Library bond goes before voters Nov. 8

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The Council voted unanimously Aug. 2 to place the general obligation bond measure on the special election ballot.

The new library would replace the existing one, opened in 1961, with a facility in the same location that meets the needs of the community as identified by residents over years of discussion.

City scores theatrical coup with John Denver tribute at Center

Gone but not forgotten, John Denver infused his joyful music with a spirit, passion, and optimism that has resonated with his legions of fans for over 30 years.

Now Denver’s life and music are being celebrated in a special tribute by the City’s Center REPertory Company that will get its West Coast premiere Sept. 8 at the Dean Lesher Regional Center for the Arts.

“Almost Heaven: John Denver’s America” kicks off Center REP’s ambitious 2005-06 season before heading to New York for an off-Broadway run. In short, it’s a real coup.

“It’s a huge opportunity for our audiences to help launch a show that’s going to Broadway,” said Center Manager DenVER, see back page

City gives OK to Comcast for system upgrade

The City Council has given the green light to Comcast to begin upgrading its cable TV system in Walnut Creek.

The July 19 agreement permits Comcast to increase the channel capacity of its system and make it possible for the company to offer high-speed Internet, telephone service, and more high definition television (HDTV) channels.

Comcast will also provide and optical fiber network to connect all the kindergarten-12th grade public schools (except Las Lomas High School, which already has an optical fiber system) to greatly improve the schools’ ability to provide instruction videos to teachers.

The upgrade is expected to take a year to complete. Meanwhile, the City expects to wrap up a separate franchise agreement with Comcast later this fall.

Come to City’s emergency readiness fair

Don’t leave safety to chance. Get the tools and the know-how to survive in the event of a disaster at the Walnut Creek Emergency Preparedness Fair.

The fair will be Sunday, Sept. 11, 11 am. to 3 p.m., in Civic Park.

Twenty exhibitors and vendors will offer everything from hands-on lessons in shutting off gas and water valves to short classes on building a home emergency preparedness kit.

Kids can play in the “Kids Safety Fun Area” and check out the fire trucks, ambulance and police car, while adults will have a chance to learn how to operate a defibrillator and talk to people around the world via HAM radio.

EMERGENCY FAIR, see back page

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EMERGENCY FAIR, see back page
Community artists display their works in ‘Local Voice’ show at Bedford Gallery

In an age when so many people don’t know their neighbors, we may be surprised to learn the person next door is, in fact, an artist.

*Local Voice: Defining Community Through Art*, a juried exhibition at the Bedford Gallery Sept. 13 through Nov. 13, will highlight those artists who live and work in Contra Costa County.

The exhibition is designed to open a dialogue between local visual artists and the greater community, exploring the kind of art being made in this area, by whom, and why.

*Local Voice* will bring together the work of Contra Costa’s diverse artists, exhibiting the best art being created locally in a variety of media, genres, and conceptual approaches.

Bedford Gallery is in the Dean Lesher Regional Center for the Arts at 1601 Civic Dr. Admission is $3, general; $2, youth 17 and under; free, children 12 and under. Ticket holders to events in the Regional Center are admitted free on ticketed date.

Hours are Tuesday through Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.; and Thursday, Friday and Saturdays 6-8 p.m.; and other evenings when there are theater productions. The Gallery is closed Mondays.

For more information, visit the website at www.bedfordgallery.org or call 925-295-1417.

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**Labor Day concert at Civic Park**

Enjoy free summer sounds at the City’s Labor Day Concert on Monday, Sept. 5, 6 p.m. in Civic Park. The Walnut Creek Concert Band will perform under the direction of Harvey Benstein.

**Movies Under the Stars: ‘Sound of Music’**

The City’s popular “Movies Under the Stars” series at Heather Farm Park will finish its 2005 season with a sing-along version of *The Sound of Music*, the 1965 Julie Andrews film classic, on Saturday, Oct. 8. Admission is free. The movie will be shown on the front ballfield at dusk; gates open at 7 p.m. Popcorn and beverages will be for sale. Please, no pets.

**Harvest Holidays returns to downtown**

In celebration of autumn, the Downtown Business Association will hold its 6th Annual Harvest Holidays in downtown Walnut Creek the weekend of Oct. 15-16, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., on Locust Street between Civic Drive and Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

This free event will feature fun festivities for the entire family with live music, holiday arts and craft booths, children’s activities, food provided by downtown restaurants, brews and wine, and an Oktoberfest area. For more information contact the Walnut Creek Downtown Business Association at (925) 933-6778 or e-mail wcdba@sbcglobal.net.

**Gardens at HF Fall Plant Sale Sept. 17**

The Gardens at Heather Farm fall plant sale will be held Saturday, Sept. 17, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 600 No. Carlos Drive. For a 10% discount on Sept. 17, bring your Gardens membership card or become a member on the spot. For details, call 925-947-1678 or visit www.gardenshf.org. All proceeds benefit the gardens.

**Home composting workshops this fall**

Composting is a quick, easy and inexpensive way to reduce your garbage significantly. To learn how to do it, free “Home Composting for Busy People” workshops will be offered Sept. 6 and Oct. 4, 7 to 8:30 p.m., at The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr. Reservations are required; call 925-906-1806.

**Leadership Contra Costa sign-ups**

Leadership Contra Costa, an eight-month program designed to motivate and identify potential leaders and prepare them for community leadership, is accepting applications for enrollment in the 2005-06 session. Participants meet monthly to learn prevailing issues in the community. For details and an application, call Marcie Hochhauser at the Regional Center at (925) 906-1806.

**Meals on Wheels seeking volunteers**

Because of increasing demand for the Meals on Wheels program in Walnut Creek, program organizers are seeking volunteer drivers who can deliver hot, nutritious meals to frail, homebound seniors during nighttime, Monday-Friday. The program seeks interested persons who have free time (about 90 minutes a week) during the noon hour. To volunteer, call 925-937-8607.
Opening of skate park set for later this fall

Mother Nature is apparently not a skater. A combination of late spring rains and high summer temperatures has conspired to slow down construction at the new Walnut Creek skate park in Heather Farm Park.

Contractor A.J. Vascone cannot easily pour cement for the mostly concrete, $800,000 facility when temperatures are above 90 degrees because it tends to dry faster than it can be finished.

The grand opening is still planned later this fall. When completed, the skate park will be a haven for skaters of all ages. It will offer a variety of challenges for street skaters and vertical skaters, including elements with rails, spines, and bowls.

Following is news on other projects:

Lar Rieu property plans
City staff and officials have held two community meetings and a public open house to discuss future plans for the Lar Rieu estate property off El Camino Corto. The 10-acre property was bequeathed to the City in 1975 by Miriam Lar Rieu, who passed away in 2003. Nearly 400 people toured the estate and site on July 9. City staff will work with the community and the Park, Recreation and Open Space Commission to refine a plan for the site.

Recycling Center relocation update
The Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority reports it is exploring several prospective sites for relocating the Walnut Creek Recycling Center, which is currently on City-owned land at 480 Lawrence Way. The Authority hopes to have a plan for relocating the facility soon. Watch the next Nutshell for further details.

Recycle bins now at Heather Farm
The City has arranged for 22 new recycling containers at Heather Farm Park in conjunction with the East Bay Conservation Corps. Recyclables such as plastic and glass bottles and aluminum cans can be deposited in the distinctive green containers throughout the park. The City plans to expand the service to other parks.

Walnut Festival on tap Sept. 22-25; 5k/10k run postponed until spring

The 68th edition of the venerable Walnut Festival, featuring King Walnut and carnival rides for the whole family, returns for its four-day fundraising run at Heather Farm Park Sept. 22-25.

The perennial Walnut Festival Twilight Parade will kick off festivities on Saturday, Sept. 17 beginning at 6:15 p.m. on North Main Street between Olympic Boulevard and Lincoln Avenue. This year’s theme is a celebration of the Fifties. The City has donated $7,000 to this year’s parade.

Carnival rides will be moving to the parking lot in the middle of Heather Farm Park, near the lake. Also returning to the Festival will be the commercial and arts & crafts tents, featuring over 80 vendors who will be selling their wares across from the carnival.

The Walnut Festival Association will again offer free admission to everyone, although there will still be charges for rides and parking. Free live entertainment will be offered all four days of the festival. A 50’s car show is also planned, along with an Elvis lookalike contest.

Paid parking will be available at the front of the park and free parking will be located in the Shadelands Business Park with a free shuttle service to the park.

Festival hours will be Thursday, Sept. 22, 5-10 p.m.; Friday, Sept. 23, 5-midnight; Saturday, Sept. 24, 11 a.m.-midnight; Sunday, Sept. 25, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

For the first time, Walnut Festival organizers have chosen to postpone the traditional 5k/10k Run/Walk to sometime in spring 2006.

For more information or to become a Festival sponsor, call 925-935-6766.

Fest helpers still needed

The Walnut Festival Association is still seeking volunteers to assist at the parade and festival. For information, visit www.walnutfestival.org or call the association at 925-935-6766.
Walnut Creek’s love affair with libraries began a long time ago, even before it became a city. It all started in 1912, when members of the fledgling Women’s Improvement Club of Walnut Creek donated books from their private collections to form the nucleus of the town’s first reading room. That modest institution was established in an existing wood-frame cottage at Main Street and Botelho Drive, near St. Mary’s Church. The little village boasted a population of under 500 in those days, and incorporation as the eighth city in Contra Costa County was the next milestone in October 1914.

By early 1915, the Women’s Improvement Club had moved the reading room down the street into more spacious quarters in a larger building. At the same time, the group applied for a Carnegie Library Foundation grant to build a permanent library.

The $2,500 grant came through in May 1915 and the town’s banker, Robert Noble Burgess, donated a lot at East Street (today’s Giammona Drive) and Main Street on which the new, 1,500-square-foot library could be built. The Carnegie Library was officially opened in October 1916 and served as Walnut Creek’s main library for the next 44 years, closing its doors for the last time on March 15, 1961.

Five days later, the community’s third library was ceremoniously opened at 1644 North Broadway. It was the happy culmination of the community’s five-year debate on how to pay for it.

Initial discussions on replacing the tiny, aging Carnegie Library began in the mid-1950s, when Walnut Creek was experiencing its first population boom due to the opening of the Broadway Shopping Center in 1951. The population in the 1950s quadrupled from 2,400 to just under 10,000 by 1960. With an eye towards building a more suitable library, the City Council opened talks with Contra Costa County officials on how to divvy up the cost of a bigger facility.

Ground was finally broken on June 14, 1960, and Romley Construction Co. of Walnut Creek swiftly built a 9,234-square-foot facility in only nine months at an under-budget cost of $176,180.

The library eventually served as the City’s first performing arts venue when legendary band leader Duke Ellington and his orchestra inaugurated Civic Arts’ Art Forum Series on Oct. 17, 1965. Among the other artists to appear in the series were jazz pianist Dave Brubeck and sculptor Benny Bufano.

An unexpected donation of land by the widow of local landowner Thurman G. Casey (inset below) allowed the City to open a second branch library (below) in Ygnacio Valley on Sept. 13, 1975. This year marks its 30th anniversary.
Planning Commission to wrap up work on draft General Plan to give to Council

It has been a busy summer for City planning commissioners, who spent the last three months combing through thousands of pages of documents, holding two more community workshops to get additional public perspective, and generally tinkering with Walnut Creek’s first new General Plan in 16 years.

The General Plan is a blueprint for development and conservation for the community which will guide Walnut Creek’s planning decisions for the next 20 years. Last updated in 1989, the plan has been the focus of a major rewrite since June 2003. The City is on course to adopt the new and improved General Plan in early 2006.

To meet that deadline, the Planning Commission has been literally working overtime to review all the draft elements dealing with transportation, downtown issues, quality of life, natural environment, and safety and noise.

The commission intends to approve the draft plan by Sept. 29 and send it off to the City Council for its final deliberation.

For updates on the General Plan, go online to www.walnut-creek.org

15 years ago in WC
Hope & Co. unveil City’s arts center

The Baby’s born!” announced guest emcee Joel Grey to an audience of over 700 enthusiastic arts patrons who had paid $1,000 each for a chance to be a part of Walnut Creek history. The all-star gala that officially christened the Regional Center for the Arts on Oct. 4, 1990 certainly was an evening they’ll never forget. Show biz legend Bob Hope, looking much younger than his 87 years, cracked jokes and sang Oscar-winning songs he had introduced during a show that co-starred singers Vic Damone and Diahann Carroll.

The event capped a 15-year odyssey led by a handful of former and current City leaders to see the arts center become a reality. Construction began in September 1988 on the $21 million center, and when the dust had cleared a little more than two years later, the community finally had a top-quality home for professional and community theater in Walnut Creek.

Renamed for the late Contra Costa Times publisher, Dean Lesher, in 1995, the center today attracts about 1 million patrons annually.

Legendary entertainer Bob Hope, left, was joined backstage after the Gala Opening show on Oct. 4, 1990 with Oscar winner Joel Grey, center, and popular singer Vic Damone. Opening night audiences arrived to find a still unfinished exterior at Regional Center for the Arts (below).

Hope, 87, performed for 45 minutes on the Hofmann Theatre stage.
How they spent their summer vacation . . .

For the 12th straight year, the City provided summer employment to local teens through its Summer Intern Program. Above, Las Lomas High School student Sarah Kious, 17, handled paperwork and provided other assistance to Business License Coordinator Sheri Lund (background), before returning to school for her senior year. At right, Song-Song Xi, 17, a Northgate High senior, helped out in the Bedford Gallery under the watchful eye of Office Assistant Alesha Colberg. The Summer Intern Program provided the youths valuable on-the-job experience, a paycheck, and a weekly session on how the City of Walnut Creek provides services to the community.

Floodplain info available to WC homeowners

Even Noah would have liked this: The City can provide property owners with site-specific floodplain information.

Documents that the City can make available to residents include historical data on flooding in their area, elevation certificates that may be required to obtain flood insurance, and property protection information such as emergency and permanent retrofitting options.

To determine whether your property lies within an identified flood hazard area, call 925-943-5839 for an engineer.

For other information, visit the City’s website at www.walnut-creek.org/Engineering/FloodFacts.htm

City wants to know of returning troops from Middle East

The City Council wants to honor all Walnut Creek military personnel who have served a tour of duty in Iraq, Afghanistan or other area of conflict around the world.

The Council will present an official commendation to those residents who served their country as a member of the U.S. armed services.

If you know a returning veteran who should be recognized, please send an e-mail to manager@walnut-creek.org or call 943-5812, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please include the person’s name, address, phone number, branch of service, and date he or she returned to the area.

Council allocates 05-06 Civic Pride grants

Nearly $52,000 in Civic Pride Grants have been allocated to nine community organizations to underwrite special projects in 2005-06.

The City Council allocated the funds June 21 as part of its 17-year program to fund activities that enhance the quality of life in Walnut Creek.

Grants were made to the following:

- Animal Rescue Foundation, $2,000
- Chinese & Asian Community Association, $1,100
- Downtown Business Association, $20,000 (for ice rink)
- Friends of Civic Arts Education Foundation, $7,300
- Gardens at Heather Farm, $7,500
- Walnut Creek Aquabears, $1,850
- Walnut Creek Aquanuts, $6,000
- Walnut Creek Historical Society, $3,200

Downtown road repair contract

The City Council has awarded a $1.17 million contract to Granite Construction to do the 2005 Downtown Roadway Reconstruction Project. This project calls for more than half of the roadways in the downtown to be reconstructed to preserve their stability.

Streets to be rebuilt are North Main Street (from Ygnacio Valley Road to California Boulevard), Pringle Avenue (North Main to California), Newell Avenue (California to South Main), South Main Street (Newell to Mt. Diablo Blvd.), Olympic Boulevard (South Main to Locust Street), and Mt. Diablo Boulevard (Main to Broadway Plaza).

Equestrian Center agreement OK’d

The City Council on July 19 approved an agreement that allows the Equestrian Center of Walnut Creek to continue using the 5-acre facility at the north end of Heather Farm Park for another five years.

The non-profit organization has used the site since 1969 for 15-20 equestrian events each year, including Pony Club activities and Special Olympic riding programs. Although an eventual change for the Equestrian Center is included in the Heather Farm Park master plan, there are currently no projects planned by the City that would require relocation of the group.

City Council Update

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How WC regulates taxis

Cities with strict taxi regulation, such as New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, know a clean cab and a good driver go a long way toward keep tourists and businesses in town.

While Walnut Creek does not have much in common with NY or SF, the Police Department does strictly regulate our 23 taxicab companies and 50-plus cab drivers. Limos and buses are regulated by the California Public Utility Commission but under state law local cities and counties must regulate taxicabs. The City’s taxi ordinance regulates both taxi companies and taxi drivers. A taxicab falls under the City’s jurisdiction when it picks up in Walnut Creek.

Here are some regulations every taxi passenger should be aware of:

• Vehicle Permit required — Look at back window for 2006 Permit (2005 permits expired June 30th). A valid permit means the taxi has passed a safety inspection within the past year.

• Driver Permit required — Your driver should have a picture ID from the Police Department. Ask to see the permit if it isn’t displayed. A valid permit means the driver has passed a drug test and background check within the past year.

• Taxi Rate - $2.50 flag drop followed by $.25 per .1-mile charge. If the flag drop has a higher number let the driver know you know the rules. Better yet, take another cab that follows the rules.

• Taximeter must be used – Drivers may quote a flat rate before a trip starts but they must still activate the taximeter and if the meter is less than the flat rate they must charge the lower amount.

• Direct Route – The driver must take the most direct route to your destination.

• Receipts – Drivers must give receipts when requested.

To complain about a taxicab or driver call the Taxicab Unit at (925) 943-5899 ext. 459.

City to study ways to make parking easier downtown

Improving ways for people to find and use parking garages in downtown Walnut Creek will be the focus of a new study commissioned by the City Council.

The City has hired Nelson/Nygaard Associates to conduct the study of downtown parking and mobility issues. It will pinpoint ways to improve parking access and availability in the three City-operated parking garages, bolster ridership on the City-funded Free Ride shuttle, and beef up pedestrian connections to and within the downtown area.

A downtown parking study conducted by the City in 2002 found that there is ample parking in downtown Walnut Creek even though there is a continuing perception that sufficient parking isn’t available.

A major outcome of the new study may be a revised parking rate structure that would free up more on-street parking spaces. Currently, the cost of parking in any of the City’s garages is 50 cents an hour, up to $3 per day. On-street metered spaces are also 50 cents per hour but are limited to largely two-hour meters.

The consultant will also suggest ways the City may best use the popular Free Ride shuttle, Route 104. Route changes and modifications to the buses may be in order, depending on the study’s findings. The consultant will prepare a short-term strategy for improving Free Ride ridership for the upcoming holiday season.

Finally, the $120,000 study will include a review of the physical environment in the downtown area to evaluate how pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users get in and around. Sidewalks, arcades, signing, and lighting would all be reviewed to determine if the City is succeeding in its quest to make downtown a more user-friendly place to visit.

What are a cyclist’s responsibilities?

A recent Re-Cycling column presented tips for automobile drivers that will help make cycling a safe and fun activity.

However, cyclists have important responsibilities in the Share-The-Road equation as well. The California Vehicle code states “bicyclists on public streets have the same rights and responsibilities as automobile drivers.”

We cyclists tend to focus on our “rights” and forget our responsibilities.

What are they?

We often see cyclists ignoring several of the key items in the vehicle code – to ride with traffic (not against it), to stop at stop signs and red lights, and in general to ride in a way that will be predictable to drivers.

When we don’t follow these simple laws we do two things: First, we create immediate hazards for ourselves and for drivers. Second, we diminish the respect that drivers have for us and for our rights to share the road.

So be good to yourself – think of every traffic situation as a chance to impress a driver that you deserve your place on the road, and keep yourself safe while still enjoying the ride.
Denver

From front page
Scott Denison, sitting in his third floor office surrounded by one of Denver’s guitars, gold records, and iconographic images of the late singer/songwriter that will be displayed at the Center during the show’s run. “We’ve been working to get this show for two years. Center REP is proud to present this show.”

The Denver show is being produced by the songwriter’s longtime friend and business manager, Harold Thau, who provided one of Denver’s 12-string guitars and several gold and platinum records from his private collection to be exhibited during the run of the show, through Oct. 8.

“John was popular for 30 years all over the world,” said Thau, sipping coffee at a café in Aspen, Colo. “With John, the messages are his songs.”

Denver was one of the top selling recording artists of the 1970s with such hits as “Annie’s Song,” “Rocky Mountain High” and “Take Me Home, Country Roads.” His untimely death in a plane accident in Monterey Bay on Oct. 12, 1997 cut short a career comeback.

Thau has assembled an impressive cast of seasoned Broadway performers for the Denver show.

“I think their ensemble work is going to knock people out,” he said. “I hope audiences will walk out feeling good and take some of the music home with them.”

Tickets for the show are $31 to $41 and are available by calling 943-SHOW.

Library

From front page
The current library, opened when there were less than 10,000 people living in Walnut Creek, is 9,234 square feet and inadequate to meet the needs of a community with a population over 66,000.

Should the measure pass, the best estimate of the tax rate to be levied to fund the bond issue during the first fiscal year after the sale of the bond series is $10.81 per $100,000 of assessed property valuation in 2006-07.

Based on the average assessed value of a home in Walnut Creek, which is approximately $300,000, the estimated 2006-07 tax would be $32.43. The best estimate of the average tax rate during the remaining 29 years of the bond is $10.43 per $100,000.

The bond measure requires a two-thirds majority vote for passage.

Emergency fair

From front page
Emergency preparedness items will be available for purchase as well.

“The goal of the fair is to give people one easy place to get the materials and the information they need to be prepared for emergencies at home … and to have fun at the same time,” said Gayle Vassar, Walnut Creek Community Relations Officer.

The Fair is an outgrowth of the Parkmead Emergency Fair held in 2003 and 2004.

“The original fair was the brainchild of a collaboration between the Parkmead neighborhood association, the Hillside Covenant Church and Parkmead Elementary School,” said Vassar.

The 2005 Emergency Preparedness Fair is sponsored by the Walnut Creek Citizen Corps Council. For more details, go to www.walnut-creek.org/community.