

SUMMER VACATION!

NO VEP MEETING UNTIL SEPTEMBER

Have a fabulous, fun-filled family summer!
Please watch for kids and always
drive carefully in our neighborhoods

2001 VEP Community Service Awards

-Greg West

VEP Community Association is proud to present its 2001 Community Service Awards to Gunderson Senior **Eric Espino** and Andrew Hill Senior **Guadalupe Rodriguez**. Both of these 2001 graduates are outstanding contributors to the community and have been awarded \$1000 to be used for the post-secondary education of their choice.

Eric Espino has been very active in volunteer activities inside of Gunderson and out. Eric was a freshman student tutor/mentor for two years. In his senior year, he asked to tutor and mentor the two most at-risk freshman students. As president of La Raza Unida, Eric made it an obligation of senior student club members to get involved in the mentor/tutor program. Eric also served as president of the Link Crew.

He spent his summer months as a counselor and conflict mediator at the MACSA Youth Center. He has served food at the Emergency Housing Consortium and has multiplied his efforts by recruiting other volunteers to do the same. Eric has attended the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Conference, the Enterprise Leadership Conference, and the New Bridges Camp.

Guadalupe Rodriguez has logged over 75 volunteer hours at the San Jose Medical Center and has been a Red Cross Youth Action Team volunteer for more than a year. In addition, she was selected as the student representative to the East Side Union High School District Board of Trustees. She been a member of the California Scholarship Federation for three years and served as the club's president this year. She served as freshman class secretary, secretary for Club Med (medical careers club) in her sophomore year, vice president of the French Club in her junior year, and president in her senior year.

Again, VEP extends our congratulations to these two outstanding seniors and our best wishes for them in the future.

Gunderson High clean-up a success

-Dave Fadness

Saturday, June 9th was a busy day for volunteers on and around the Gunderson High School campus. A few neighborhood folks joined approximately 100 students in a general clean-up organized by **Phil Hophan**, the Leadership Advisor for the Gunderson's Associated Student Body and Leadership Course (120 students enrolled).

Members of these student groups were involved in the clean-up:

Gunderson High School ASB 2001-2002;
Gunderson High School Leadership Classes;
Saturday School Students; and
Community Service Students.

These volunteers planted fifteen trees around the campus, cleaned dead brush away from the parking lot and all areas around the school, trimmed and cleaned the areas around the football field that were overgrown and ugly, and whacked lots of weeds. They also planted a small amount of ground cover on the bare hills of dirt around the school.

Students fanned out along Chynoweth to the light rail station and down neighborhood streets to Vista Park to pick up trash. They also did some cleaning inside the school.

Campus area clean-ups will be done once every two months next school year. Watch for announcements of dates in future editions of the VEP News—and make it a point to spend an hour or two helping out.

Our thanks to Mr. Hophan and his volunteers for a job well done!

Auto break-ins in VEP neighborhood

- *Joyce Chesnos*

Someone broke into five cars on Chiles Court sometime after midnight Saturday morning, May 26th. CDs, stereo equipment, a cell phone, and a wallet were stolen. The wallet and its credit cards were found discarded down the block, but the cash was gone. The thief even emptied change out of a car ashtray, so it appears quick cash was the goal. No car alarms were triggered and no one heard anything except a few barking dogs. A police report was filed.

My husband Bob and I really liked the fact that VEP's e-mail spread the news of these incidents so quickly, alerting our community to be watchful. I think that system could be helpful as a *Neighborhood Watch* tactic if used appropriately.

Neighborhood Developments

- *Dave Noel and Dave Fadness*

Home Depot Expo Design and Best Buy – Construction is underway for the retail stores on the property at the north-west quadrant of the Almaden Expressway/Route 85 interchange. Improvements on Cherryview will be completed by the end of the summer. The plans for the improvements on Almaden Expressway and the Route 85 ramps are expected to be approved by the county and Caltrans by about the end of this month. Construction on Almaden Expressway should start within three weeks of plan approval. Construction will be completed by November 2002.

Pearl Ave – The recently completed roadwork along Pearl Avenue was due to installation and upgrades of ductwork for Pac Bell.

Foxworthy Bridge – The new bridge over the Guadalupe River connecting Foxworthy to Pearl Avenue will be completed by the end of July this year.

Branham Traffic Light at Safeway – The new traffic light in front of Safeway remains out of service since the project requires work from PG&E. PG&E drastically curtailed work such as this since it declared bankruptcy. No word yet as to when that signal will be wired-up and operational.

Guadalupe Creek Trail – Pat Dando says she is still working to develop a trail network in our community for pedestrians and bicyclists. As evidence of her success, you will be pleased to learn that \$400,000 has been approved for two trail projects in District 10.

Improvements will take place along the Guadalupe River Trail from Blossom Hill Road to Branham Lane. Completing this section of the Guadalupe River Trail will provide a scenic, off-street, pedestrian route from Branham Lane to South Almaden. In addition, the Guadalupe Creek Trail from Almaden Expressway along Coleman Avenue to Quicksilver Park will be developed. When complete, both of these projects will enhance the trail system in our community.

Oakridge Mall – Westfield Corporation is changing their plans for expanding Oakridge Mall. Their new plan calls for expansion in the front (Blossom Hill Road) side, including a 20-screen movie theater, restaurants, a food court, shopping facilities, and two stories of parking full-width overhead. Access to/from the overhead 1076-space parking garage will be off Santa Teresa and Winfield, on the east and west sides, respectively, of the new mall. Macy's will be expanded by 70,000 square feet in two stories toward the north (Thornwood Drive) side of the mall.

This expansion will mean removal of the two existing, free-standing buildings in front of the mall. The Oakridge Lanes bowling facility will also be demolished to make way for 550 ground-level parking spaces behind the mall (no more bowling alley!).

A traffic signal will be installed at the mall's rear entrance on Thornwood Drive. Changes will be made to existing signals in front of the mall at Hillview Avenue/Blossom Hill Road, and on the west side of the mall at Winfield Ave/Blossom River Drive. The signal on Blossom Hill just west of Hillview will be removed and no left or U-turns will be allowed. A new west-bound right turn lane will be added along the north side of Blossom Hill Road from approximately Denny's to Almaden Expressway.

VEP submitted a five-page letter providing comments and concerns regarding this project. This letter is posted on VEP's website (shown on the mailing page of this newsletter).

Summerhill Homes – This housing project on the old walnut orchard (at Branham & Vistapark) is moving through the city approval process. Summerhill has been meeting with neighboring homeowners and will continue to through the summer months. They hope to complete their zoning application by early August. A final hearing before the San Jose City Council is targeted for mid-August this year.

President's message

-David Noel, VEP's President

As I look back over the last month, it's amazing how much has happened in the VEP community. Our May meeting was our fifth annual **Home Improvement Faire**. This year's Faire was another big success. We received positive feedback from both VEP members and our vendors. Many thanks to **John Marks** for another job well done.

During the Home Improvement Fair, we set some time aside to discuss an important item of business, House bill **HR 1486**. This bill, still under consideration in the House Ways and Means Committee, would help preserve the **Lester property** by allowing Mr. Lester to receive credit against estate taxes he currently owes if he donates his land for use as a public park. VEP members voted unanimously to support this legislation, and also signed petitions stating their support. I sent a letter to Representatives Bill Thomas and Charles Rangel on behalf of VEP on May 29th (check our website for a copy you can use).

The latest news is that HR 1486 faces an uphill battle in the House Ways and Means Committee. Please keep sending your letters in support of this bill. **Greg West** has done an outstanding job leading our letter writing and petition campaign. If you missed it, **Dave Fadness** wrote an excellent letter to the editor in support of HR 1486 that was published in the San Jose Mercury News; we're including a copy of that letter in this month's newsletter.

On May 24th and May 29th, I had the honor of presenting VEP's **community service awards** to **Eric Espino** of Gunderson High School, and **Guadalupe Rodriguez** of Andrew Hill High School. Eric and Guadalupe both received a certificate and an award of \$1000 towards college or vocational training of their choice. Although VEP's community service award is intended to honor community service rather than academic excellence, we see a pattern in that the students most involved in community service also tend to excel academically and demonstrate leadership in their extracurricular activities. This year was no exception, and I assure you these two students were very well deserving of their awards. Many thanks to **Greg West** for working with the school administrators to get their nominations, for facilitating the selection committee, and for producing the award certificates.

On May 30th, VEP members attended a community meeting held by the San Jose Parks department to review the latest plans for the construction scheduled to start at **Vista Park** later this year. In response to concerns regarding the specific equipment planned for the tot and youth lots, VEP quickly assembled a **Playground Equipment committee**.

This energetic committee met in person and by email to arrive at consensus on which equipment best meets the needs of our community, and reported back to the city within a two-week deadline required to keep the project on track. VEP salutes the members of the Vista Park Playground Equipment Committee: **Robyn Catelani, Kathi Hansen, Carolyn Calzia, Lori Zendejas, Kristine Alexander, Julie Brooks, Francette Pecoraro, Yvonne Reddy, Dave Noel, Justin Noel, Laura Nadell and Lisa Miller**.

On July 17th, the Parks department will present finalized play lot designs to our committee based on their recom-

mended equipment. VEP will also meet separately with the Parks department and **Pat Dando** to discuss options for stretching the overall park budget by using community resources such as funds and volunteer labor from the Bobby Sox softball league and other volunteer "sweat equity."

On June 2nd, I attended the grand opening of the new teen center called **The Spot**, located in a new building on the campus of Brett Harte Middle School. This fully staffed center offers a safe place for teenagers to make friends and have fun. It is open extended hours all summer and offers reasonably priced field trips and many other activities. The grand opening was the culmination of many years of work and perseverance by our council member **Pat Dando**, and serves as a model of public/private partnerships sure to be replicated in other parts of San Jose. If you have teenagers, I highly recommend you check it out.

You've probably noticed the palm trees along Chynoweth Avenue were pruned this month. Thanks to **Dave Fadness** for the many hours of volunteer work that keeps them looking great. Also thanks to **Joshua Howard** in Pat Dando's office who arranges to have the trimmings picked up.

In early June, another big issue suddenly hit our radar screen... the **Oakridge Mall** expansion. VEP received just slightly more than one week's notice of a Planning Commission hearing for significant changes to Westfield's previously approved expansion plans. We met with Westfield about a week before the hearing, and finally received the written documentation we needed to assess community impacts, particularly traffic, on a Saturday evening prior to a Wednesday hearing.

We distilled this information and wrote a five-page letter expressing our concerns and suggestions and requesting a deferral of the planning hearing. (This letter is posted on our website.) A deferral was denied, and the Planning Commission approved the project. It is scheduled to go to City Council for approval on June 19th. (By the time you read this, it will probably have been approved.) VEP, Westfield, Westfield's traffic consultant, and the city planning and public works departments will work together beginning in July to make sure the traffic designs best meet the needs of our community as well as the project.

VEP remains quite active during the summer even though we don't have regularly scheduled general meetings in June, July and August, or publish a newsletter in July and August. This summer we expect major developments on the Vista Park and Oakridge fronts. In addition, the executive board will establish goals for 2001-2002 (for approval by the membership in September), and update everything needed to complete our recent name change to **VEP Community Association**. A new committee will review our annual community service award policy and suggest changes to the membership next fall. Our **Hospitality Committee** (formerly called the Welcoming Committee), led by **Katherine Decker**, plans to re-energize this summer as well.

Over the summer, our primary means of communication with you is via email. If you want to be kept informed of major developments as they occur, please make sure we

have your current email address. Send your email address to me at **DNoel1234@aol.com** and I'll make sure you get on our email list. Just as with our phone and mailing lists, our email list is only used for official VEP business and is not shared with anyone outside of the VEP executive committee.

Have a great summer. I look forward to seeing you in September.

In closing, I'd like to dedicate this issue of the VEP News to my grandmother, **Alice Noel**, who lived at the Atrium and passed away yesterday. Memere, I miss you and I'll always love you.

Seeds of Success

-Kalane McDonald

Can you make a difference in the life of a young person? Could you provide a sense of optimism and direction to youth who see only closed doors ahead? Would you enjoy the satisfaction of watching a high school student succeed and go on to college?

If you responded affirmatively, we need you to become involved in the newly formed Mentor Program for ninth grade students at Gunderson High School. A mentor is defined as a wise and loyal advisor, teacher and coach, who is there during a crucial period and makes the difference between achievement and settling for less.

As one facet of the Gear-Up project, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, we are seeking interested adult members of the community to become involved in this new mentor program this fall. Training sessions and discussion groups will provide mentors with effective strategies and activities to engage students. Mentors will work in pairs with about ten students, meeting with them once a month during the school day.

If you belong to an organization or church that encourages community involvement, perhaps you can help us to find potential mentors. I encourage you to contact me directly to learn more about this opportunity to sow the seeds of success for the youth of our community.

[Ed. Note: Kalane McDonald can be reached by calling Gunderson High School at 535-6340 or by e-mail at sfkalane@msn.com]

Graffiti

If you are a victim of and/or want to report graffiti in our neighborhoods, call the graffiti hotline @ 277-2758. To become an anti-graffiti volunteer, call the City of San Jose's anti-graffiti director, **Rob Boyles** at 277-3208.

Computer corner

-Bob Aquino, VEP's Computer Guru

Well, it finally happened! Your pride and joy has just graduated from high school. College, watch out! You've selected the school, the major (maybe), and the dorm (if

available). All that remains to be done is to find the money to fund all of this and to get the essential equipment for a college student--a car (possibly), a stereo, and a computer (this list is arranged in order of importance). As a veteran of the college wars, I'd advise against the first and not venture an opinion on the second, but I might be able to help on the third.

I'll assume that the plan is to buy a computer system rather than assemble components. Computers are a little like cars, in that they come in various models, with upgrade options. They also come with software packages that may or may not suit the student's needs. You need to look at the *entire* cost of a system.

First of all, a lot depends on the student's major. In technical majors, the school may prescribe a model and software. If not, for the techno geek student, I'd recommend a more high-end system, perhaps a 1GHz machine with 256 MB of memory. For a students in the arts, a 750 MHz machine with 128MB of RAM should be able to carry them through to graduation.

Hard drives are cheap, so you ought to go with the biggest available. It's difficult to tell what major would consume more disk space. For instance, an art history major might have massive storage requirements because of the need to store works of art, while a computer science major might have very modest requirements because he has a big disk space allocation on the school network.

A word of warning about graphics cards. Any card that the system is equipped with will be fine. In general, graphic card upgrades are for gamers and solid modeling CAD users, not most students.

If the system doesn't have one, you might want to check if the student needs a network card to attach to the school network. They run between \$15 and \$40. A modem is nice but usually not necessary.

Don't go above 17" for a monitor. The bigger ones are too bulky for a small space. Flat panel displays are nice but pricey. I always advise against laptops for students. They're an invitation to theft or loss. If the student needs a printer (probably not) there are lots of inexpensive ink jets out there.

In terms of software, make sure that you have equipped the computer with a word processor, a calendar/date book software, a spreadsheet, and probably a presentation package. You don't have to go the MS Office to get those features. There are less expensive programs out there.

That's the list. Good luck to you both!

Lester property needs ***your*** help!

-Dave Fadness (*)

Approximately 300-acres of land in the middle of our city is currently under siege. Zoned for Open Space in both the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County's General Plans, that land is Walter Cottle Lester's *Cottle Ranch*. Mr. Lester has for many years been trying to donate this land to the people of our county for a park. Now facing an enormous

hit in inheritance taxes, Lester may have to sell 90-acres just to pay the taxman.

Our area is generally deficient in park acreage, especially the kind of larger regional park his land would provide. In the face of this need for recreational and open space land, our surrounding community of more than 2000 homes is unanimously in favor of Mr. Lester's proposed park. Moreover, he has recently negotiated the donation of more than ten acres of his land to the city for long-planned widening of two major streets (Branham lane and Snell Avenue) that serve our area. That land alone is worth at least ten million dollars.

Mr. Lester's sister died about a year ago. As 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 more than 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 will surely be lost forever to urban development. This could mean the end of our shared 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.

Fortunately, our congressional delegation is attempting to come to his rescue. Introduced by Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren and supported by Mike Honda, Pete Stark, Sam Farr, and Anna Eshoo, if enacted, **HR1486** will allow an estate tax deduction for qualified conservation contributions by heirs of an estate. Passage of this bill would mean that Mr. Lester would be forgiven his estate tax liability in exchange for donation of his land to the public; it would, in effect, allow his open-space property to remain whole for the enjoyment of future generations in San Jose.

Unfortunately, this crucial bill is now hung up in the House Ways & Means Committee. We need the help of other citizens in writing to Ways & Means Chairman Bill Thomas (2208 Rayburn Building, Washington, D.C. 20515), asking that immediate action be taken to assure passage of HR1486.

I think Mr. Lester and others like him should be fairly credited for any donation of land they are willing to make to the public. There is almost no land available in our city for parks today—at any price. As such, Mr. Lester's philanthropy is especially appreciated and must be taken advantage of. Please lend your immediate support to HR1486 so that his gifts of land to the public may be credited against his tax debt.

[() Ed. Note: This article appeared as a letter to the editor in the Saturday, June 2nd San Jose Mercury-News.]*

Redistricting hearings upcoming in August

-Dave Fadness

A Redistricting Commission comprised of ordinary citizens of San Jose has forwarded a recommendation for redrawn district boundaries to the City Council. Reflecting statistics from the 2000 Census, their new map makes adjustments that will have our ten council districts equal in population

within $\pm 5\%$. San Jose's total year 2000 population was set at 894,943 by the federal count.

District 10, which includes VEP, experienced relatively minor changes. Unfortunately, we lost to District 9 our colleagues in the Pinehurst and Thousand Oaks areas, west of Route 87 and north of Branham Lane. These and other boundary changes as well as related population and ethnicity statistics may be reviewed on the city's website, www.ci.san-jose.ca.us.

Pursuant to final adoption of the Commission's recommendations, two public hearings have been tentatively set by the City Council for the evenings of August 14 and August 21, 2001. If you are interested in attending one of these hearings, please be sure to call first to confirm time and place. You can check with the City Clerk @ 277-4424 or with Councilwoman Pat Dando @ 277-5251. Council agendas are also listed on the website given above.

I represented District 10 on the Redistricting Commission. Call me @ 578-6428 if you have specific questions relating to the redistricting process—or—would like to see the new district map and statistics but don't have access to the internet.

Counselors Needed

-Donna Marks

The American International Youth Foreign Exchange program, headquartered in Tiburon, CA is calling for workers interested in counseling families on visiting foreign students, or counseling families wishing to send a child overseas.

I provide training for this counseling work by telephone or in person. If you're interested, call me at 629-6433.

Be a NEWS contributor!

-Dave Fadness, Editor

Yes, *you* can be a news reporter! Think of it, *your* by-line on the front page of the VEP NEWS!

All you have to do is write a few lines (more if you'd like) about something that happened or is happening in our neighborhoods. It could be a story about something good or something bad. It could be about a play, sporting event, or fundraiser at your kid's school. It could be a story about something nice you saw someone do in our community. It could be about an idea you have to improve traffic or your nearby park. Or, it could be a warning to your neighbors about criminal activity.

Take a look at the front page of this edition, for example. **Joyce Chesnos** did an article on automobile break-ins that happened on her street last month. I'm willing to bet that Joyce didn't even know she was a NEWS contributor—she wrote us an email to alert our members about criminal activity; we turned it into an article.

Send your articles to me via the email address shown on the mailing page of this newsletter—or, call me if you're not online. Don't worry about spelling, etc. I'd be happy

just to get a rough outline from you that we could work on together to make into a story.

Give it a try. This could be your first step toward a Pulitzer Prize!

Gardening

-John Marks

Most children love playing in the dirt and watching things grow, ingredients that help make gardening with your kids a rewarding experience. To pass along the pleasures of gardening, start when the kids are young and curious.

Preschoolers aren't too young to have fun and grow plants successfully; in fact they think dirt turns into something magical as soon as you add water!

Give your children their own small garden plot. This provides a sense of ownership without overwhelming them. And, rather than assigning repetitive chores, expose your kids to the whole process--preparing the soil, planting, maintenance and harvesting.

A neat way to start is to plant some green beans in an egg carton and set indoors on the windowsill; then when they sprout, punch holes in the bottom and plant outside. Suggest vegetables and flowers that grow quickly or dramatically. (This might even become a way to get them to EAT THEIR GREENS.) Radishes, beans, cucumbers and pumpkins meet these criteria, as do marigolds, snapdragons, sunflowers and zinnias. Then let the kids make the final decisions.

Offer enough instruction and guidance without imposing heroic expectations. So what if rows aren't straight and radishes are eaten before they make it to the kitchen?

Finally, focus on process, not yield. Even a single radish is cherished by children if they grow it themselves. (AND THEY MIGHT EVEN EAT THE GREENS!)

Visit the following web sites for more information on children and gardening:

Kindergarten

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarten/kinder.htm>.

This site focuses on ways children can interact with plants and the outdoors. It provides information, resources and links, as well as an activity page for kids.

Kids & Classrooms

<http://www2.garden.org/nga/edu/home.html>.

This is the National Gardening Associations forum for adults interested in using gardening to enrich kids' lives.

Barbecue Ash Warning

Charcoal ashes from your barbecue briquettes should not be used in the garden! Plant roots, stems, leaves and fruit take up residues from coal, sulfur and heavy metal--particularly lead and cadmium.

WWW.seedsofchange.com is an on-line source for 100 percent organic seeds. Seeds of Change is based in Santa Fe, NM and offers seeds for flowers, herbs, vegetables and gourmet greens. Its claim to fame involves the numerous seed offerings that have their roots in American Indian Garden. All seeds are open-pollinated and chemical-free.

Rose Care Guide

Need to know how to grow roses in pots? How to go about picking them, fertilizing them, watering them, mulching, and pruning? You can learn all about that from The Silicon Valley Rose Care Quick Reference Guide, a new publication of the Santa Clara County Rose Society. It is available from Bob Bergthold, 15082 Lynn Ave, Los Gatos, 95032; phone 356-8560.

Also contained in the guide are ways of identifying rose diseases, advice on disease controls and preventatives, treatments and controls for pests.

The classic bouquet of long-stem roses will never go out of style. But a new trend is to arrange them in a bowl. Lush roses in full bloom, stems trimmed, packed into a small teacup or low decorative bowl is great for small parties, a dinner table, or a touch for a fine piece of furniture or atop the piano.

Tomato Summer Care

Although summer is when you are doing other things, like going to ball games, beer parties, swimming, watching stock car races, going to weddings, and traveling, don't abandon your vegetable garden. Remember, woolly worm and creepy crawler are waiting for the radishes and tomatoes to ripen.

Tomatoes are America's most popular home garden crop. (Corn is second.) If you are bathing your garden from time to time, you shouldn't have to buy anything to ward off bugs. But if the Tomato Horn Borer--that big, fat, ugly green worm--shows up, use a broad-spectrum insecticide. It will handle the borer and any other insect bumming around your garden.

When planting tomatoes, be sure to plant them deep, with the bottom row of leaves flush with the ground, assuring a longer rooting source. Tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and the vine crops can't compete with weeds. So apply any of the chemical garden weeders that are available.

Another method is to plant through holes in sheets of black plastic or plastic cleaning bags or garbage bags. You can also use shredded newspapers, grass clippings, or wood chips as mulch.

Fertilizer your tomatoes a "little bit, lots of times," as opposed to "lots of food, one time." The same goes for the rest of your vegetable garden. Keep your eyes peeled for sick plants. Blossom-end rot will most likely be the big problem. This is when the blossom end of the forming tomatoes turns gray, then black. This is caused by poor distribution of moisture in hot, dry weather. It can be controlled by spraying with a solution of tablespoon of calcium chloride to a gallon of water.

Also, avoid sick tomatoes by washing your hands before

you work in the garden, particularly if you are a smoker because tomatoes are susceptible to diseases transported through tobacco smoke. (Maybe a better solution would be to stop smoking!)

You can also get more tomatoes per plant by spraying with a tomato-set spray available from the nursery. Don't water vegetables from the top; water from below and water deep.

Now let's talk about pruning and suckering. Tomato plants can be pruned by pinching the tops out in the summer. This keeps them short and bushy after they have formed most of their fruit. The suckers are those freeloading rascals around the base of the stem that eat a lot but don't produce any fruit. Pinch them off where you can, and don't be afraid to take them off quite high on the plant, leaving just a few strong ladder branches to bear fruit.

Tip of the Month

A good way to liven up silk flower arrangements is to add some fresh stems into the mix. Put the fresh flowers in water picks and insert those into floral foam. Floral picks will hold enough water to keep fresh flowers fresh for only a few days, so be sure to check them and add more water if necessary.

Summer energy tips for seniors

Energy needs of senior citizens and shut-ins are often more critical than those of other consumers, especially during summer and early fall months when temperatures can rise dramatically. PG&E has a check list of daily and monthly summer tips to help these valued customers stay comfortable and keep gas and electric costs down.

PG&E recommends that seniors consider the following on a daily basis:

- Health permitting, keep the thermostat at 78° or above;
- Turn off or raise air conditioning to a warmer temperature when away from the home;
- Close curtains, draperies or shades when possible to block the sun's rays;
- Use room fans to increase comfort;
- Avoid cooking, baking, and other indoor heat-producing activities on hot days. Run appliances or bake earlier in the morning when it is cooler;
- Ventilate the house in the evenings or early morning when it is cooler outside than inside.
- Consider using fluorescent lighting where possible because it costs one fourth as much to operate, and generates considerably less heat than incandescent bulbs.

PG&E recommends the following on a monthly basis:

- Change or clean air conditioning unit filters;
- Clear weeds and other debris away from the outside condensing unit.

Additionally, seniors may want to consider using surge protectors or power strips in the home. These affordable devices can be purchased at most electronic stores to augment wall outlets and to guard against electricity fluctuations. This increases energy reliability in the home.

Power strips can be used for any electrical device. Seniors

who opt for in-home medical care can use power strips to help ensure the reliability of home health care devices. Look for the UL 1449 rating, or better.

For more information about PG&E, please visit our web site at www.pge.com.

[Ed. Note: The foregoing article was submitted by PG&E for use in our newsletter.]

Home Generators

-John Marks

You've probably thought of buying a handy little generator at Orchard Supply or Home Depot and hooking it up when needed during a blackout this summer. Of course, you can save your freezer and refrigerator by just running an extension cord to the generator, and not fool with powering the whole house.

But connecting a generator through the watt-hour meter outside the house is not so easy. You run the risk of back feeding power to the utility and of several other safety problems.

There is a solution, however, in the form of an automatic transfer switch, which upon loss of utility power, disconnects your house from the utility, starts your home generator, and feeds into your house; it disconnects automatically when normal utility power is restored, and shuts down your home generator.

Approximate Cost: \$2,600 for a 12-kW generator, and up to \$1,900 for installation by Home Depot. Both the generator and transfer switch are available for much less from a local electrician, Mustafa Electric, a VEP member. His number is 224-9220. Good luck!

Bulletin Board Ads

PLAYGROUP MEMBERS WANTED: Looking for families in the Vistapark area who are interested in starting a playgroup for 2- to 3-year old children. Call Lori @ 226-8747.

GOING ON VACATION? Responsible, experienced 12-year old is available for pet, house, and yard care. Call Matt @ 225-5878.

MR. FIX-IT will repair leaks, sticking doors, locks, latches, lights, and life's little ills. No job is too small. Call John Marks @ 629-6433.

Affordable Tree and Landscape

Yard Clean-Up, Sprinklers, Etc.

Call Moises, a VEP Member

(408) 224-2243 or (408) 690-2460

* * *

VEP will print free ads for its members for transactions involving less than \$250, for lost-and-found, for announcements of general interest to our community, and for kids

under 18 or retirees who are looking for work. Free ads must be submitted monthly for publication.

Commercial ads cost \$1.00 per line per month, 10 lines maximum, must be prepaid before publication, and may only be run once per calendar quarter. Commercial ads must be submitted quarterly. No graphics allowed. For information on full-sized ads with graphics (camera ready), contact VEP'S Treasurer listed on the mailing page of this newsletter.

One line contains 50 characters, including spaces. Mail to VEP, P.O. Box 18111, San Jose, 95158. Ads must be received no later than the 10th of the month for inclusion in that month's newsletter. Use the following form as a guide for submitting an ad:

NAME: _____

PHONE # _____

AD WORDING: _____

The VEP Executive Board reserves exclusive right to refuse any ad for any reason. VEP does not certify nor is it responsible in any way for the claims, goods, or services of any advertisers.

Home Improvement Web sites

-John Marks

The most valuable tool during a yard or home project isn't a hammer, lawn mower or shovel. It's a brochure. Manufacturer's brochures are what homeowners need when they're trying to decide on what kind of fixtures, skylights, decks or plants to get. (Of course, these were easy to pick up at VEP's annual Home Improvement Faire, held in May each year.)

Literature from all types of manufacturers is available at www.homeideas.com. Among the categories are lawn and garden, patio and decking, sunrooms, appliances and building materials.

In addition to this extensive database of free brochures, this site features a listing of on-line merchants, a new product showcase, a directory of professional services, a user forum and a collection links to mfg. web sites.