

West Portal MONTHLY

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Police Blotter

see page 3

Rat Place, Rat Time

see page 8

In Praise of Beauty

see page 10

No Vets Left Behind

see page 11

FEBRUARY 2008



Mayor Gavin Newsom endorses former State Senator Jackie Speier for Congress as School Board member Hydra Mendoza looks on.

Newsom endorses Speier for Lantos' seat in Congress

Retiring Rep. Tom Lantos favors former state Sen. Jackie Speier to replace him

by Glenn Gullmes

In a move that could signal increased focus on the San Francisco portion of a congressional district that has long seen more attention being paid to San Mateo constituents, Mayor Gavin Newsom came to West Portal Elementary School to announce his endorsement of former state Senator Jackie Speier for the Congressional seat currently held by Rep. Tom Lantos.

"I don't think anyone is more qualified" said Newsom, citing Speier's experience in being able to address pressing needs pertaining to education, health care and the environment.

Before being termed out in 2006, Speier had served in the Assembly and state Senate for 18 years. She ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor in 2006, losing a bid for the Democratic nomination by three percentage points.

Speier announced she would seek the District 12 congressional seat being vacated by Rep. Tom Lantos. The heavily Democratic District 12 includes the southwestern portion of San Francisco, along with northern San Mateo County. Lantos announced his retirement earlier this year, following his diagnosis with esophageal cancer. The 80-year-old chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee had served 14-terms in Congress.

Speier is looking to fill the seat once held by Rep. Leo Ryan, who was killed on an airstrip in Guyana in November 1978 following an investigation of People's Temple cult leader Jim Jones. Speier — who served as an aide to Ryan at the time — sustained five gunshot wounds in the same attack. The Jonestown mass suicide soon followed.

State Sen. Leland Yee, who had been previously rumored as a possible candidate for the congressional seat, announced that he will not run for the office.

New Parkmerced owners unveil green expansion plan

Ambitious project will include re-routed Muni lines, new shopping district and increased density, energy efficiency

by Rae Doyle

Can you go forward by turning the clock back? The new owners of Parkmerced intend to do just that. Built for returning World War II servicemen and blue-collar workers, the builders of Parkmerced in the 1940's designed the complex to replicate suburban living with buildings positioned in large open green spaces, and by accommodating automobile use.

But what was considered desirable then is considered wasteful and environmentally unsound in the 21st century, according to Craig Hartman, lead architect of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, who speculates that Parkmerced will be one of the most environmentally ambitious projects in the country.

He explained that the two 13-story towers will not be replaced but will be refurbished. Hartman promised that smaller buildings will be replaced by buildings of the same height and size, and will be positioned to allow the streets to be bathed in sunlight for longer periods during the day and will block the westerly winds sweeping from the ocean.

The streets, originally designed for efficient car maneuverability, will be reconfigured to be more pedestrian friendly. The past suburban ideal of residential only neighborhoods, adopted by the original Parkmerced developers, will be abandoned by building a commercial district within a 5-minute walk from all housing units.

To further reduce dependency on automobile use, they intend to study more sophisticated workforce transportation plans. One option would be to move the MUNI stop at 19th and Holloway into Parkmerced.

One conservation measure will be to reduce the open green space and employ the space for recreational activity and a community center. Hartman reported that 60 million gallons of drinking water is being used now for landscaping of green areas that have no recreational use.

— continued on page 6



In Memory...

Viking saga ends in glory

Popular local builder, West Portal resident
Fjalar Viking Gullmes will be greatly missed

In an epic saga that included an ocean crossing to the New World and ended following a valiant battle, Fjalar Gullmes — who was named after a Norwegian king and known affectionately as "Viking" to many of his friends — passed away peacefully in his sleep on Jan. 16, 2008.

His sparkling blue eyes and friendly cheerfulness were well known throughout the West Portal neighborhood where he built his home.

A long-time member of the Ebenezer Lutheran Church council and property

committee, he was also a strong supporter of the West Portal Monthly and the annual Easter Sunrise Service at Mt. Davidson Cross.

Recognized as one of the City's top home builders in a career spanning the 1950s-80s, he was recently honored by Carpenters Union Local 22 for 55 years of service. Praised by his peers for his skill and unsurpassed work ethic, he oversaw the construction of more than 100 homes and apartment complexes throughout the City — from the Marina to the Mission, and Hayes Valley to Twin Peaks.

A humble man of tremendous strength who led as much by example as sheer force of will, he spent two decades supervising projects for the San Francisco-based Gaehwiler Construction Company.

It was once written of the young Scandinavian that he "swung a hammer with the thunderous fury of Thor himself." His toughness and resilience were legendary, as illustrated by two incidents that probably would have stopped most "mere mortals" in their tracks.

Following a power saw accident in the 1950s that nearly severed his left hand completely, he made his way to the nearby, nearly-completed Kaiser Hospital on Geary Street, where he became the hospital's first major surgery patient. In a providential turn of events, a visiting surgeon — who had recently returned from combat service in Korea — was able to successfully re-attach his hand.

In 1967, he fell off a three-story building on Miraloma Way, landing on his back atop a pile of concrete rubble. True to form, he simply got up and walked over to ask a co-worker for a ride to the emergency room.

Born Dec. 6, 1923 in Lappfjård, Finland to Frans and Alvina Gullmes, Fjalar lived in the shadow of one of Finland's largest historic churches in a Swedish-speaking farm community until he immigrated to San Francisco via Sweden in 1950. A pioneer in promoting Swedish cinema, Frans Gullmes wrote *Valda Dikter*, a collection of Swedish poetry that continues in print to this day.

Awarded a medal for bravery as a 17-year-old soldier in the military effort to repel the Soviet "Winter War" invasion, he was feted last year, along with other WWII veterans, with a trip to his home-

— continued on page 2

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Parkmerced... from pg. 1

The plan is to use recycled water for the reduced landscape area. Other conservation measure will be employed by installation of more efficient appliances.

It is estimated that, ultimately, energy use at Parkmerced will be reduced by 62 per cent and water use will be reduced by 42 percent.

However, Parkmerced tenants are particularly disturbed by the plan to reduce open green areas. Aaron Goodman, Vice President of the Parkmerced Residents' Organization, is concerned that reducing the open space will drastically reduce the feel of community in Parkmerced.

The surrounding neighbors are concerned that the current 3221 units will be increased almost threefold by the time the project is completed in 20 years.

P.J. Johnston, speaking for the developer, said that the site is zoned for 11,000 units, but the developer intends to keep that number below 8,700. He said that the project has to be smart and "within reason" of what the area can support.

The previous owners have sold off pieces of the property to Summerhill Homes and San Francisco State University. The current Parkmerced developers in-

tend to keep the 115 intact and employ a comprehensive plan of development that should be acceptable to the neighborhood.

For the past year Denise LaPointe, President of the West of Twin Peaks Central Council, has expressed concerns about the City's failure to look at Westside developments as a whole and determine a mitigation plan for the cumulative impacts on traffic, infrastructure and the environment.

There is a proposed development of 200 units at Summerhill Homes, which was once part of the Parkmerced property. The Brotherhood Way development appears to be stalled at the moment with an undetermined number of proposed units.

A development of 162 to 199 units is being planned on a portion of the Arden Wood Christian Science Home Site.

Both City College of San Francisco and San Francisco State University are planning housing developments.

On Twin Peaks, there are two potential developments, one on Aqua Vista Way with a potential of either 17 homes or 60 condominiums, and another on Crestmont Drive of 57 condominium units.

The Parkmerced development will require an Environmental Impact Review, but the other de-

velopments taken separately are exempt.

LaPointe expressed frustration that City Hall doesn't prescribe higher standards for developers to address and mitigate neighborhood concerns regarding the substantial level development. Modern city planning encourages density.

The Association of Bay Area Governments and the State of California are mandating more density in urban areas. San Francisco was told to add 20,000 new units to the housing stock in the period 2000-2006. And environmental groups are encouraging more density in urban areas to reduce the environmental affect of commuter traffic.

The Parkmerced developers have held community meetings in the West of Twin Peaks area of mainly single-family residences for the past year.

It is a tough sell in neighborhoods that were developed in the 1920's with the conscious ambition to reduce density by zoning changes that required large lots and minimum house sizes.

Community workshops to review and refine the various design elements are tentatively scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 21 and Saturday, Feb. 23. For more information, call 227-0630 or visit www.ParkmercedVision.com.



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