



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Jan. 22, 29

Louise Koch dressage clinics

Info: 310-377-3507

Portuguese Bend Riding Club

Jan. 27

RHE Equestrian Committee

meeting

RHE city hall

Feb. 20

PVPHA general meeting

Empty Saddle Club

Events listed here are not necessarily sponsored or endorsed by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen's Association. To add an event, send the information to pvpha2010@gmail.com.

Volunteer Trail Watch off to a good start

Program designed to collect data, raise awareness.

by **MELODY COLBERT**
CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

The new Volunteer Trail Watch program got off to a great start in September 2013. More than 20 volunteers completed the training program, and each volunteer is now monitoring the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve for a minimum of four hours per month.

The purpose of the program is to gather observational data about how the 11 different reserve areas are being used. Volunteers also provide interpretive services.

This means helping visitors to the preserve get the most out of their experience by answering questions; providing information about trails and their usage; helping those who are lost, injured, or in some other way in need of help; and advising visitors about preserve rules, which are posted at the trail head for each reserve, when needed.

Volunteers are encouraged to become familiar with the trails in each reserve so they can give guidance to visitors who may become lost or who perhaps just forgot how to get back to their car. Maps are available at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center

and also online at pvplc.org/_lands/pvnp.asp.

There is an online calendar where VTW members can schedule their hours, and a special online portal to upload data and observations from each "watch."

Quarterly group meetings are planned. The first one was held in November. Volunteers heard about data collected and discussed how to improve the program's effectiveness.

The information gathered by VTW members is used by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority rangers to determine where increased patrol may be needed and where volunteer efforts should be concentrated.

If you are interested in getting involved in this volunteer group, there is an opportunity to participate in this year's training and become a VTW volunteer.

The dates for the three mandatory training sessions are on Saturdays in 2014: Feb. 22, March 15, and March 29. All sessions begin at 8 a.m. and last until noon. For more information and to request an application, contact volunteer coordinator Barbara Ailor at barbailor@gmail.com. U



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THE SEAHORSE SAGA:

by **NICOLE MOORADIAN**
DISPATCH EDITOR

The property housing Seahorse Riding Club, a local landmark in Rolling Hills Estates, is nearly a year into a 24-month escrow with the Oxbow Corporation, which intends to build a senior housing facility on the land, according to Devon Gibson, the stables' head trainer.

Under Oxbow's plan, the property would be rezoned from a Commercial Recreational designation to High Density Residential, and the equestrian facility would be relocated to a Los Angeles County-owned parcel between

the existing Seahorse Riding Club and the Peter Weber Equestrian Center.

"The developers have the feeling that members of the RHE City Council are not opposed to this development but know that the community is a huge part of whether or not changes will be allowed for the rezoning of the property," Gibson wrote in December in an email to the equestrian community.

A letter from Thomas Grabiell of Oxbow Partners that was circulated among members of the equestrian community indicates that the developers believe that the Seahorse site is ideal for a senior living facility.

"We know that there is an aging population that would prefer to stay on the peninsula when they reach the stage of life where they need assistance and I know we would develop a first-class facility," Grabiell wrote. "It is more than just a good location—we truly seek out sites that are equestrian-oriented as we use equine therapy as one of the modalities of treatment at our facility."

The project has been the subject of controversy over the past year, with some accusing Oxbow of going behind the community's—and the city's—back with its plans. In October, RHE City Manager Doug Prichard sent a letter to Grabiell asking the developer to submit a formal application or abandon the proposal.

"Your independent efforts to gain community support for Oxbow's proposal to convert the Seahorse Riding Club property into a senior assisted-living facility are causing undue concern and anguish among our residents," Prichard wrote. "While this may not have been your intent, it is nonetheless the case."

Prichard also wrote that he had "expressed ... deep res-

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Developers seek to relocate riding center, build senior living facility on Seahorse property

ervations about (the proposal).”

“It seems that your response to that meeting has been to try to garner support from the equestrian community by relocating Seahorse Riding Club to an adjacent property,” Prichard wrote. “This completely ignores other crucial issues at hand, such as conformity with the General Plan and current zoning, which my staff has made abundantly clear to you.”

A community meeting about the project was originally scheduled for the beginning of January; however, it was canceled by the developers on short notice. It does not appear to have been rescheduled.

The following correspondence from Gibson, community member Cindy Savitt and Grabiell was previously shared with members of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen’s Association.

Letter from Devon Gibson

Hi there,

My name is Devon Gibson, and I am the head trainer

at Seahorse Riding Club on Crenshaw Boulevard located just behind the Rolling Hills Estates City Hall.

I’m not quite sure if you are aware of this, but the Seahorse Riding Club property has 13 months left on a 24-month escrow to get it rezoned from its existing Commercial Recreational Zoning to High Density Zoning so that Oxbow Corporation/The Freshwater Group can put an “equine themed” senior housing facility on the property and relocate Seahorse Riding Club to a piece of land between the existing Seahorse Riding Club facility and the Peter Weber Equestrian Center. This piece of land is owned by the county of Los Angeles but under city of Rolling Hills Estates jurisdiction (per city representatives)...

The developers have the feeling that members of the RHE City Council are not opposed to this development but know that the community is a huge part of whether or not changes will be allowed for the rezoning of the property and necessary changes to the City’s Master Plan.

I myself am involved because it directly affects my live-

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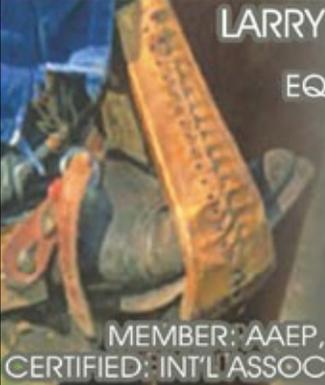
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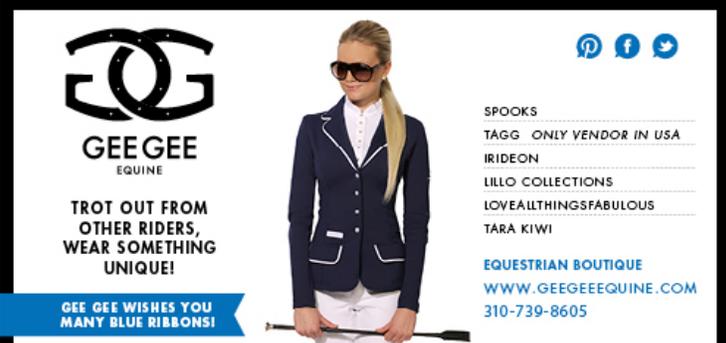


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Continued from the previous page.

likelihood. If in fact the rezoning occurs, I will lose my place of business with no place to relocate over 40 horses locally or continue to run my operation unless a new facility is built. If the rezoning does not happen, then nothing changes with Seahorse Riding Club, and it continues on as is.

So I am helping the developers get the word out about the meeting and get input from the equestrians and residents of RHE about this situation.

If you would like to email the developers directly, email Thomas Grabiell at tgrabiel@oxbow-partners.com.

I strongly suggest you copy the RHE City Manager and any or all of the RHE City Council members as well:

- Doug Prichard, city manager:
dougpr@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Judy Mitchell, mayor:
JudyM@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- John Addleman, mayor pro tem:
JohnA@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Steven Zuckerman, council member:
SteveZ@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Frank Zerunyan, council member:
FrankZ@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Brit Huff, council member:
BritH@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us

Thanks so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Devon Gibson

Miraleste Farms LLC at Seahorse Riding Club

Cindy Savitt's letter to Oxbow Partners

Dear Mr. Grabiell:

I am writing regarding the proposed construction of a retirement/assisted living facility on the property now occupied by Seahorse Riding Club in the city of Rolling Hills Estates, Calif.

I am not a resident of that city nor a client or employee of Seahorse Riding Club, but having had a horse in training there for two years and having been a boarder at the adjacent public stables for 15 years, I have some familiarity and knowledge of SRC and the local equestrian community.

The closure of SRC, while having an immediate negative impact on the owners, clients and staff, would also be a huge blow to the entire Peninsula horse community. The lack of available land combined with high real estate values makes the probability of any future equestrian centers being built close to zero; therefore, it is imperative that every effort be made to preserve and maintain whatever horse facilities are currently in operation.

Seahorse Riding Club is the only full-service training facility in the area that caters solely to clients who wish to pursue competitive show jumping. It's not for everyone, but neither is calf roping, dressage, trail riding or any of the many other equine activities within the community. It's exactly this diversity that creates a common bond between ALL the area horse people—to lose any part of the local equestrian scene weakens the entire community. Take away a trail here, a boarding barn here ... it's a house of cards.

I respect that you plan a quality project; I'm sure you've researched the demographics and that that information weighted your decision to place your development on this particular piece of property. But when I heard that you were promising a project with an "equestrian theme," I realized that you have no knowledge of the depth and commitment of the local horse community. This is not a fake, suburban, horsey "theme" neighborhood; it is a totally immersive lifestyle, one for which many people have made sacrifices to achieve and maintain.

It boils down to the fact that while your project can be sited elsewhere, SRC cannot be, not without a major financial investment. If, as rumored, your company is willing to make that investment, a detailed proposal needs to be presented to Ms. Devon Gibson and the appropriate community leaders. Show your integrity with spreadsheets, blueprints and contracts, not with vague, unsupported verbal intentions.

I have no stake in the outcome of any of this except for the fact that I am extremely grateful to have had access to a vital, established equestrian community for many years, and I will try to help ensure that the horse lovers that come behind me have the same good fortune.

The opportunities to own and ride horses in Los Angeles County are disappearing; I hope that the local community, equestrians and non-horse people alike, will rally to protect the uniqueness of this one small area. Once the infrastructure to support equine activities is gone, it will be gone forever.

I urge you to work with your broker to find another site for your project that will truly add value to the community and not help destroy the desirability that attracted your interest in the first place.

Respectfully yours,
Cindy Savitt

Response to Savitt's letter from Thomas Grabiell of Oxbow Partners

I thank you for your communication and respect your commitment to the equestrian community. Oxbow has never intended to close Seahorse Riding Club, we have

always committed to relocating Seahorse to the adjacent property owned by the County of Los Angeles. Not only would it be relocated but vastly improved by working with Devon Gibson to design a new state of the art facility. We have designed the new facility, we have priced the relocation and we have committed to Devon, in writing, that unless we are able to build Seahorse on that property we will not pursue the Senior Living facility.

We have proposed to the City Planning Staff that relocating Seahorse would be an acceptable Condition of Approval for the entitlement to build Senior Living on that site. We will show preliminary designs for both the new Seahorse and the Senior Living facility at the upcoming meetings with the community and the City Council and Planning Commission.

You are correct in that we have done our homework and this is a premier site for Senior Housing. We know that there is an aging population that would prefer to stay on the peninsula when they reach the stage of life where they need assistance and I know we would develop a first class facility. It is more than just a good location, we truly seek out sites that are equestrian oriented as we use equine therapy as one of the modalities of treatment at our facility. I don't know where "equestrian themed" came from, we truly integrate equine into the facility.

Further, to expand on the on the new Seahorse, we believe the proposal would again be a better training facility than the existing; would be a better location for the horses, away from Crenshaw; and preserves the recre-

ation/equestrian uses for a longer period of time. Mr. Hill has been trying to sell Seahorse for a while and some day someone will buy it, and they do not have to operate an equestrian facility. By providing Devon the lease rights to the relocated Seahorse, she controls her own destiny and is not at the mercy of an underlying land owner.

I am the first to admit that we have our challenges to complete this endeavor. Convincing a community that this is a good change; convincing the City of the same; and then convincing the County to allow this use on their property, and they will not even discuss the possibilities until the City has committed to pursuing the change of use at Seahorse, all add up to a formidable challenge. But we believe, for the reasons stated above, for both the community and Oxbow, it is worth the risk and the effort.

Thanks again and please do not hesitate to ask anything further if I have failed to address your concerns within.

I am off to Mammoth for the Holidays so if a response is delayed please understand.

Happy Holidays,
Tom

Editor's note: This is a developing story. As updates are received, they will be published in future editions of the Dispatch. If you would like to submit a letter about the issue for publication, please email it to pvpha2010@gmail.com. Remember to include your full name. U



Portuguese Bend Riding Club

Upcoming Clinics and Events

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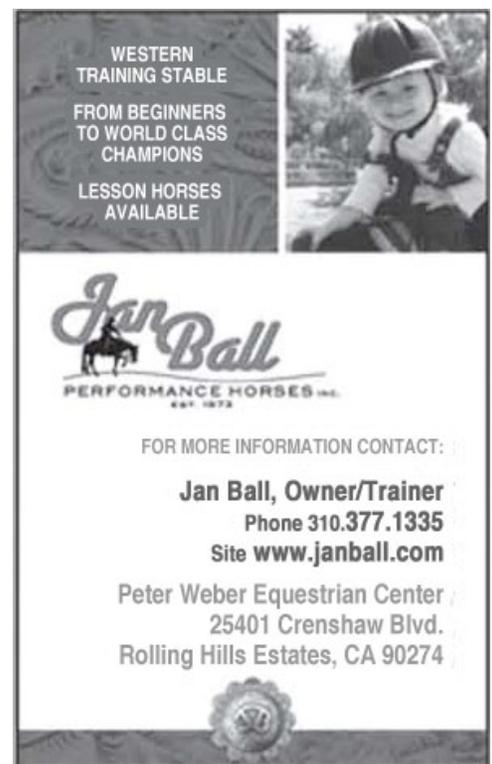
Louise Koch:
January 22 and 29
February 5, 6, 12, and 26
March 12, 13, 19, and 26

Trainers:
Hunter/Jumper: Jen Hannink Riding School: Mary Hirsch
Western: Callie Bell

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2014 Cowboy Poetry & Music Festival



PHOTOS BY LIZ KANE

The 2014 Cowboy Poetry & Music Festival at the Empty Saddle Club featured poets, musicians, homemade chili, brownies and more. Check the February issue for a complete article on the festival!

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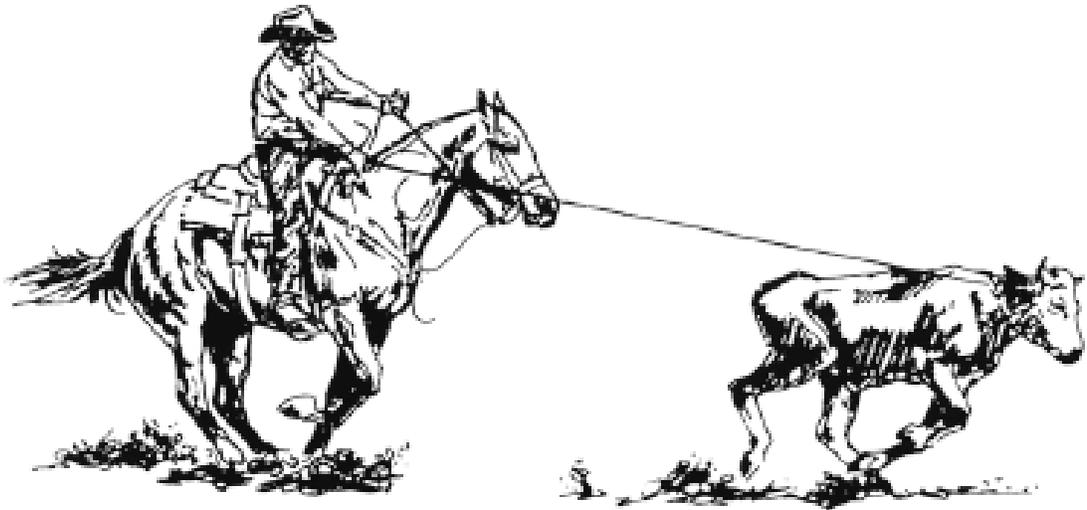
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Dispatch edited by Nicole Mooradian.

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