

Response to "Unstable Ground" article

I have called West Sonoma County my home for 50 years and have been performing civil and geotechnical engineering services since 1964.

I was deeply distressed with the 8/13/09 "Unstable Ground" article by Ray Waldbaum and Jane E. Nielson. In this article they unjustly criticized Engineering Geologist Bill McCormick as well as other private industry geologists in Sonoma County, and the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD). I found it to be unprofessional, if not unethical. I have reviewed several reports by Bill McCormick and, for the most part, find him to be a creditable engineering geologist who is responsible-in-charge. Example: his report regarding the Rio Nido landslide.

I believe we can rely on PRMD's permit procedures. However, I suggest that they up-grade their staff with additional professional engineers.

In his article Ray Waldbaum did not inform you that he practiced in Southern California and moved to Sonoma County with Southern California ethics and standards. He also did not tell you that he interviewed with several Sonoma County geotechnical firms. I assume these are firms that he calls private industry geologists. They did not hire him after he informed them that they were not providing services in accordance to Southern California standards, and were working in the "dark ages".

However, Bill McCormick did hire and then let Ray Waldbaum go after Bill determined that Ray did not have common sense, and could not provide recommendations that were practical and affordable. Is this why Ray is on a "witch hunt"? Mr. Waldbaum lacks the common sense to know when a brief reconnaissance type of feasibility study is appropriate to determine if a site is buildable. He thinks there should be a full design level and study for every project.

Sonoma County has unstable ground and other geological hazards. However, Sonoma County has several geotechnical engineers and engineering geologist firms who can provide practical and affordable recommendations and are in responsible charge. These recommendations are within the current state of the art for California. These firms have insurance that is very costly, therefore their rates increase, therefore increasing fees.

Gary . Sitton

An Open Letter to West County Residents

By Mr. Neil Todhunter

I'd like to thank you for the hospitality that has been extended to me, a new arrival in this wonderful West County. My name is Neil Todhunter, and I will be here for the next few months as Interim Chief Executive Officer of Palm Drive Hospital.

There have been a lot of changes at Palm Drive recently, and I want you, the community we serve, to understand what's going on.

At the end of July the Palm Drive Healthcare District, which owns and operates Palm Drive Hospital, hired Brim Healthcare, Inc., a national hospital management and consulting firm. Brim is based in Brentwood, Tenn., and specializes in small hospital operation. The company manages 36 hospitals in 18 states, including three in California.

The contract gives Brim the administrative responsibility for managing Palm Drive, while the Board, which is publicly elected, continues to be the decision-maker. The contract is for 120 days. At the end of that time, the contract could be extended for three years.

Brim appointed me as Interim Chief Executive Officer and will soon be launching a nationwide search for a permanent Chief Executive Officer for Palm Drive.

Just so you will know your hospital is in good hands, I have been a hospital CEO for 35 years, most recently in Shawano, a town of 10,000 in rural northeastern Wisconsin. I retired from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, where I was a CEO of one of their 20 hospitals. During my career, I have been awarded five "Top 100 Hospital" recognitions, as well as other national and regional awards.

As part of its contract, Brim sent a team of experts to Palm Drive. For the past two weeks, they have been meeting with staff, physicians and managers in order to assess where Palm Drive is now, financially and medically, and to help us chart a direction for the future.

The goal is help Palm Drive reach its dreams of financial sustainability and ensure its ability to continue to provide excellent medical care. Some of Palm Drive's greatest strengths lie in its skilled medical staff and the warm, caring environment it creates for patients. Brim respects this, I respect this, and we intend to preserve and nurture it.

LETTERS cont'd on page 10