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# OJAI VALLEY NEWS

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## On the trail of a killer

Ojai man uncovers evidence of serial rapist and murderer

Misty Volaski  
 misty@ojaivalleynews.com

It's been almost 27 years, but Russ Whitmeyer is seeing this thing through to the end. Along with his wife, Leta, Ojai's Whitmeyer has dedicated himself to finding the man who is responsible for what he claims is the largest unsolved serial murder and rape case in California history: 13 brutal murders and 55 rapes committed between 1976 and 1986. DNA and forensic work now shows these crimes are all linked to the same man, Whitmeyer said.

The Whitmeyers don't know the killer's name, how old he is, what he looks like, or even whether he's still alive, but they're offering up to \$250,000 in reward money for information that links the suspect's DNA to the cases. They're hoping to find someone who will help fund the reward in exchange for movie and book rights.

"But if no one's willing to help me," Whitmeyer said, "I'll refinance my house to pay the money."

His dedication to the case began in 1980, four years after he'd retired as a detective with the Ventura County Sheriff's Department and started his own private investigation company. He was called in to work the case of Lyman and Charlene Smith, who were murdered in their Ventura hills home as they lay in bed. Although Whitmeyer had an emotional attachment to the case — he'd gone to Camarillo High School with Charlene — he began to work as a private investigator for the defense.

"Joe Alsip (a former business partner of Lyman's)

Please see Whitmeyer, Page A-3

## Founder's Dais

Jack Fay, attorney and former Ojai City council person, spoke to the Retired Businessmen's Club on Wednesday at Soule Park about his role as legal counsel in the founding of the world's largest nonprofit organization, the American Association of Retired Persons, by Dr. Percy Ethel Andrus over dinner at the Ojai Valley Inn in 1958.

Andrus, California's first female school principal, ran The Grey Gables, now The Gables of Ojai, as a home for retired teachers and founded the organization as a way to provide health insurance for retired teachers. In those pre-Medicare years, health insurance was virtually unavailable for retirees. The organization was housed at the Grey Gables until it reached 400,000 members, in about 1963, when its headquarters were moved to Long Beach. AARP now has 35 million members.



Photo by Rob Clement

## Casitas seeks new chief, affirms that hydrants work

Board sets special meeting Friday to begin search

Sondra Murphy  
 sondra@ojaivalleynews.com

With general manager John Johnson retiring March 1, Casitas Municipal Water District board members are determining the course for finding his replacement and will hold a special meeting on Friday to begin the process. In their regular meeting on Wednesday, the board met to discuss other business.

After reading about the malfunctioning hydrants at Friday's Buena Vista Street fire, President Russ Baggerly looked into the situation. "The one that worked belonged to us, not the malfunctioning ones. Golden State (Water Co.) has some explaining to do," Baggerly said.

Regarding a letter from the

board to Ojai Quarry, director Richard Handley suggested an addition to sediment concerns. "In the north fork of Matilija Creek, there is a large boulder blocking fish passage. I would like to make it clear that we are in favor of removing that boulder." The directors agreed to add the request to the letter.

The former Barber Ford facility has electric cars needing to be disposed of. Director Bill Hicks wanted to obtain them for the water district and either repair them or use them for parts. The board agreed to try to obtain the "Thinks."

Resolutions of appreciation to Chuck Bennett, Dwight Clements and Merl Meach were approved. Clements and Meach each worked for CMWD for 35 years. "I

Please see Casitas, Page A-3

## County seeks 450 housing units from Ojai

Plan for 2014 conflicts with city's growth plan, which allows for 16 units per year

Nao Braverman  
 nao@ojaivalleynews.com

The city of Ojai, proud of its "small-town" atmosphere, with many residents highly against growth, is now required to allow for the construction of 450 new housing units by 2014. Some of those are to be specified as affordable housing. The exact breakdown depends on the results of an income analysis by the Southern California Association of Governments which will determine the number of affordable housing units required, based on Southern California's population growth and housing needs.

Unfortunately that number doesn't exactly coincide with Ojai's Growth Management Plan which allows for a maximum of 16 new housing units a year, and

none of them higher than 35 feet (essentially two stories). What became clear at Tuesday night's council meeting, was that although local residents have expressed a disdain for franchises and tract homes, they are not necessarily against density anymore. If the price for creating affordable housing is increasing the density a little, there are plenty of residents who will support that, as long as it is done tastefully.

"High density is a key factor so we are going to have to get over it and use it nicely," said Dulanie Ellis-LaBarre. "A garage conversion can be tastefully done without overloading the neighborhood. I would also suggest increasing our parameters on the height

Please see Housing, Page A-3

## Council, critics agree: no more gravel trucks

Council votes to oppose gravel mine plan

Nao Braverman  
 nao@ojaivalleynews.com

The Ojai City Council and its frequent critics finally found something they could agree on: no more gravel trucks coming through Ojai.

At Tuesday night's council meeting city planners presented a letter of comment to the Santa Barbara County Planning Department regarding the proposed Diamond Rock Sand and gravel mine in Cuyama Valley. The project's draft environmental impact report states that proposed mining will have an average of 118 daily truck trips and up to 164 trips at peak operation going north and south on scenic Highway 33.

Though city planners prepared a letter asking for a more concrete monitoring method that would

prohibit trucks from using the highway during restricted hours, the City Council and meeting attendants agreed that such a letter would have little effect.

Ojai resident Bob Walker told council members that he was already significantly impacted by the truck traffic from existing mines, the Ozena Valley Ranch and the GPS mine. Though trucks transporting gravel for Ozena had certain time restrictions they rarely followed them because of the lack of enforcement. Why, then would the new mine be expected to follow such regulations?

"I do not think enforcement is going to work so I would ask that we not ask for enforcement," said Council Member Steve Olsen. "I would ask that we just say no."

Please see Council, Page A-3



Photo by Rob Clement

Stop Sign  
 Jeff Otterbein holds aloft a sign Wednesday in front of the post office Thursday morning protesting President Bush's call Wednesday for 20,000 more troops to be sent to Iraq.

## Ojai Valley neighbors

Laignee Barron  
 laignee@ojaivalleynews.com

Ojai Creates! is a dream come true for the owner and manager John Azevedo. A Boston native, Azevedo grew up in the college town of Cambridge and later attended the nearby Northeastern, where he earned a B.S. in business. "The cool thing about Northeastern is that they had so many people doing co-op education, which means working for a few months and then doing school for a few months. It's great," he said.

One of those jobs brought Azevedo to Santa Barbara, where the winter climate surprised him. "I was on the beach in Santa Barbara in January, wearing shorts. I said, 'Someday I have to come back here,'" recalled Azevedo.

Azevedo didn't return to Southern California right away, however. After getting his business degree he took a job running the Massachusetts College art store. "It

was a funky college. The students were fun, the staff was fun, the professors were fun," he said.

For 13 years Azevedo enjoyed managing the college art store, but in 1989 Azevedo returned to California and began working for the U.C. Santa Barbara bookstore. "It was fun in the beginning, but it started to become more slick and corporate. That's part of why I left."

Fun is essential for the good-spirited Azevedo. His trademark laugh is an integral part of the business. "We spread fun. We want to make people feel good and enjoy being here," he affirmed. "Every day people thank me. I've never worked at a business where people show such appreciation."

Although Azevedo loves working at Ojai Creates!, he's ready for some time off. By the end of the year Azevedo hopes to go on a three-year sabbatical, traveling to places he loves: Peru, Scotland and Japan.

"There are two options. I'm either going to sell the place and travel, or fulfill my dream of



John Azevedo

making an Art City, which would be more of everything we have and expanding on the things we don't have, like classrooms, creative spaces, art spaces, a performance area and travel supplies. It's the store of my vision. Like a creative city," he explained. Azevedo has already looked into expanding at the old bowling alley or the Ford dealership, but found with the high cost of rent, he needs a partner in the venture. "I hope to find someone who shares my creative vision. If it happens, that would be wonderful. If not, I'll go to Plan B and the sabbatical," he said.

For more information on Azevedo and Ojai Creates! visit ojaicreates.com.

## News Briefs

**CORRECTION:** There was a mistake in the headline of the article about Ojai Art Center Theater's 2007 season preview on Page A8 of the Wednesday, Jan. 10, paper. The free preview is being held at the Art Center on Wednesday, Jan. 17, at 7 p.m.

**LVW TAKES UP GRAVEL MINE PROPOSAL:** The League of Women Voters' Ojai Unit will meet Saturday at 9:30 a. m. at the Ojai United Methodist Church, 120 Church Road. The first item under discussion will be the controversial Environmental Impact Review being conducted in Santa Barbara County.

The review relates to a proposal to mine and transport gravel, often across mountainous two-lane Highway 33 into the Ojai Valley. From there it passes Nordhoff High School and the "Y" before merging with Highway 150 and continuing as a two-lane road until it leaves the Ojai Valley to connect as a freeway to Highway 101 in Ventura. Also to be discussed is the California State League's upcoming program planning for the coming fall. Some league units are pushing for an education study. Is that what the Ojai unit wants? If not, what would you propose instead? The public is welcome. For more information, call 646-3905.

**HELP OF OJAI THANKS THOSE WHO LIT THE WAY:** Help of Ojai would like to thank those who donated toward lighting the Holiday Tree at



**Sports**  
 Villanova, Nordhoff cagers prepare for crosstown showdown.  
**Page B1**

**Arts**  
 Photos of Kenyon's polio eradication trip to India on show at coffee shop.  
**Page A10**

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# Whitmeyer:

(Continued from Page A-1)

had taken a polygraph before I was asked to work the case," Whitmeyer said. "He came out clean, truthful. I interviewed Alsip, and I didn't think he was guilty. So I was glad to work the case."

A priest had approached police and claimed that Alsip had confessed to him that he'd killed the couple. Whitmeyer's well-trained nose smelled something funny, so he sent nine investigators across the country to places where the priest had lived and preached. What they discovered would eventually set Alsip free: in each place he'd lived, the priest approached law enforcement and had offered to help them.

There were other suspects in the murders — Charlene's secret lover, another of Lyman's former business partners — but all trails ran cold.

Once all the cases were linked through DNA and method of operation — the killer rode a stolen bike to the scene of the crime, wore a mask, and brought lengths of precut cord — Whitmeyer started sniffing around Sacramento County to investigate the East Area rapes for a lead.

But he kept running into dead ends. A while back, Whitmeyer received a highly promising call from a couple in Rancho Cordova. In a crime chillingly similar to the Smith murders, a husband and wife heard their sliding glass door being opened as they lay in bed. The wife called police, who arrived quickly and were able to apprehend the intruder. On his person were a pistol, knife, a mask, and three and one-half feet of precut cord. That was in 1974.

**"I interviewed Alsip, and I didn't think he was guilty. So I was glad to work the case."**

— Russ Whitmeyer

Feeling a solid lead, Whitmeyer rushed north to check the Sacramento County records. What he found was heartbreaking: like so many other sheriff's departments, Sacramento County had long purged the records of that particular case. So again, the Whitmeyers were back at square one.

But Russ Whitmeyer isn't going to give up. "Period. From the very beginning it's been a goal I've set. I don't plan to give up until I identify this guy." So he's placing ads in local newspapers, tracing down leads, and is sending out 90,000 information packets to Sacramento County residents in a few weeks.

"He could be alive, he could be dead, he could be in jail," said Whitmeyer. "When the suspect was younger, he might've made more mistakes," perhaps telling someone or not being careful enough to cover up all tracks, explained Whitmeyer. That's why he's starting with Sacramento County. Those who have information can place a call to Whitmeyer anonymously and be assigned a code number, he added. "Someone knows something. I feel confident that the 90,000 mailers will result in the identification of this suspect."

# Council:

(Continued from Page A-1)

His comment was followed by a tempered applause.

Council Member Rae Hanstad echoed his perspective.

Council members agreed unanimously that the city planners should write a letter opposing the project, rather than just asking for further mitigations.

Hanstad added that the Casitas Municipal Water District would write an additional letter of comment if the council so desired.

Council Member Sue Horgan suggested that the city ask for support from other local organizations and from the county and state governments to help Ojai oppose the project proposal.

"Frankly I think the governor should be involved," she said. "because apparently he's a motorcyclist and he should appreciate scenic highways like ours."



Photo by Rob Clement

**A semi-trailer passes by students leaving Matilija Junior High School Thursday afternoon. If approved, a gravel mine operation in the Cuyama Valley could add another 69 truck trips a day through Ojai.**

# Housing:

(Continued from Page A-1)

ordinance."

Ojai's 450-unit allowance agreement comes from the Regional Housing Needs Assessment which requires Ventura County to allow for 28,481 total new housing units to be built. The proposed number is unrealistically high for a lot of cities in Ventura County, said Ojai city manager Jere Kersnar. However, the 28,481 number was determined by the Southern California Association of Governments, a six-county organization with which the small county of Ventura has little clout.

So the county accepted their 28,481 unit allocation, and divided the units among cities at a meeting of the Ventura County Organization of Governments. Ojai, a small city with little power, was forced to accept 450 of those units, said Kersnar.

The planning department is currently considering options on how to allow for those new units by 2016. A housing element which outlines the steps taken to make those accommodations is

due in July of 2008. Notably, while SCAG has come up with unrealistic housing allowance requirements in the past, Kersnar does not know of a time that Ojai has met them.

"The vast majority of the county's cities do not meet the RHNA targets," he said. "It's not at all unusual or surprising that Ojai doesn't. But we still are required to submit a plan."

Apparently if Ojai does not allow for the construction of those 450 units, there are no penalties or direct negative consequences to the city that he knows of. If property owners have difficulty getting proposals past the city, they can sue on the grounds that the city has not fulfilled certain building allowance requirements, said Kersnar. But that hasn't happened yet.

So, effectively, it is up to the city to decide whether it wants to implement affordable housing requirements, there is nothing at the state or county level requiring them to do so.

The RHNA also only specifies the number of new units allowed. It does not address the preservation of already existing affordable units.

Many frustrated residents have

marveled at the absurdity of tearing down affordable rentals to put in a new housing development on Mallory Way when the city repeatedly does not fulfill its affordable housing requirements. However, the RHNA does not address such details.

Kersnar agreed that dollars would be more effectively spent by preserving existing low-income rentals. He said that planners are looking into ways of getting credit for preserving the existing affordable housing stock. But that will take some time. Perhaps longer than it will take to preserve Mallory Way cottages, he said.

Part of the problem, he said, is that Mallory Way is not dense.

Kersnar's presentation at the council meeting pointed to supply and demand as the primary issue. The high demand for housing is what brings up the prices, he said.

However, Ojai's growth does not reflect such demand.

The total occupied dwelling units has only increased by 92 units since 2006. The current total is 3,180, which means that in six years the city's housing units have increased by a mere 2.8 percent, according to the

State Department of Finance.

During the comment period at Tuesday's council meeting, many residents expressed interest in increasing affordable housing stock using more creative methods such as garage conversions and "co-housing."

Though Ojai residents have converted garage and storage space into dwelling units, many have not been reported because they may not comply with certain building requirements. Mayor Carol Smith suggested that the city aid in adding the required construction to make those spaces legal dwellings, and thus adding them to the stock of new units in the city, without increasing density.

"Cohousing," homes, which include communal kitchens and dining rooms, are also minimum density affordable housing options proposed by a number of council attendants.

While public speakers reiterated the need for more affordable housing, Smith pleaded that they keep their comments brief and asked to table the topic of chain stores in Ojai until the next meeting.

"I have a 13-hour workday tomorrow," she told attendants.

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**"We are lucky to have people like that working for us."**

— Russ Baggerly

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Casitas:

(Continued from Page A-1)

don't know how we can show appreciation for adults who have spent half their lives working for this district," Baggerly said. "We are lucky to have people like that working for us."

The district expects to receive a report soon from consultants MWH America Inc., who inspected the fish screen in December. The report is to include recommendations for improved fish passage for steelhead trout.

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