

The Highlands lowdown

March 2011

The Highlands Community Association Newsletter

Volume 57, Number 3

www.highlandscommunity.org

HCA Membership Drive Is On!

by *Liesje Nicolas, HCA Membership Chair*

A great big thank you to the Highlanders who have volunteered to be HCA Area Reps for 2011: **Davis Barch, Florence Beier, JP Bernard, Arline and Phil Dixon, Margaret Errington, Christine Foote, James Goodman, Bob Gutierrez, Jonathan Horton, Betty Jue, Davaid Krakower, Jack Kundin, Sylvia Merkadeau, Liesje Nicolas, Aleth and Dixon Reilley, Niar Thorpe, Etienne Vick, Eva Voisin, and Michael Xie and Cindy Zhou.**

The HCA and our community appreciate your efforts to make our membership drive a success!



Area Reps l to r (standing) Dixon Reilley, Aleth Reilley, Jack Kindin, Arline Dixon, Phil Dixon, David Krakower, Bob Gutierrez (sitting) Eva Voisin, Liesje Nicolas, Betty Jue

Our 2011 HCA membership drive is off to a great start, thanks to the nearly 170 members who have joined already! Your HCA Area Reps will be knocking on your door to remind you to join or renew your membership in the Highland's Community Association (HCA). They can answer your questions about the HCA and relay any concerns you have about the community to the HCA Board.

Check out our website: www.HighlandsCommunity.org to see who your Area Rep is or to pay your dues.

Update On The Chamberlain Project

by *Sam Naifeh, HCA Land Committee Chair*

The housing project approved in April 2010 for the Chamberlain Group has made a step forward. The proposal has recently been modified with regard to the four houses along Bunker Hill. These homes will be reduced in size from the approved size of approximately 3,800 square feet to about 2,700 square feet, and the garages will be reduced from 3-car to 2-car garages. There will be no changes to the open space parcel or the required conservation easement.

The County has let us know that the project will be implemented in phases: the first phase will be construction on the four lots on Bunker Hill (at the smaller house size) and creation of the 93+ acre open space parcel that will be protected forever through a conservation easement. Construction of the seven homes on the Ticonderoga, Cowpens, and Cobblehill lots would follow at a later date and would occur in accordance with all the conditions of approval established in April 2010.

HRD Meeting

Tuesday, April 12, 7 p.m.
Rec Center Social Room

lowdown Deadline

Friday, April 1

HCA Meeting

Tuesday, March 22, 7:30 p.m.
Rec Center Social Room

FROM THE HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION



Rick Priola
HCA President

With the rains continuing into March, it looks like we won't have to face water restrictions this year. It's been a very good rainy season for our gardens.

Public Safety: There have been several reports lately of individuals ringing doorbells in the neighborhood, claiming to be students and asking for money for a trip to Spain. They say their parents live in the Highlands, but when asked for their parents' name or whether they have a license to solicit, they have no answer, and quickly leave the front door. There also have been several robberies of cars that were parked outside. It makes me wonder if the Highlands has been identified as a good target for these scams and crimes.

The Sheriff's deputies remind us to be alert, keep our eyes open, and immediately call the Sheriff's office, 650-363-4763, if we see anyone who behaves suspiciously or raises questions about what they're doing in the neighborhood. The deputies will follow up appropriately.

The car robberies have all been to cars that were parked outside and left unlocked. Not only should you lock your car when it's left outside, but it's also a very good idea not to leave anything valuable in the car, especially on the front seat, when it's not parked in your garage.

4th of July: We need volunteers for all the parts of our celebration on the 3rd and 4th of July. Participating in putting on this event is a Highlands tradition, and you'll have a good time doing it, too. Whether you want to help at the fireworks, the parade, the midway, food booth, tickets, cleanup, we'll find a place for you. Call me at 574-8313 to sign up.

Construction Project at the Dam: You won't be able to see the work on seismically upgrading the out

let structures of the Crystal Springs Dam because it will mostly take place under water. But the project is underway. The project team has also been surveying Sawyer Camp Trail. You might occasionally see a truck on the trail, which is closely coordinated with the San Mateo County Park Rangers staff for safety.

Two sources of information about the work are a 24-hour phone line, 1-866-973-1476, and the website, www.sfwater.org/SCT.

Community Cooking Kick-Off: Don't forget this new event to support Highlands School. The location has been changed to the Siguenzas home. See page 9 for details.

As always, I look forward to meeting you and seeing you at the HCA meetings. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at hcapres@gmail.com

**HCA Meeting March 22, 7:30 p.m.
Agenda**

- I. Call to Order
- II. Review and Approval of the Minutes
- III. Sheriff's Dept/CHP/CDR Cal Fire
- IV. Reports
 - A. First Vice President
 - B. Second Vice President
 - C. Treasurer
 - D. Membership
 - E. *lowdown*
 - F. Public Utilities Committee
 - G. Emergency Services Committee
 - H. Land Committee
- V. Old Business
- VI. New Business/Announcements
- VII. Adjournment

HCA Board Officers for 2011

President:	Rick Priola	574-8313
First VP:	Jean-Pierre Bernard	357-7644
Second VP:	Gene McKenna	346-7348
Treasurer:	David Krakower	(415) 398-1100
Secretary:	Denise Haas	372-0373
lowdown Editor:	Dorothy Greene	341-1752

HCA Committee Chairs for 2011

Land:	Sam Naifeh	572-8787
Public Utilities:	Wil Pinney	345-2546
Emergency Services:	Pam Merkadeau	280-9046
Membership:	Liesje Nicolas	773-7805
lowdown Co-Editor and Technology:	Beverley Madden	574-1593

HCA MINUTES

by Dorothy Greene for Denise Haas

HCA Meeting

February, 22, 2011

I. Call to Order — The meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m. by President Rick Priola.

II. Review and Approval of the Minutes — A motion to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2011, was made by Phil Dixon, seconded by Jack Kundin and approved unanimously.

III. Sheriff's Department/California Highway Patrol/CDF

No members of the Sheriff's Department, Highway Patrol or CDF were present. Rick Priola reported on a spate of car burglaries on Brandywine that had occurred during February. They were all in cars that had been left unlocked. Residents should make sure that cars left outside are locked. A reminder will be included in the March lowdown.

IV. Reports

A. First Vice President — Jeff Schwartz of the Rec Center staff brought the board up to date on the Child Care Center construction, which is proceeding according to plans.

B. Second Vice President — Written information about the process of producing all parts of the July 4th celebration is available, and Rick Priola is working on getting volunteer chairs for them.

C. Treasurer — David Krakower reported that preparation of the 2011 budget will take place in March and April.

D. Membership — Liesje Nicolas reported that the membership kickoff has gone very well. Ninety people used the envelope and flyer in the

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February *lowdown* to send in dues. Area Reps met before the HCA meeting and will begin going around their neighborhoods in March.

E. lowdown — the deadline for the March lowdown is Feb. 25. Dorothy Greene announced that the return address on the *lowdown* will change to the HCA mail box address to comply with Post Office regulations.

F. Public Utilities Committee — James Goodman reported that currently there are no plans for increasing our sewer charges for 2011. There is some talk about combining some current sewer districts into one large one, but there are many complications involved. David Krakower reported that the tall light towers on Skyline Blvd. near the dam will be taken down as part of the project to rebuild the portion of Skyline Blvd. that is now closed because of the dam upgrade projects now underway.

G. Emergency Services Committee — No report.

H. Land Committee — Sam Naifeh reported that the Chamberlain group is reducing the lot sizes and house sizes on their Ticonderoga sites. He will write an update on the Chamberlain project for the March *lowdown*.

V. Old Business—None

VI. New Business/Announcements—None

VII. Adjournment— The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.



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Beginning and Intermediate Guitar

M 3/28-6/13 3-7 p.m.
\$200/205

T 3/29-6/14 3-7 p.m.
\$200/205

Learn how to play the guitar by focusing on technique and ear training. This class will de-mystify the sometimes overwhelming and confusing technical information about playing the guitar. The approach and method is beginner-friendly and aims to make each lesson a productive and enjoyable experience. Teacher Robert 'Bo' Razon is a multi-instrumentalist, arranger, composer, and teacher, who for nearly three decades has been studying, researching, teaching, and performing within the musical genres of Blues, Rock, Jazz, Latin and World. 30 minute time slots.

Ages 6 - Adult

No Class: 4/4, 4/5, 5/30, 5/31.

After-School Hoops

W 4/13-6/8 12:05-1:05 p.m.
\$135/140

Join One-on-One Basketball for AFTER SCHOOL HOOPS® at Highlands School. Skilled and experienced basketball instructors will conduct a one-hour clinic each week for you and your friends. Learn, work hard, get better with ONE ON ONE!

Tap Dance

W 4/13-6/15 1:45-2:15 p.m.
\$55/60

Tap for Tots/Tap I (Ages 3-9 yrs): This class is for the little tap dancer with little or no tap experi-

ence. We will have fun while building skills in basic tap technique. Please wear clothes you can dance in. Tap shoes required. Parents are welcome to watch. **No Class: 5/4, 5/11.**

Horse Riding Lessons

Th 4/14-6/16 4-5 p.m.
\$350/355

F 4/15-6/17 4-5 p.m.
\$350/355

C'mon out and ride! 10-session program teaches English-seat riding and horsemanship skills, such as safe handling, horse behavior, and grooming at Glenoaks Stables. Limited class size for personal attention, new friendships and lots of fun. All children must have a parent sign a release form before the first session. For more information, call 650-854-4955 or email glenoaksstables@gmail.com. All lessons will be held at beautiful Glenoaks Stables at Glenoaks Equestrian Center, 3639 Alpine Rd., Portola Valley.

Drum Circle

W 4/20-5/25 12:30-1:30 p.m.
\$72/77

Learn to play the drums and other percussion instruments, such as shakers, bells, and sticks. We'll explore African, Caribbean, and Latin music styles. We'll work on rhythm, technique, how to play in a group, and also do some singing and dancing. Come check out the fun! Drums will be provided for all students in the class, but students can bring drums if they have them. **Class held at Highlands School.**

Japanese Calligraphy

F 4/22-6/10 4:30-5:30 p.m.
\$70/75

Let's explore the unique brush stroke of Japanese Calligraphy. Step-by-step, you learn the fun of the brush stroke and Japanese language. \$10 material fee is payable to the instructor at the first meeting. **Ages 9 years old to adult.**

► **Rec Programs:** to page 10



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COMMUNITY AND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH NEWS

Community Celebration--You're Invited

by Valerie Anderson, President, College of San Mateo



This spring is an especially exciting time at CSM as we are eagerly awaiting the completion of our new signature building, College Center. To celebrate this milestone, the college will host a ribbon cutting and open house on Thursday, April 14, at 2:30 p.m. We would like to invite you, as members of our community, to attend. Parking is available in Beethoven, Parking Lot #2.

Following a brief program, the building will be open for self-guided tours, campus-based entertainment and refreshments.

This four-story 140,000 square foot building located in the heart

of the campus features outdoor terraces and stunning views of the San Francisco Bay Area. It will serve as the hub of college life, providing a "one-stop" center of student services. It is also the site of the new Learning

Center, bookstore, cafeteria, digital media program and the Creative Arts and Social Science Division Office. We hope you will be able to join us for the celebration.

Connect to College

A Night of Information for High

School Seniors and Parents

Thursday, April 14, 2011

6:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Free and open to the public

CSM Theatre

Parking is available in

Beethoven, Parking Lot #2

Crystal Springs UMC News

by Steve Schlichter



Our new interim pastor is Hee-Soon Kwon, a native of Korea who has spent much time here in the States. Come and meet her.

Crystal Springs Players: The Players have generated some energy after having to give up on doing a fall play. We will be presenting a play in the spring, *A Memory of Water*, about three daughters who return for their mother's funeral and compare notes. It is a comedy with some drama thrown in.

We open on April 1 with our usual gala and run April 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9. Call 650-345-2381 for reservations. Prices are: Gala \$20, Regular \$16, Senior \$14, Students & Groups, \$12, Thurs., Apr.7, \$10.

Combo: On the last Sunday of the month we take advantage of our own and visiting musicians to put together a combo to play more contemporary music. Come on down at 10 a.m. and listen to our talented people.

► UMC News: to page 10

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COMMUNITY NEWS



SMCAAlert.info
San Mateo County's Community Alert System

Have you signed up yet with SMC ALERT? It's an notification system administered by the San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services that is used to contact you immediately with important information and updates during urgent or emergency situations by sending text messages to your email account, cell phone, pager, Smartphone, or other handheld devices. The service is free, though your phone or device provider may charge a fee for texts.

When you register, you personalize the locations you want to include. For example, you might want alerts related to your your home address, neighborhood, work site, children's schools, etc. There are choices for the subjects for alerts too. For more information about the system and to register in it, go to <http://www.smcalert.info>

**If You Leave Your Car Outside,
Keep The Doors Locked!**

**Investigation after car robberies in the
Highlands found that unlocked doors made it
easy for the thieves to help themselves**

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1920 Lexington, SM- Listed @ \$1,250,000
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Highlands Book Club

by Jo Nassutti



We usually meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 10:15am in the Exercise Room at the Rec Center.

Our book for **April 5** is *The Widow Ginger*, by Pip Granger, who also wrote *Not All Tarts Are Apple*, an enjoyable book we read several years ago. *The Widow Ginger* is an unconventional look at life in the East End of London through the eyes of a world wise child.

On **May 3** we will discuss *The Soloist*, a true story by newspaper columnist, **Steve Lopez**. The story is a portrait of mental illness, social neglect, and the fight to save a fallen prodigy. Lopez puts a face on mental illness and shows how friendship can change the lives of both the downtrodden and those who try to help.

Questions, call Jo Nassutti at 345-8915. Curious, come by and observe.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Did You Know?

Many Peninsula residents have been composters for years, but for those who have never attempted it, questions arise about how to handle the food scraps and the small plastic pails we all received to hold them. It can get messy and sticky to collect food scraps for a week in an unlined pail.

Here's the solution, thanks to the rethinker, the quarterly newsletter of the South Bayside Waste Management Authority, Rethinkwaste--the regional agency that help local communities reduce waste through innovative programs and partnerships and by managing service contracts.

You can use compostable bags to line your pail or your cart, but they have to be products approved by the Biodegradable Plastics Institute. These are available at some local stores. You can also line your pail with newspaper, paper bags or paper towels and empty all of the contents together into the compost cart.

The *rethinker* also reminds us to put our carts away and out of sight after they are emptied. Go to www.RethinkWaste.org, or www.RecologySanMateoCounty.com for more information.

Spring is Coming!

Looking forward to warmer weather and the benefits of the generous rainfall we've had, the *lowdown* is hoping to begin a column about gardening ideas and hints that are especially appropriate for the Highlands weather conditions, soil, and environment.

We are ready to compile items

that come as email or attachments to lowdowneditor@gmail.com, but would enthusiastically welcome anyone who would offer their gardening experience and expertise to review and organize the submissions received or write some articles.. Pretty clearly, the *lowdown* editor has a brown thumb. Help!



Tasty Treats @ Crystal Springs Village is now OPEN on Sundays!

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HIGHLANDS RESIDENT

COMMUNITY NEWS

Senior Network News*by Barbra Cohn*

Are you taking care of an elderly person? Do you need help making arrangements or providing care? Lately, we have noticed many inquiries about this; as a result, there is consideration of a "caregiver" support group to fill the void. For more information, call Dianne Weitzel at 571-6122, or e-mail kona_caves@juno.com.

Senior Net members (and all Highlanders as well) are invited to a pot-luck lunch on Tuesday, April 12. We will gather at the Rec Center at 11 a.m. for a presentation "The Rec Center and You," which will cover all the exciting new plans for children, for adults, for seniors--in other words, for all of us. Then we can eat all the goodies everyone will bring. How's that for a social network?

At long last--a reasonable way for older adult non-drivers in the Highlands to get around. Of course, you do have to plan ahead

a bit, but imagine the freedom to come and go as you need! The Peninsula Jewish Community Center offers transportation for doctor appointments, shopping, or personal appointments in San Mateo County on a first-come first-served basis. The cost is \$5 for a door-to-door round trip. Call (650) 378-750 no later than the Thursday of the week before the date you want.

Monday dates are March 14, 21, 28, and April 4, 11, 18. **Tuesday** dates are March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, and April 5, 12, 26. **Friday** dates are March 4, 11, 18, 25 and April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. No same day requests will be taken.

Of course, our own Rec Center staff continues to provide free door-to-door transportation to shopping at Crystal Springs Shopping Center every Tuesday morning. Call Jeff at 341-4251 to reserve.

It's Membership Time!

To join or renew your membership in the HCA, send in your dues of \$30 and any contribution for the 4th of July to HCA 205 De Anza Blvd #49, San Mateo, CA 94402-3989.

Questions: email liesjenicolas@gmail.com



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Highlands lowdown

Editor and Business Manager:

Dorothy Greene

phone: 650-341-1752

email: lowdowneditor@gmail.com

mailing address: 1879 Lexington Ave., San Mateo, CA 94402

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Articles, Letters, and Photos must include your name, address and phone number. Any material accepted may be edited to fit space or lowdown standards. Items may be submitted through any of the following means, in order of preference: email lowdowneditor@gmail.com, or typed double spaced, or legibly handwritten. Photos can be color or black/white and can be delivered to the email or postal address. Mail or drop off contributions to lowdown, 1879 Lexington Ave., SM 94402.

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Neither the lowdown nor the HCA is responsible for the accuracy of any information in the display or want ads. Readers are encouraged to check that licenses are current and to get references. Subscriptions for non-residents of the Highlands are \$25 per year. Individual issues are \$2.50 each, if available.

HIGHLANDS SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY NEWS

Highlands School News

by Mary Tsao

Recycling News: Highlands parent Jay Beard is organizing the recycling efforts at our school.

This program earns us money that we use for field trip scholarships. Please bring your plastic bottles and cans to the school playground, and Jay will make sure they get to the Recycling Center. Please separate your plastics and cans into different bags. Thank you, Jay!

PTA General Meeting to feature Kidpower: The next PTA general meeting and parent education night will be on Monday, March 28 at 7 p.m. in the Highlands School LGI room. It will feature speakers from Kidpower, which is a nonprofit organization whose vision is to work together to create cultures of caring, respect, and safety for all. Their mission is to teach people of all ages and abilities, especially children in need, to use their power to stay safe, act wisely, and believe in themselves. The "People Safety" skills taught by Kidpower prepare individuals to be emotionally and physically safe with others and with themselves.

You don't have to be a parent of a Highlands School student to come. Childcare will be provided.

District Superintendent

Retiring: San Mateo-Foster City School District Superintendent Penderly Clark plans to retire on July 1. The district Board of Trustees is hiring a search firm to find a replacement superintendent. If you want your voice heard about what you think the needs are for our school and this district, contact the district board. You can

find information on the district website at www.smfc.k12.ca.us.

Volunteers needed for the 2011-2012 PTA Executive Board: The PTA (Parent Teacher Association) is a group of parents, teachers and staff working together to make our children's education the best possible. Are you ready to serve your school by volunteering on the PTA Executive Board? There are many positions that allow you to get even more involved at Highlands Elementary. Contact Kevin McGowan at chomcgowan@yahoo.com to be considered by the nominating committee.

Dates for your Calendar

March 19 – Community Cook-Off

March 23 – Family Dinner Night at Our Place (Tell your server you're from Highlands!)

March 24 – Report cards

March 28 – PTA General Meeting and Parent Education Night

April 1 – Minimum day

April 4 through April 9 – Spring Break

April 20 – Open House

Cook-Off Moves to the Siguenzas



The 1st Annual Highland Community Cook-Off on Saturday, March 19, has been moved from the Rec Center to the

home of the Siguenza family, 2252 Allegheny., but all the other details about the event haven't changed.

It begins at 6:30 p.m., and tickets cost \$50. If you are participating as a chef in the competition, your ticket is free! You can purchase tickets and find out everything you want to know about the Cook-Off on its website: <http://www.highlandscookoff.com>, or by phoning Linda Siguenza, (650) 315-5931.

This is truly a community event, with cooks of all generations and a variety of cooking styles participating. It's something to look forward to. Yum, Yum!

WE'D LOVE TO WORK WITH YOU ON YOUR REMODEL OR ADDITION!

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PHOTO: ©2009 MICHAEL O'CALLAHAN

COMMUNITY NEWS

► **Rec Programs:** from page 4

Spring Camp 2011

April 4-8 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

Weekly fee \$250/255

Field trip to Jungle Island & Lone Hill Park on 4/7

Daily fee \$60/65

Field Trip Day fee \$70/75

Our Spring Camp will be filled with engaging activities and a memorable field trip to keep your child entertained all week long. Stop by the office or give us a call at (650)341-4251 to sign up today.

Kids Nite Out

3/18/11 6-10pm \$25/Child with \$5 sibling discount

Take advantage of an evening out while your kids are having a fun-filled night at the Rec. We'll provide a pizza dinner and a movie.

► **UMC News:** from page 5

Our Sunday School has been growing. If you would like your child to participate, the school is held every Sunday at 10 a.m., except the first Sunday of the month when the kids remain in the regular service.

Launch of 211 Helpline in San Mateo County Completes 211 Regional Network

by Maria Stokes, United Way of the Bay Area

More than seven-million residents across the Bay Area now have access to the 211 helpline with the official launch of the service in San Mateo County in February. 211 is an easy-to-remember, toll-free phone number that connects callers with local community services, such as food, shelter, counseling, employment assistance, quality child care, volunteer opportunities and more. San Mateo County is the final county in the Bay Area to receive 211 service, completing the 211 regional network, which now serves 12 counties.

Last year, 211 assisted more than 218,000 Bay Area callers, up 6% from 2009. The service is confidential and available 24 hours a day in more than 150 languages.

“Launching 211 in San Mateo County makes finding help, and giving it, a lot easier,” said Anne Wilson, chief executive officer of United Way of the Bay Area. “The helpline enables residents to quickly navigate the maze of govern-

ment and nonprofit agencies that provide health and human services in San Mateo County.” She noted that without 211, people often call several agencies before getting through to the correct service, while many give up before finding the help they need.

211 is also an integral component of the county’s disaster-response infrastructure and will alleviate misuse of 911 for non-emergencies. During a disaster, 211 provides critical information about evacuation routes, food and shelter, as well as support with finding new jobs and permanent housing during long-term recovery.

Residents from around the Bay Area can visit ww.211bayarea.org to search the region-wide database of services. Information about 211 nationally can be found at www.211.org. United Way partners closely with San Mateo’s Community Information Program (CIP) to update and maintain the 211 San Mateo County database, which is the backbone of the helpline.



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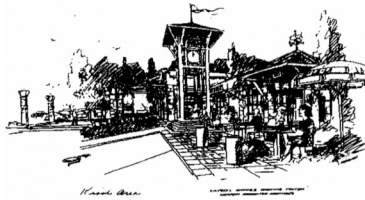
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Crystal Springs Chiropractic, Dr. Jordan Savara	574-1456	Rainbow Pizza (Home Delivery)	571-1848
Crystal Cleaning Center	342-6978	Realty World, Martinelli Properties	578-1300
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Crystal Springs Fish & Poultry	212-7921	Renew Life Center, Dr. Julieta Gabiola Primary Care, Internal Medicine	341-3600
Crystal Springs Pet Hospital	341-3438	Ritz Salon & Spa	570-5750
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A VIEW FROM THE HIGHLANDS

Parent-Free Zone

by David Dobbs

A few months ago I met another dad who lives on my street. He was trying to place me - just another balding beige dad - and then the answer zapped him like a capital "S" on a Kindergarten report card. He looked at me with a devilish grin and said in a low hushed voice, "You're the house with all the kids in the front yard." Bam. ID'd by the glaring anomaly of kids at free play. I felt, strangely, wrongly accused.

This guy got me thinking. Of all the houses on my street, I could only think of one other that sometimes had kids playing in the front yard. And those kids were kids I knew because they were often playing at our house too. Then I thought about the Highlands. There were a few front yards with rope tree swings swaying in the trees, but I could count them on one hand.

I now had a strange heightened sensitivity to finding kids at play - kids swooning on swings, brewing flower petal tea; kids tending to delicate fairy hideouts, kids soaring with capes made of dated tablecloths holding tree branch scepters raised to the heavens. But all I saw was yard after yard of landscaped yet kid barren zones.

So then I started rationalizing all this. Maybe the kids just aren't home. A lot of families have two working adults. The kids are in after-school care, activities, and play dates until dinner time. But that didn't answer why I didn't see the kids on the weekends. Then the safety factor hit me, hard. Mountain lions—they've been spotted in the Highlands and on Sawyer Camp. Kid snatchers—glaring Amber a propagate our fears, yet abductions occur today at the same rate as 30 years ago. Roads and cars—kids could

run in the street, or worse yet, a car could come crashing into a yard. One afternoon a driver lost control on the curve upstream of our house, drove over our lawn and landed in the shrub that borders our yard. It still remains severed.

With life comes risk and dangers of all kinds. There's the sick malice of terrorism and unintentional horrors like the gas explosion tragedy in nearby San Bruno. As parents, there are some risks and dangers you can and should try to mitigate, like putting medications out of reach and making sure you teach your kids to look both ways before crossing. Others, there's just no way to prepare. The randomness of life happens and your kid may get caught up in it, for the worse. It is very scary, and makes me want to hide my kids in a safe place and wait it all out.

But kids won't always be able to call on us when they need help. They need an ongoing dose of a parent-free kid-space to build their internal skill set. Kids just play differently when adults aren't around watching their every move, dictating how they play, anxious to smother - or better yet prevent - every boo boo.

That gap in our shrub is still there. To me it's a silent but glaring reminder that danger really can happen right in your front yard. But it's also a reminder that I can't let irrational fears nor can I let myself hold my kids back. The kids were playing outside the very next day, without my watchful eye. As they happily dart about thick in imagination, climbing the lemon tree to seek refuge from the nipping Sheltie intruder, they are soaking up the joys and important lessons that only a kid who is free will find.