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Aquarium plans groundbreaking for high-tech education center

By KELLY NIX

THE MONTEREY Bay Aquarium will kick off efforts later this month to get approval for a proposed \$50 million education center on Cannery Row, a project that includes the demolition of an existing building, an aquarium official told The Pine Cone this week.

In June 2014, the aquarium announced its proposed Ocean Education and Leadership Center for California's Schoolchildren and Teachers, a center it hopes will "offer innovative and highly interactive education programs" for teachers and students K-12.

"We're still raising funds for the project, but hope to break ground before the end of 2016," aquarium communications director Ken Peterson told The Pine Cone.

The proposed center will take the place of an existing building at 625 Cannery Row. That building, which backs onto the Rec Trail, will be razed in favor of a modern,

13,000-square-foot complex which will house the center.

The project requires the approval of the Monterey Planning Commission and the coastal commission, and Peterson told The Pine Cone that the aquarium will begin the process of getting permits this month.

The aquarium paid \$12.4 million for the building that will be torn down, along with an adjacent one at 585 Cannery Row. The two buildings, across the street from El Torito Mexican restaurant, are adjoined by an enclosed skyway.

At first sight, the City of Monterey seems to like the idea.

Monterey's architectural review committee reviewed preliminary design plans for the center on Sept. 2.

And planner Kimberly Cole said that a new building has the opportunity to "dramatically improve the design character of

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A decrepit commercial building that backs onto the Rec Trail on Cannery Row will be transformed into state-of-the-art center for teaching young people about the oceans, if a plan announced by the Monterey Bay Aquarium is approved.

Dallas says he's the one to move city past Stilwell era

By MARY SCHLEY

"I BELIEVE I am the best candidate running for mayor to move us beyond the past failures and continue healing and rebuilding our community and our government, because I will put Carmel first," city councilman Steve Dallas said this week, as he made official his bid for the mayor's seat in the April 2016 election.

Dallas, a lifelong city resident who served on the planning commission and was elected to the council in 2014, joined the council right in the middle of the tur-

moil wrought by former city administrator Jason Stilwell and his second-in-command, Susan Paul. He likened it to walking into a disaster and acknowledged that, while everyone would like to forget the whole thing and move on, voters should think back on that era at city hall when deciding whom to vote for.



Steve Dallas

Burnett to return \$25K to contributors

By MARY SCHLEY

SINCE HE is not running for reelection next April, Mayor Jason Burnett is offering to give the roughly \$25,294 sitting in his campaign war chest back to the people who donated it to him.

And if they don't want it back, he said he'll find something else good to do with it.

The law doesn't require candidates to return unused campaign funds to the contributors, and Burnett said he conferred with a Sacramento law firm specializing in campaign finances, just to make sure he was following the rules.

"They said it was unusual to offer, but I thought it was the right thing to do," he said. "People contributed to my candidacy, and if I'm not going to be a candidate, I should give them the opportunity to take that back. And whatever is left, we'll

"When I think of the employees who were hurt, the costly investigations that went nowhere, the legal matters over wrongful terminations, the wasted taxpayer dollars on contracts, the citizens' march on city hall, I am still shocked at the weird, strange, dark time we went through as a community," he said. "I don't want to repeat that past."

Dallas' opponent, Ken Talmage, was a member of the council that hired Stilwell in September 2011 and was vice mayor for part of his tenure. But he was also there, alongside Dallas, when the council fired Paul, negotiated Stilwell's departure, and brought back former city administrator Doug Schmitz, who took over in October 2014 and began the process of smoothing things out before abruptly leaving the post a year later due to health concerns.

"If the council members had listened to the people expressing their concerns and to The Pine Cone raising serious questions for a full year before change

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DAMETRA REJECTS LANDLORD'S ALLEGATIONS

By KELLY NIX

THE PROPRIETORS of Dametra Cafe have responded to a \$3 million claim filed by their landlord in an ongoing dispute over who owns the Mediterranean restaurant.

In a Dec. 22, 2015, document filed in

Monterey County Superior Court, Faisal Nimri and Bashar Sneeh "deny each and every allegation," landlord Connie Laub made against them the previous month, including financial elder abuse and breach of contract.

Laub's lawsuit was in response to a suit Nimri and Sneeh filed in May 2015, alleging she was trying to abscond with the restaurant.

Nimri and Sneeh say they're Dametra's true owners, while Laub maintains that she is and claims the men merely manage the restaurant.

Laub also alleges in her complaint that Nimri and Sneeh have failed to pay her or caused her to lose more than \$3.1 million, including more than \$600,000 from "past-due payments of management fees over a period of years," more than \$1 million from loss of use permits and licenses, "which, otherwise, would have been transferable to other real property locations," and more than \$1.5 million in damages from "loss of her business value of her restaurant."

The men, she also claims, preyed on the finances of Laub by "intentionally misrepresenting the nature and effect of the Dametra management agreement to suggest that they, not Ms. Laub, are the owners of the business," according to her countersuit.

While a trial has not been set in the matter,

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New Year's resolutions for last century and this

By ELAINE HESSER

IF YOU look back through old Pine Cones, you'll find evidence of varying degrees of celebration on New Year's Eves past. Sometimes there's barely a mention of a socialite's party, while in other years, there are pages of goings-on leading up to midnight.

One hundred years ago, The Pine Cone and its publisher, William Overstreet, marked the occasion by placing a list of New Year's resolutions for Carmelites right smack-dab in the cen-

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TURNING GUNS INTO GOODWILL



PHOTO/COURTESY ERIC YOUNG

A U.S. Marine from Carmel Valley who served in Iraq is working with friends in that country to help families get their lives back after the devastation of war. See page 7A.