Gunderson administration committed to request that SJUSD place more trash cans on the fields. They also committed to contact the field users to remind them of their responsibility to clean up after themselves.

Gunderson principal, Ms. Ferdig-Riley, gave us the number of the security patrol for SJUSD: 800-318-2222. She encourages Gunderson's neighbors to record license plate numbers and call this number to report illegal activity on campus, including dumping, drinking, and vandalism. She also asks that neighbors call the security patrol, or the San Jose Police at 311 (or 911 for emergencies only), to report these activities rather than put themselves at risk by confronting the people involved.

NASCOP (Warning: Look Out!)

School is back in session and our VEP neighbors need to be specially mindful of their driving habits. In response to concerns over speeders in recent months, we've decided to ask for NASCOP surveillance at various locations in our community.

NASCOP (Neighborhood Automated Speed Compliance Program) uses an parked, unmarked van containing a speed sensing radar unit, two cameras, and a staff person. If you're exceeding the speed limit, you, your car, and your license plate will be featured in a photograph along with a mailed traffic citation.

To avoid this, simply drive carefully and observe speed limits at all times--especially near schools, before, during, and after school hours.

A Word of Thanks—and Apology!

Thanks: **Bill Johnson** and **Aiko Fadness** recently did booth duty for VEP at the Gunderson High School *Back-to-School Night Resource Faire*. Their ambassadorial efforts resulted in another VEP family membership. Thanks and three cheers to these VEPers!

Apologies: For reasons we may never know, a small fraction of our September newsletter mailing was delivered late. All copies were delivered to the post office at the same time, but some newsletters were delivered as much as a week late for our September 26th meeting. In behalf of the Postal Service (which has always done a remarkably good job for us), we apologize for any inconvenience late receipt of the NEWS may have caused you.

About VEP

-Bob Aquino

What is VEP? VEP is an all-volunteer organization of friendly neighbors who are dedicated to serving the needs of our community. Founded in 1969, we are one of the largest, most successful, and most enduring grass roots organizations in Santa Clara County. VEP has a track record of getting things done in our neighborhoods—among our many accomplishments:

- Planting and maintaining 170 trees in the median on Chynoweth Avenue.
- Challenging the City and County over increased high-density housing in our neighborhoods.
- Lobbying for safety improvements in and long overdue completion of neighborhood parks.
- Lobbying for improvements along Route 87 that reduce noise and visual intrusion in adjacent homes.
- Sponsoring clean up days in which hundreds of cubic yards of trash are removed from our neighborhood.
- Winning important traffic safety improvements at key neighborhood intersections.
- Awarding *VEP Community Service Awards* each year to graduating seniors at Andrew Hill and Gunderson High Schools.

Why did I get this Newsletter? Members of VEP are working to improve the quality of life in our community. Whether it's getting information out to the electorate or alerting the community to important neighborhood issues. The two topics that are covered in this edition of our monthly letter are of such importance that we felt it necessary to get the word out to the entire neighborhood. So, we are inviting our friends and neighbors to participate with us in communicating with our city planning commission, city council, and congressional delegation about the Lester property. Our general meetings are always open to everyone, but we especially urge you to come to our October 23rd candidates' forum meeting.

How can I join VEP? Come to our October 23rd meeting. We will have membership materials there for you to sign up. Or, call Bob Aquino at 629-5459 for a membership envelope. Or simply write a check and drop it in the mail. (Our address is on the mailing page of this newsletter.) In January, you will again receive membership materials in the mail. Family dues are \$15 per year; one of the best investments you have ever made.

Writing to federal representatives:

These are the mail and email addresses for our federal delegation:

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren
318 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(408) 271-8700
FAX: (408) 271-8713
email: zoeqram@lofgren.house.gov

Congressman Tom Campbell
2442 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(408) 371-7337
FAX: (408) 371-7925
email: campbell@mail.house.gov

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo
318 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(408) 245-2339
FAX: (202) 225-8890
email: annagram@mail.house.gov

Senator Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
(415) 536-6868
FAX: (none)
email: senator@feinstein.senate.gov

Senator Barbara Boxer
Hart Senate Office Building, Suite 112
Washington, D.C. 20510
(415) 403-0100
FAX: (415) 956-6701
email: senator@boxer.senate.gov

As they are currently candidates for Congress on the November 7 ballot, you may also want to contact these two state assemblymen who represent our area:

Assemblyman Jim Cuneen
2174 Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814
(408) 369-8170
FAX: (408) 369-8174
email: jim.cuneen@assembly.ca.gov

Assemblyman Mike Honda
5155 State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814
(408) 269-6500
FAX: (408) 277-1036
email: mike.honda@asm.ca.gov

(See names & addresses above.)

Honorable Senator/Representative XXXXX:

I am a neighbor of Walter Lester's Cottle Ranch, approximately 300-acres of land in the middle of our city. His ranch is zoned for Open Space in both the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County's General Plans. As you probably know, Mr. Lester has for years been trying to donate this land to the people of our county for a park.

Our area is generally deficient in park acreage, especially the kind of larger regional park his land would provide. In the face of our need for recreational and open space land, our community of over 2000 homes is unanimously in favor of Mr. Lester's proposed park. Moreover, he is now negotiating a donation of more than ten acres of that land to the city for long-planned widening of two major streets that serve our area (Branham Lane and Snell Avenue). That land alone is worth approximately 10-million dollars. At minimum, we think he should be fairly credited for any donation of land he is willing to make to the public.

Mr. Lester's sister died last year. The only remaining member of his immediate family, he is now faced with a very large federal estate tax debt. Except for the value of his land, which has been in the Cottle-Lester family for 150 years, Mr. Lester is not a wealthy person.

So, to pay estate taxes, he will have to sell off a significant portion of the land he wants to donate. The land he'd have to sell to pay taxes would surely be lost to urban development. This could mean the end of our dream for a park; if not, it will certainly mean that when a park is ultimately built, it will be much smaller than currently envisioned. The only reason is taxes.

We ask that you work with other members of our San Jose delegation and muster your creative powers to find a way to credit Mr. Lester for the land he is willing to donate to the public. It seems manifestly unfair to tax this man, forcing him to sell land he wants to make into a park. It seems even more absurd to tax him into having to sell his land, then have to spend even more tax money to buy land later for public parks.

A crucial fact is that, even if we had money for acquisition, there is almost no land available in our city for parks. As such, Mr. Lester's philanthropy is especially appreciated and must be taken advantage of.

Please find a way to credit any gifts of land to the public against his tax debt. We need your immediate assistance to save this treasure from the taxman Please, please help us.

Thank you,

My Name
My Address
San Jose, CA 95136

SAMPLE LETTER #2

(See names & addresses above.)

Honorable Senator/Representative XXXXX:

As a resident of the neighborhood of Walter Lester's Cottle Ranch, I wish to call to your attention an unfortunate situation regarding this property.

It is Mr. Lester's intent to give this 300 acre property to the people of Santa Clara County, as a park. Although the property is very valuable, Mr. Lester is not a wealthy person. Unfortunately, to pay estate taxes, due to the death of his sister, he would have to sell off a major portion of the land.

Please help us to find a solution to this problem, because if we don't, another piece of our children's heritage will be lost forever.

Thank you,

My Name
My Address
San Jose, CA 95136