



IN A

Nutshell

No. 135

Official community newsletter of the City of Walnut Creek

MARCH/APRIL 2008

City scores an 'A' on 2007 national traffic signal test

Next time you're breezing down Ygnacio Valley Road, making every light, just remember that Walnut Creek's traffic signal timing system is one of the best in the nation.

The City recently scored an 'A' grade on the National Traffic Signal Report Card, a measurement provided by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) on behalf of the National Transportation Operations Coalition.

"An 'A' is an exceptional score," said Lisa Fontana Tierney, ITE project manager in Washington, D.C. "(Walnut Creek) should absolutely be proud. A very small percentage received an 'A'."

Walnut Creek was one of 417 public agencies (including 276 cities) to take the self-assessment test, she said, adding that the national grade was a 'D'.

To qualify for an 'A' grade, cities must have a fully-staffed and fully-maintained traffic signal operation running seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Fontana Tierney said the emphasis is not on getting an 'A' grade, but on available resources and how they are allocated to help agencies strive for performance excellence in traffic signal

TRAFFIC SIGNALS, see back page



Balloon artist Tama Zambale presents a balloon kitten to Emma Kolb, 20 months, while her parents, Bill and Cindy Kolb, look on at the "Thanks for the Memories" event on Jan. 13. For more pictures, see page 5.

City set to break ground on new downtown library this spring

After more than 10 years of anticipation and planning, City officials are set to break ground on the new downtown

library in early May.

The groundbreaking will kick off a two-year construction schedule for the 42,000-square-foot facility, which is set to open in spring 2010.

The City Council is expected to award the construction bid for the project at its April 1 meeting.

On Jan. 13, library supporters and residents of all ages paid final homage to the venerable former library in celebration of its 46 years of service to the community. An estimated 700 persons

LIBRARY, see page 5

WC has no unfunded retiree health costs

While many cities across California and the country are grappling with how to pay for skyrocketing health care benefits for retired workers, Walnut Creek is not among them.

As Walnut Creek staff begins the process of preparing the City's 2008-2010 operating budget, the City is on solid

financial ground and not faced with the prospect of service cutbacks or employee layoffs.

City Manager Gary Pokorny said a key reason for the City's sound fiscal position is because it does not have an unfunded liability for retiree health benefits.

RETIREE COSTS, see back page

City Event Calendar

March

22

Spring Egg Hunts

(See *What's Happening*)

24-28, 31-April 2

Spring Art Days

(See *What's Happening*)

25

Spring Concert

(See *What's Happening*)

April

25-27

WC Fine Arts & Crafts Sidewalk Fair

Main & Locust Streets
10 a.m.-5 p.m.

City Meeting Calendar

City Council

March 4, 18; April 1, 15
7 p.m.

City Council chamber
City Hall, 1666 N. Main St.

Planning Commission

March 13; April 10, 24
7 p.m.

City Council chamber

Arts Commission

March 17, April 21
4:30 p.m.

City Council chamber

Transportation

Commission

March 20, April 17
7 p.m.

City Council chamber

Design Review Commission


March 5, 19; April 2, 16
7 p.m.

City Council chamber

Park, Rec & Open Space Commission

March 3, April 7
7 p.m.

City Council chamber

 City Council meetings are televised live on Comcast Channels 28 and 26 (unincorporated), and on Astound Channel 29. They are repeated the following Sunday at 1 p.m. on all. Video of the meetings is also available online at www.walnut-creek.org

'Art of Diorama' next show at Bedford Gallery

Bedford Gallery's next exhibition, *The Art of Diorama*, showcases life-like environments or habitats blending real and imagined elements to capture a single moment, frozen in time.

The exhibition runs from March 26 to June 8.

Using sculpture, drawing, painting, video, and photography, the artists transform an enclosed



Lauren Davies, Bird Diorama

area ranging in size from a matchbox to a 10-by-10-foot room.

Featured artists include Jeremy Mora, Randall Heath, and Danielle Giudici Wallis among others.

Located in the Leshar Center for the Arts, the Bedford Gallery is open Tuesday-Sunday, noon-5 p.m.; Thursday-Saturday, 6-8 p.m. General admission is \$3 (free on Tuesdays).

For information, call 925-295-1417.

What's Happening

WC Seniors' Second Hand Sale

The Walnut Creek Seniors' Club's annual Second Hand Sale will be Friday, April 11 and Saturday, April 12, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. both days, at the Civic Park Community Center, 1375 Civic Dr. A wide variety of items will be available for purchase, including clothing, toys, books, collectibles, and jewelry (Note: Donations of these items will be accepted at the Community Center weekdays March 31 through April 11 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Please, no furniture, computers, TVs, office equipment, or telephones.) All proceeds benefit the Seniors' Club. Call 925-943-5852.

Children invited to Spring Art Days

The popular *Spring Art Days* program will be offered to preschoolers as well as grade schoolers March 24-28 and March 31-April 2, 9 a.m. to noon p.m. at Shadelands Arts Center, 111 N. Wiget Ln. Sponsored by the City's Civic Arts Education, the program groups children ages 5 to 10 by age with activities appropriate to each age group. Fee: \$25/session. To register, call 925-943-5846 or go online at www.arts-ed.org

Spring Egg Hunts planned March 22

Children can participate in Walnut Creek's annual Spring Egg Hunts on Saturday, March 22 at Heather Farm Park or Larkey Park. The activity begins promptly at 10:15 a.m. at both parks for preschoolers through 5th graders; Heather Farm is accessible for disabled children. A pancake-and-sausage Bunny Breakfast will also be offered before the egg hunt at Heather Farm Community Center from 8 to 9:45 a.m.; cost is \$5 per person.

Free home composting workshops

Residents can again sign up for free home composting workshops on March 4, 7-8:30 p.m., at Heather Farm Community Center, 301 N. San Carlos Dr.; and March 29, 1-2:30 p.m., Lindsay Wildlife Center, 1931 First Ave. Reservations are required; call 925-906-1806 to sign up.

WC Band's Spring Concert March 25

The Walnut Creek Concert Band, under the direction of Harvey Benstein, will present an *American Music Retrospective* on Tuesday, March 25, 7:30 p.m. at the Leshar Center for the Arts. Repertoire includes William Schuman's *Chester*, *Variations on America* by Charles Ives, the music of John Philip Sousa, Duke Ellington and a patriotic salute, *Liberty for All* by James Beckel. The Walnut Creek Concert Band will also present a morning educational program sponsored by the City for school groups and seniors in the Leshar Center. For details: WalnutCreekBand@gmail.com.

Spring Plant Sale at Gardens at HF

A wide selection of healthy plants suited to our Mediterranean climate will be for available at the Spring Plant Sale on Saturday, April 19, 9 a.m. to noon at the Gardens at Heather Farm, 600 North San Carlos Dr., Walnut Creek. All proceeds benefit The Gardens at Heather Farm. For more information and to view the list of plants available for sale, visit www.gardenshf.org or call 925-947-1678.

Host families sought for foreign students

The International Education Center at Diablo Valley College is looking for local families to host international students on a temporary basis while they improve their English skills. Short and long term placements are available. Host families will receive a monthly stipend of \$750 per student, and must provide a bedroom and two meals per day for the student(s). Contact Fia Parker, at 925-876-0080 or email: fparker@dvc.edu

East Bay Women's Conference March 3

Madame Jehan Sadat, widow of Egypt's former president Anwar Sadat, will be the keynote speaker at the 2008 East Bay Women's Conference on March 3, 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the San Ramon Marriott, 2600 Bishop Dr., San Ramon. Registration is \$145; call the Walnut Creek Chamber of Commerce at 925-934-2007 to reserve a seat.

Council weighs in on BART's latest transit village plans

A revised proposal for a new transit village at the Walnut Creek BART station garnered positive feedback from the City Council during a study session on Jan. 8.

The project must still go through reviews by the Planning and Design Review commissions before the Council considers approving it. Issues related to the density of the project will be addressed in an environmental impact report that has yet to be prepared.

BART Board President Gail Murray, a former mayor of Walnut Creek, told the Council the transit village would be good for BART and Walnut Creek because it could increase ridership by nearly 1,000 riders a day.

The revised plan calls for 598 rental apartments, 1,000 parking spaces (an increase of 100), a new bus center, and 10,000 square feet of retail space.

BART and its development partner, Walnut Creek Transit Lifestyles Associates, said the project would provide needed affordable housing (60 percent of the apartments would be single bedroom units) and enhance pedestrian, bus, and shuttle access to the station.

Following are updates on other development projects in Walnut Creek:

John Muir Medical Center expansion

Mayor Gwen Regalia joined officials at John Muir Medical Center in breaking ground Jan. 16 on the long-awaited expansion that will double the number of beds at the 43-year-old hospital.

The \$621 million project calls for a five-story, 347,000-square-foot patient care tower with an additional 230 private rooms (a total of 416 beds) to be built by 2011.

Spring City Bus Tour to visit WC landmarks

Ever wonder what Walnut Creek was like 100 years ago? You can see for yourself on the next City Bus Tour, scheduled on Saturday, April 12.

City Public Information Officer Brad Rovanpera will again guide this fun and educational 3 1/2-hour excursion, which runs from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

Stops along the way will include historic Borges Ranch, Shadelands Ranch



Artist's rendering of the bus center at the proposed BART Transit Village.

Villa Vasconcellos

Villa Vasconcellos, an affordable senior housing project on Geary Road, will have its grand opening in April.

The two- and three-story complex will offer 69 one-bedroom units at affordable rates to extremely-low and very-low income seniors.

The City provided funding of \$2.6 million to help make the \$19 million project possible.

City offers home rehab, starter loans

Qualified residents can obtain loans for important home repairs or to buy a first home in the City's Home Rehabilitation and First-Time Homebuyer Assistance programs.

The Home Rehabilitation program provides low interest loans and emergency grants to low-income homeowners living in the City for needed home repairs such as new roofs, new heating, plumbing or electrical work, and removal of architectural barriers for the disabled. For details or an application, call Pat Corum at 925-335-1137.

The First-Time Homebuyer Assistance Program provides loans for low and moderate income households currently

The Mercer

Work is nearly completed on the Mercer, a 181-condominium complex at California Boulevard and Trinity Avenue.

The developer paid the City \$1.4 million in affordable housing in-lieu fees that went in large part to the Villa Vasconcellos project.

A trendy hamburger cafe called The Counter will occupy space on the ground floor.

living or working within Walnut Creek to purchase their first home within the city. The City will loan up to \$65,000 as a deferred second loan.

The maximum annual income limits for both programs are: 1-person household, \$64,570; 2-person, \$73,700; 3-person, \$82,940; 4-person, \$99,550.

For details, call 925-943-5899 ext. 208.

City's teen summer job fair slated March 6

Local teens will again be able to shop for summer employment with the City at the annual Summer Job Recruitment Fair on Thursday, March 6 from 3 to 6 p.m. at the Civic Park Community Center, 1375 Civic Drive.

Upwards of 100 paid summer jobs (including lifeguards, camp counselors, and interns) will be available. Student interns will work from June 16 to Aug. 15.

The City will accept applications through April 18.

For more information, go online to www.realwc.org or call 925-943-5858.

Going solar reduces energy usage for Walnut Creek couple

Last fall, Walnut Creek residents were invited to share their stories of “going green” with the City as part of the Sustainable Walnut Creek: Going Green Together event on Oct. 20. Following is another resident’s personal experience:

We live in Walnut Creek and last year (2006) we had solar panels installed.

We had switched from a gas dryer to an electric dryer, and we had air conditioning installed, so the solar panels enable us to produce the electricity that we consume. I think generally we’re saving in the neighborhood of \$25-50 a month. We didn’t install the solar panels just for financial reasons, but because we could afford to do our share to reduce our carbon footprint.

“Additionally, we also installed a couple of solatubes (which allow dark areas of our house to be lit with natural light) to further reduce our electricity consumption.

“We also have converted our front lawn and more than half of our back lawn from grass to drought tolerant and California native plants so we will consume less water.”

— Marie Delahaye & Carmelo Salgado



Carmelo Salgado inspects the solar panels on his roof, top, and tends his drought tolerant backyard, right.

Photos by Grant Hochstein



Free electronic waste recycling April 12-13 in WC

A free electronic waste recycling collection will take place April 12-13 at Heather Farm Park from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Universal Waste Management, Inc. will recycle the electronic waste into base

material or for other beneficial reuse.

All proceeds benefit the Young Artists Symphony Orchestra.

For details, go online to www.unwaste.com.



Hydrolyzed soy protein

Read those labels — this product is found in prepared gravies/package sauces and dried soups. It’s just what it is: it adds flavor and salt to food and gives a longer shelf life. Be careful, especially if you have an allergy to MSG (because the process of hydrolyzing actually produces a small amount of MSG).

Go for the natural, organic broths and dried soup and gravy mixes, or better yet, make it from scratch!

‘Going Green’ event to air on local cable

If you couldn’t make it to the City’s *Sustainable Walnut Creek: Going Green Together* program last fall, you can see what you missed on a special TV program that will be shown this spring on the local Comcast and Astound cable channels.

The one-hour program highlights the presentations made by *Bay Area Backroads* host Doug McConnell and



Dan Ashley

PG&E’s Jan Berman. KGO-TV news anchor Dan Ashley, a Walnut Creek resident, is also featured in the broadcast.

The program will air on Comcast Ch. 28 and Astound Ch. 29 on the following dates and times:

- Friday, March 14, 8 p.m.
- Sunday, March 16, 7 p.m.
- Friday, March 28, 8 p.m.
- Friday, April 11, 8 p.m.
- Sunday, April 13, 7 p.m.
- Friday, April 25, 8 p.m.

Thanks for the memories...



The venerable Walnut Creek Library and the popular Walnut Creek on Ice rink as they appeared on Jan. 13 — the library's final day of use.

Library party

From page one

attended "Thanks for the Memories," a three-hour party organized by the Friends

of the Library and the Walnut Creek Library Foundation.

Demolition of the library is scheduled to be done the first week of March.



Two-year-old Liliانا Weiss, granddaughter of Jesse Goldberg of the Walnut Creek Library Foundation Board of Directors, draws on the library wall.



Sylvia Haugen, a 30-year Walnut Creek resident and Back Room Books volunteer, signs her name on the wall.



Former Walnut Creek senior librarian Ann Shelton looking at the history wall.

Friends of Library bookstore moves

With the closure of the Walnut Creek Library, the Friends of the Walnut Creek Library have relocated their bookstore to 1910 Olympic Blvd., Suite 101, in Walnut Creek.

Hours are Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The organization accepts donations of books, CDs, and DVDs during open hours. Proceeds from the sale of these items will be used to purchase books for the new library.



The Rossmoor Big Band performed for the "Thanks for the Memories" audience.

City Council Update

Commissioners reappointed

The City Council in January reappointed the following individuals to second terms on their respective City advisory commissions:

Robert Simmons, David Powell, Planning (4-yr. terms)

Jacquelyn Smith, Carol Fowler, Arts (3 yrs.)

Rick Underwood, Park, Recreation & Open Space (3 yrs.)

The Council on March 4 will announce their appointments for vacant first-term seats on the Park, Recreation & Open Space, Design Review, and Transportation commissions.

Council adopts massage ordinance

After months of discussion, the City Council on Jan. 15 adopted a new massage ordinance that requires all massage establishments to have a permit to ensure their employees meet minimum sanitation and health standards.

The ordinance also regulates massage services to ensure they are conducted in a lawful and professional manner.

Following the repeal of the previous massage services ordinance in 1990, the lack of oversight in Walnut Creek attracted some illicit businesses that purported to operate as legitimate massage service establishments.

City takes steps to change operations, address capital needs at Boundary Oak

The City is taking steps to change the operations management structure and address capital improvement needs of the 39-year-old Boundary Oak Golf Course and clubhouse.

The three existing separate agreements for golf operations, golf course maintenance, and food and beverage services will end on June 30, 2009, creating a unique opportunity for the City to make strategic decisions about the future management structure and capital improvement needs at Boundary Oak.

On Dec. 18, the City Council authorized staff to seek proposals for a management agreement with a single entity to oversee golf operations, food and beverage operations and golf course maintenance at Boundary Oak.

A new study of the 160-acre golf course and clubhouse concluded that Boundary Oak remains generally healthy with respect to its market share and position within the highly competitive Bay Area golf market.

City officials believe that a targeted capital improvement program is necessary



Boundary Oak Golf Course

to ensure that Boundary Oak offers a high value and superior golf experience and remains financially healthy in the competitive regional golf market.

Boundary Oak golf green fees are competitive with neighboring golf courses and discounts are offered for seniors and residents.

The Council also approved a capital investment program in concept, which will focus on golf course, driving range, maintenance facility, and clubhouse improvements.

Proposed clubhouse improvements include relocating the golfer's grill from its ground floor space to the second floor area with excellent views.

Police Dept. notes 2 homicides, drop in other crimes in 2007

Walnut Creek police investigated two homicides in 2007 but saw a decrease in robberies, D.U.I. arrests, and auto thefts.

A summary of criminal offenses in 2007 compiled by the Police Department shows there were 31,006 calls to the police for service (9,235 of the calls required follow-up).

In 2007, the department also investigated 759 non-injury auto accidents and 229 injury auto accidents, which included three fatalities.

CRIMINAL OFFENSES

CRIME	2006	2007
Homicide	0	2
Rape	3	4
Assaults	460	486
Robbery	41	34
Burglary	431	506
Theft	1,773	1,875
Auto Theft	259	206
Vandalism	793	827
D.U.I.	421	295
Sex Offenses	30	28
Weapons	43	37

Center REPeratory's 'Other Half Loves' wins Shellies for play, acting, directing

The City's Center REPeratory Co.'s 2007 production of *How the Other Half Loves* took top honors for a play at the 29th annual Shellie Awards ceremony Jan. 12 at the Leshner Center for the Arts.

The British comedy earned Shellies for best play, best director (Michael Butler), best actress (Carrie Paff), and best actor (Mark Phillips).



Mark Phillips, Carrie Paff

Center REP's Kurt Landisman also won the Shellie for best lighting design for *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

Since 1979, the Shellies — created by Leshner Center Manager Scott Denison — have become the recognized measure of outstanding

achievement in dramatic and musical theatre in Contra Costa County.



By Officers Beth Hopkins and Mark Kan

'Every 15 Minutes' returns

Every 15 Minutes, a two-day DUI prevention program aimed at high school juniors and seniors, challenges them to think about drinking, driving, personal safety, and the responsibility of making mature decisions.



The program is an intense experience involving a mock crash scene followed by an assembly for the entire student body. Students receive an invaluable lesson in how drinking and driving can adversely affect their futures.

Through this experience, students are made aware of the impact their decisions have on their own lives, the lives of family, friends, and the community around them.

In the spring of 2000, the "Every 15 Minutes" program was presented for the first time at Las Lomas High School, and brought "rave" reviews.

This was followed by a successful presentation of the program for the first time at Northgate High School in the spring of 2001. We have alternated the program between the two schools yearly since. This year's presentation of the "Every 15 Minutes" program will be April 8-9 at Las Lomas High School.

To learn more about the program, call 925-943-5899, ext. 517.

New CERT emergency training to begin

Learn how to help yourself and your neighbors in the wake of a disaster by enrolling in the next Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) series, to be held Tuesdays, April 15- May 20, 6-9:30 p.m.

The free course is a partnership of the City and the Contra Costa Fire District.

For details, go online to walnutcreek.org and choose "Emergency Preparedness" from the Quick Links menu or call 925-256-3556.

'Friendly' Shepherd newest member of police K-9 corps

When you confront this highly-trained canine, you're better off saluting him than petting him.

That's because Orfas, the City's new police dog, is treated as anything but a pet by his owner/handler Officer Pat Duggan.

"He's most definitely NOT a pet," said Duggan, a 15-year police veteran and father of four. "I can't have a police dog take directions from a 4-year-old."

That's because Orfas, a 3-year-old Dutch-born German Shepherd, has been trained to track people, not tennis balls.

Orfas lives with Duggan and his family, including four children, in Clayton. But because of his specialized training, he lives in an outdoor kennel while Duggan's two pet dogs reside inside the family home.

In the Police Department, Orfas is the first member of the K-9 corps since Becky the Wonder Dog, an English Springer Spaniel who sniffed out narcotics for the force eight years ago.

Orfas will eventually be cross-trained for narcotics detection, said Duggan, but for now he is used primarily in building searches of people. Already he has located a young woman who had attempted suicide, and he has participated in article searches (for items such as keys



Officer Pat Duggan and Orfas at the opening of the Walnut Creek Dog Park.

Photo by Dennis Bell

and guns).

Orfas had a spectacular debut last November when he sniffed out the key to unlock the gate at the new Walnut Creek Dog Park on its opening day, Nov. 17.

Like his human partner, Orfas wears a bulletproof vest, although he doesn't react to gunfire.

"He's a very friendly dog," said Duggan. "It's an interesting dynamic to see a dog that friendly who is that imposing."

Bay-Friendly gardening tips

It's never too late to be green, so get an early start exploring ideas that can help Mother Earth. How about a simple change in our approach to gardening? The usual gardening practice is to remove all plant debris off-site — to landfills or large compost facilities — which effectively mines our solids of organic matters. When urban soils are compacted, eroded and so depleted, they are no longer able to function naturally.

By keeping plant debris and yard trimmings on-site in the form of mulch and compost, we restore the soil's ability to absorb water or filter pollutants. Visit the Bay-Friendly Gardening website (www.BayFriendly.org) to learn natural

gardening techniques that use fewer water and fertilizer, compost yard clippings, grass-cycling and use least-toxic pest control.

While creating and maintaining your own garden can be satisfying experience, hiring the right help is also appropriate. Consider selecting a qualified Bay-Friendly gardener. The City of Walnut Creek is co-sponsoring Bay-

Friendly Landscape training for the professional landscape community starting on March 27. For more information, please contact the Gardens at Heather Farm (925) 947-1678 or send an email to: melanie@gardenshg.org.

Remember, living green is a work in progress.



Traffic signals

From page one

operations.

It is estimated that improper traffic signal timing nationwide accounts for 5 to 10 percent of all traffic delay, or 295 million vehicle hours of delay on major roadways.

Over the years, Walnut Creek has invested millions of dollars in upgrading its signal timing operation. In 2000, it became the first city in the nation to use new ethernet technology to alert a technician immediately whenever there is a signal problem anywhere in the city.

By reducing traffic stops, the City is



Associate Traffic Engineer Simin Timuri monitors traffic flow in Traffic Operations Center at City Hall.

helping to protect the environment from harmful emissions.

Retiree costs

From page one

The rapidly escalating costs of retiree health benefits are threatening the fiscal solvency of hundreds of municipalities and counties, according to the League of California Cities.

For many agencies, the cost of providing health benefits to retired employees more than doubled between 2000 and 2004.

Agencies had been paying for retiree health benefits on a pay-as-you-go basis, thereby softening the financial impact.

However, federal law now requires all

governments to report their future costs for these benefits and how they are going to pay them. As a result, many agencies are discovering that the cost of their retiree health care benefits is unsustainable.

“Walnut Creek is spared this burden as a result of not having an unfunded retiree health benefit liability,” said Pokorny.

“The City does contribute to retirement health accounts for qualified employees, which we feel is the most fiscally responsible way to provide an important benefit to retirees.”

Time to apply for Civic Pride grants

Applications will be available March 24 for 2008 Civic Pride Grants, which will be awarded later this spring by the City Council.

The deadline for submittal is April 25. The Council will make its decisions on June 17.

Since 1989, the City has awarded over \$1 million in Civic Pride grants to a wide variety of local non-profit organizations to help underwrite the costs of projects that improve the quality of life in Walnut Creek.

For details, go to www.walnut-creek.org



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* For appointment: Call 256-3504

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INA **Nutshell**

Published bi-monthly and mailed to
Walnut Creek residents and businesses

Editor:
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We welcome your comments and questions.
Please call 943-5895 or 943-5800
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For past issues, go online at walnut-creek.org



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