

The Carmel Pine Cone

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SANTA'S WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN, BUT CAMERA CATCHES THIEF'S FACE

By CHRIS COUNTS

A LIFE-SIZED stuffed Santa Claus disappeared last week from where it stood in front of a Carmel Valley business, and its owner told The Pine Cone a surveillance camera captured the face of the thief who stole it.

Ryan Zotovich of Carmel Valley Computer & Phone Repair said he bought the Santa last year for about \$300. But Zotovich said the figure — which stands more than 6 feet high — is no ordinary Saint Nick.

"He's so striking," the business owner explained. "I've never seen one like this before. He's wearing real clothing, and he has a wood frame that's stuffed with fabric. He's very huggable, and he's pretty unique. That's why I'm bummed out."

Typically, Zotovich takes his Santa inside his shop at night. But last Sunday, he left him out in the cold. When he returned in the morning, there was no sign of the jolly gift-giver.

"It was the only night I didn't bring him in, and he got nabbed," said the man, who acquired the Santa last holiday season.

Before he called the police, Zotovich checked the business' surveillance camera, which showed someone making off with the Santa at precisely 6:27 a.m. According to the shop owner, the face of a woman carrying away the figure is clearly captured by the camera in a reflec-

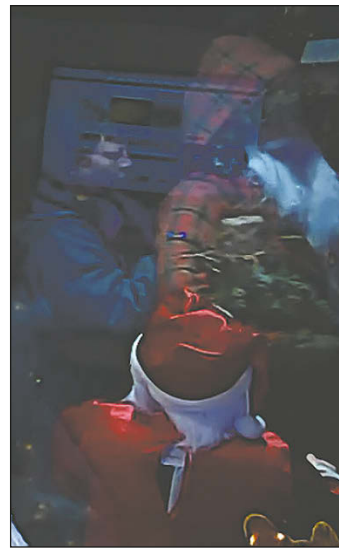
tion in the front window of the shop.

Zotovich said he recognized the woman's face, and he passed her name on to the Monterey County Sheriff's Office.

Cdmr. Keith Wingo confirmed the Santa is still missing, and said deputies contacted the woman suspected of pilfering it.

While he misses his Santa, Zotovich is trying to take a light-hearted view of the matter.

"It's humorous," he added. "Who would steal a Santa? Only a grinch."



A life-sized Santa (left) greeted visitors at Carmel Valley Computer and Phone Repair until he was stolen this week. Security camera footage captured an image of a woman carrying him away.

Coastal commission OKs wood fire ban

By KELLY NIX

IN A narrow decision that defied its own staff's recommendation, the California Coastal Commission last week voted to uphold a city ban on wood fires on Carmel Beach, paving the way for the city to go forward with a propane-only beach fire plan.

At the Dec. 11 meeting at the Portola Hotel & Spa in Monterey, more than two dozen speakers rallied against wood fires, arguing that they cause air pollution, make the white sand grey, poison the ocean and are the source of myriad health problems. Those in favor of keeping wood fires cited Carmel's long tradition of the activity and said banning them is going too far.

At the end of the three-hour meeting, the coastal commission voted 5-4 against requiring the city to have 26 fire rings for burning wood on the beach — an earlier idea OK'd by the Carmel City Council — and voted instead to let Carmel ban all woods fires and pursue its idea of providing six propane-fueled fire rings.

"Nobody is suggesting a ban on beach fires," Carmel Mayor Jason Burnett told the commission in his opening statement. "But we want cleaner burning fires."

Last May, after complaints from residents on Scenic Road that the proliferation of fires on the beach had become a nuisance, the city council approved the placement of 26 fire rings and decided to end the long-honored tradition of fires built directly on the sand. But people who thought that decision was too limiting asked the coastal commission to overturn it. Meanwhile, as their appeal was making its way through the process, the city council abruptly changed course and voted this month for a complete ban on

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Air district could fine city for beach fires — but probably won't

■ Next in the crosshairs: fireplaces

By MARY SCHLEY

IF A contractor demolishes an asbestos-laden building and sends harmful fibers into the air, or if a body shop, dry cleaner or anybody else illegally causes air pollution, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District can order them to stop. Empowered by federal and state laws on air quality, the district can also levy fines of up to \$75,000 per day for individuals and \$1 million per day for corporations, through civil and criminal courts.

So, earlier this month, when air control officer Richard Stedman sent an email to Mayor Jason Burnett warning him the district would take enforcement action against the city if it didn't do something to control the air-polluting wood fires on Carmel Beach, the threats weren't empty. Stedman said he had received more than 50 emails and letters from residents complaining about the smoke generated by beach fires — which numbered in excess of 100 on busy nights.

Therefore, he said, allowing beach fires violates the district's rule that, "No person shall discharge from any source whatsoever such quantities of air contaminants or other materials which cause injury, detriment, nuisance, or annoyance to any considerable number of persons or to the public; or which endanger the comfort, repose, health, or safety of any such persons or the public; or which cause, or have a natural tendency to cause, injury or damage to business or prop-

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Three companies chosen to build water pipeline

By KELLY NIX

CAL AM announced this week that it has selected three construction firms to build 22 miles of pipeline and other systems for its proposed Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project. The centerpiece of the project is a desalination plant in Marina to supply 100,000 residential and commercial customers on the Peninsula and end overpumping of the Carmel River.

California American Water said it picked Garney Pacific, Mountain Cascade and Monterey Peninsula Engineering because they ranked highest in "technical and business criteria," and offered the lowest cost estimates. A total of six companies submitted proposals.

One pipeline will convey seawater from Cal Am's intake wells in Marina to its desal facility about 1.5 miles away, where the water will be converted to fresh. Another pipeline will carry the fresh water south along Highway 1 before going inland to Gen. Jim Moore Boulevard, crossing Highway 68 and into Monterey via Fremont Street. During winter months, the desalinated water will be stored underground; in summer, it will flow directly into Cal Am's distribution system.

"Originally, we'd planned to go down Highway 1 and Del Monte Boulevard, but changed the route to reduce traffic impacts," Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Stedman told The

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Estate at north end of beach sells for \$27M

By MARY SCHLEY

A STUNNING stone home on Carmel Beach owned by Carl Panattoni sold this week to an East Coast venture capitalist for a record-setting \$27 million. Carmel Realty's Shelly Mitchell Lynch, who listed the home with Lynn Knoop, confirmed the deal closed Monday and that it was "the highest recorded sale in Carmel-by-the-Sea."

According to the Wall Street Journal, the buyer was Andrew M. Paul, who has worked in private equity and venture capital, mostly in the health care industry, for more than 30 years and is founding member of New York City-based Sopris Capital Associates LLC.

The home is one of three on a few acres at the north end of the city, and three years ago, Panattoni was offering the trio as a single compound for \$79 million. The main home was once owned by movie star Gene Hackman, who sold it to Craig McFarland in 1979. The

disgraced financier's family later sold the property, and it was acquired by Panattoni, who heads a development company, in 1993. In 2000, Panattoni and his wife obtained two

See SALE page 26A



An expansive beachfront property and the stately mansion on it were sold this week to a Wall Street executive for a price that set records in Carmel-by-the-Sea.