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GUIDE

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## PENINSULA BRACES FOR EL NIÑO STORMS

### ■ Damage in 1998 was widespread

By KELLY NIX

IF PREDICTIONS from meteorologists and emergency officials are correct, the Monterey Peninsula is probably heading into another winter of power outages, flooding, downed trees and property damage due to El Niño — a warming of water in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

Expecting the significant amounts of rain and heavy winds that usually accompany El Niño conditions, Monterey

Peninsula cities and agencies are gearing up for what could be a series of severe winter storms, and they're encouraging residents to do the same.

History shows they're right to be concerned. When El Niño hit in 1997-1998, it caused 17 deaths and more than \$550 million in damage in California, and 35 counties were declared federal disaster areas.

Locally, it washed out 17 Mile Drive at the Carmel Gate, flooded numerous homes, caused landslides in Carmel Valley and Big Sur, and brought down dozens of trees, many of them right onto buildings.

### Cities preparing

Carmel public works director Rob Mullane outlined numerous winter storm preparations the city has completed or is in the midst of doing, including inspecting and maintaining storm drains, fixing "damaged or ineffective" shoreline landscape barriers along the Scenic Road pathway, trimming overgrown vegetation, redistributing sand on its beach, and performing overdue tree maintenance.

"Strong winds in previous El Niño years have caused trees or large branches along Scenic Road to fall," he said. "The city forester has undertaken inspection of shoreline trees, and trimming to reduce the risk of branch and tree failure has been completed."

City crews and contractors are also maintaining the Scenic Road

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PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE (FEBRUARY 1998)

During the last major El Niño, many parts of the Monterey Peninsula suffered major damage, including the washout of 17 Mile Drive where it crosses Pescadero Canyon (above) and the loss of a bridge at Soberanes Canyon in Big Sur. Officials are hoping to keep damage to a minimum this time.

## City will make case that propane fires are swell

### ■ Hope to convince coastal commission not to insist on wood fires for Carmel Beach

By MARY SCHLEY

MAYOR JASON Burnett will seek to sell the California Coastal Commission on the idea of propane fires during a Dec. 11 hearing on Carmel's beach-fire program. The com-

mission's staff has recommended the city be required to allow wood fires, but city officials have said they have no intention of doing so.

Last week, Burnett sent a letter to commission chair Steve Kinsey asking him to delay the hearing on beach fires — rather than possibly approving a program the city would refuse to implement — but on Tuesday, public works director Rob Mullane wrote to district director Dan Carl asking that the commission hold a hearing and take testimony, after all, but put off voting to another day.

Instead, Mullane requested commissioners direct their planners to work with city staff and an officer from the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District on a plan calling for propane fires — not wood fires — on Carmel Beach.

"The city is looking for confirmation that the commission will support an all-propane alternative for the pilot program before committing substantial city staff time and resources to further discussion with commission staff on an acceptable program," Mullane said in the Dec. 8 letter. "We remain optimistic" the commission will agree that only propane fires should be allowed on the beach, "as such a program would avoid the deleterious impacts resulting from wood-fueled fires on Carmel Beach while both maintaining a low-cost visitor-serving uses and enhancing coastal access and enjoyment of the beach" by people who haven't been able to do so because of the poor air quality created by wood smoke.

The lobbying effort came a week after the council voted at its Dec. 1 meeting for a complete ban on wood fires, citing

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## Talmage announces bid to succeed Burnett

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER THINKING it over for a month, discussing it with friends and community members, and checking in with his East Coast family, city councilman Ken Talmage made official this week the news he will run for mayor.

"You don't get there right away — I got to 80 percent and wasn't sure I wanted to go the rest of the way," he said.

The upside was the possibility of making progress on a number of important city issues — such as developing a reliable water supply, finding a new city administrator, filling job vacancies and continuing to strengthen the city's finances — while the things pulling him in the other direction were the fact he'll be turning 70 next month and has two grandkids he visits six times a year in Boston and elsewhere. He also has a water-purification company to run.

"At my age, with family commitments and business commitments, I wanted to be sure," he said.

And now, with the support of his daughter and grandkids, and the encouragement of residents, community leaders and other elected officials, he is.

"After Mayor Jason Burnett's announcement last month, I've received many emails and calls from community members and elected officials with whom I've served offering their support," he said. "Those names will be made public during the campaign," though he wanted to thank retiring U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, Burnett, several former Carmel mayors, "and almost every supervisor that I've worked with in the tri-county region," for their support.

Talmage pointed to his years in city government — including two-and-a-half years on the planning commission



Ken Talmage

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## French bakery bookkeeper 'usurped' shop, lawsuit says

By KELLY NIX

THE OWNERS of an acclaimed French bakery in The Barnyard are embroiled in a legal row with a former employee, accusing her of "usurping control" of the store, hijacking access to its bank account and embezzling money.

In a lawsuit filed Dec. 2, Lafayette Bakery owners Jean Bernard Vial, Marion Vial, Quentin Vial and Pascal Merle allege that former bookkeeper Hilary Holbrook tried to take over the bakery even though they're its rightful owners.

"She took over the Lafayette bank account, removed plaintiffs' names from the account, blocked their online access to the account and took all available company cash," according to the complaint, filed for the plaintiffs by attorney Douglas Oldfield.

Holbrook got involved in the business in 2013 when she

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## Cal Am test well delivering the goods

By KELLY NIX

THE SLANT well in Marina that's serving as a test operation for California American Water's proposed full-scale desal plant, and which resumed operating in October, is achieving highly favorable results, according to officials.

Cal Am was forced to halt the slant test well operation in June when groundwater levels dipped in order to comply with a condition of a permit issued by the California Coastal Commission. On Oct. 6, however, the coastal panel permitted Cal Am to resume testing, and the well was restarted Oct. 27.

"This Friday will be our 90th day of operation," Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Stedman told The Pine Cone.