



sl City News

YOUR COMMUNITY IN YOUR HANDS

Shall We Dance?
JumpBrush Dance Festival sprang into action at Cal Poly. More photos by Christopher Gardner on page 32.



Measure H Sparks Local Contention

By Camas Frank

As many of the ballot measures proposed under California's citizen ballot initiative process are prone to do, Measure H on the November ballot is court-ing controversy. With a recently successful signature drive and petition, the measure's backers have reopened what many had thought was a finally closed debate on the extension of Prado Road and the future of community planning in the City of San Luis Obispo. Driven by two local teachers and a park ranger (according to the ballot statement paperwork), the measure calls for the planned extension to terminate near the Damon-Garcia Sports fields rather than

take the course that City Planners have worked out over an eight year period. "The Council is elected to make these decisions; it's our job," Mayor Dave Romero said. "We're already carrying out the will of the voters." With the City Council in unanimous opposition to the measure, Romero and Councilmember Allen Settle were called on to draft the rebuttal argument for the ballot supplement. Among the official arguments, Romero also commented, "This is also just very late in the process. We're talking about undoing years and years of work in one step," he added. "I'm not sure what else we could do safely as an alternative at

this point." None of the Measure H proponents returned calls asking for comment as of press time. However, in their supporting statement, local residents Bill Wilson, Michael C. Sullivan and Mila Vujovich-LaBarre argue that with the measure, voters will have the opportunity to "preserve four acres of land for recreation and safeguard the open, natural connection between the South Hills Open Space and the popular Damon-Garcia Sports Fields." In their bullet summary of other benefits they suggest that the city will then have the chance to explore other routes for traffic. However, Romero asserts,

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Sweat Equity Pays Off

By Jack Beardwood

More than 5,000 low and moderate income people on the Central Coast will be sleeping in beds tonight provided by People's Self Help Housing. After building their first project in Los Osos in 1971, the group has built almost 1,400 "affordable" rental units and helped local residents build more than 1,100 "sweat equity" homes. According to Jeannette Duncan, executive director, members of a Methodist Church in San Luis Obispo loaned them \$2,000 interest free for their first project. Eight families built homes. The organization has gone on to build apartment projects and help people build in every community

in San Luis Obispo County. "We were willing to take chances, to have people loan us money and buy lots and put financing together," said Duncan, who was on the original board of directors and has been the executive director for 33 years. "They were willing to take that extra step to try to provide more housing for folks. "We've had wonderful board members who were willing to give a lot of extra time. They don't get paid. They have been willing to go to city council meetings. They have been willing to sit down with a banker and me. I think we also have wonderful staff. They are all mission driven. They love helping people." Their sweat equity program guides people through the process of building their

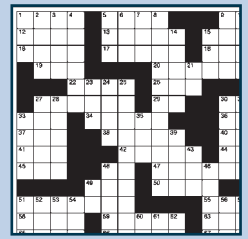
own home. "We buy the land, get the lots ready to build on, and then we help the families get financing to pay for the lot and all the building materials and the permits," Duncan said. A construction supervisor helps 10 families build their homes on weekends. "They learn how to dig a foundation, how to frame, how to put a roof on. They work together and after 12 months they have a new home." People's Self Help Housing, which also serves Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, does a lot more than help people build their own homes and help place low and moderate income people in apartment housing. They help residents of their senior housing

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complexes remain as independent as possible. On-site staff helps with items like getting them to a doctor appointment or filling out paperwork for insurance. "A social worker does an assessment of each person's needs," she said. "If they have a hard time getting around, they help arrange for assistance."

The group has employees who work to assist veterans and help the homeless find permanent housing.

"In the last six or seven years we've had more and more requests from Social Services agencies to help house some of the people that they serve that have become homeless," Duncan said. "The recession has hurt everybody. As a result, our social workers have had to be involved up front in working with whoever is applying, assessing their needs. In some cases, if they've been on the street — let's say it's a Vietnam vet who has been homeless — he may have lots of issues. He may have mental issues. He may have physical issues. It could be post-traumatic stress issues. We have some gulf war vets, too. Our social workers work with them to get them stable, get them into our housing and support them to make sure they can keep their housing."

As they started building housing for families, particularly farm worker families, they discovered the need to provide after-school education for their children. "We found out their parents had little or no education and couldn't help their kids with homework. As a result of that, we started our youth education enhancement program. They get a

snack and help with homework after school and teachers attend every parent-teacher conference with families."

People's Self Help Housing also has some housing for developmentally disabled persons, including one on Brizzolara Street in San Luis Obispo that is home for about a dozen people.

The organization also provides home ownership education on matters like how to improve your credit. "Unfortunately, in the last four or five years we've also had to start foreclosure prevention counseling," Duncan said. "We are working with a lot of folks to not have them lose their homes. We're trying to get loan modifications. Daily we get the phone ringing of someone who got one of these loans where the interest rate was low and now it's gone up or maybe it's a loan they shouldn't have taken in the first place."

A foreclosure prevention specialist works with their lender to get loans modified so they can save their house. "We've had a lot of that, unfortunately. They are here all the time. People are desperate."

People's Self Help Housing will be celebrating its 40th anniversary with events at the Rubin Estate in Santa Barbara (Oct. 3), Edwards Barn in Nipomo (Oct. 23) and at the Niner Winery in Paso Robles (Nov. 6).

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