



1st Friday means 1 thing: Cruise Night

By Peggy Kelly
Santa Paula Times

Today, May 4, is the first Friday of the month, which means the Santa Paula Cruise Night tradition on Santa Paula's Main Street continues, from about 5 p.m. to dusk.

Since 1998, from April through October, the first Friday of each month means visitors to Main Street can see all types of vehicles at Santa Paula Cruise Night, the first and original continuous car show in Ventura County where all pre-1975 vehicles are welcome, from antiques to muscle cars, low-riders and hot rods.

Cruise Night debuted in April, starting its 20th season, showing off not only cars, trucks and motorcycles, but also the historic downtown of Santa Paula, perfect for strolling.

For the past 20 years, classic car owners and car lovers have flocked to the city's downtown to show off their vehicles, coming from as far away as San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles and Orange counties.

What they find is more than a car show, but an experience as they are surrounded by wondrous architecture, with a choice of restaurants offering everything from Mexican, New Orleans, Irish and American standards. Live music along the streets adds up to a hard combination to beat. Strollers can wander from 10th Street to Seventh Street and many side streets are also closed to accommodate the overflow of cars.

The May Cruise Night features the Cruise Knights, a band that quickly became a hometown favorite and now spends much time on the weekends traveling to far-flung and much larger gigs. The Knights include Carlos Juarez, Paul Skeels, Jerry Byrum, Wes Easley and Brian Hernandez. Juarez and Easley are retired Santa Paula police officers, Skeels is the city's retired fire chief, Byrum is a Santa Paula Fire Department captain, and Hernandez, well, he's a



Santa Paula Cruise Night started off the 20th season of Ventura County's oldest and original continuous car show, an event that draws exhibitors and attendees from Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo and Orange counties. Members of the Ventura County Woodies Club came out in a variety of distinctive vehicles that brought back memories of surfing and Beach Boys music last month. The free and fun Cruise Night tradition continues again tonight on Santa Paula's Main Street from about 5 p.m. to dusk.

drummer.

There's a strong bond between public safety and Cruise Night. The event was founded by, and continues to be sponsored each month, by the Santa Paula Police Officers Association and the Santa Paula Chamber of Commerce. Retired Santa Paula Police Department Officers Dave Anderson and Henry Aguilar have been the coordinators of Cruise Night since it started and Assistant Police Chief Ish Cordero is — and always has been — involved.

At the April season premier, the three men were discussing just how long Cruise Night has been in existence.

"Dave and I were just talking

about that, whether this is the 19th or the 20th," said Aguilar, who noted they agreed it was the 20th year.

"I think we're going to have to put something special on the T-shirts this year to show it's the 20th," said Cordero of the specially designed shirts that each month feature a different Cruise Night participant.

The shirts — many designed by the late Santa Paula artist Wendell Dowling — are collector items and have found new life as quilts and pillows.

Cruise Night is a happening, a friendly mix of people who are into cars or just into socializing who come from far and wide — or from just around the corner

— to enjoy the ambiance of a free night on the town.

Animals on leashes are welcome. At the April Cruise Night, Doreen and Jack Pitluk had their dogs, as well as Hamilton, who received the bulk of attention.

"Oh, Hamilton just loves people, he's really friendly," Doreen said of the pig she and Jack, the CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, purchased last year.

Some passersby stopped and gawked when they saw Hamilton, considered to be the most intelligent domesticated animal species in the world.

"It's Cruise Night," shrugged Police Chief Steve McLean. "Everybody loves it."

Understanding the inevitable: How to prepare for wildfires

By Naomi Pitcairn
Special to the Santa Paula Times

A diverse crowd gathered at the Santa Barbara Public Library on the evening of April 26 to hear Fire Ecologist Dr. Jon Keeley speak about chaparral wildfire preparedness.

The invitation for the Los Padres Forest Watch-sponsored event promised topics such as:

-- "How our chaparral-covered hills and mountains differ from other fire-prone landscapes."

-- "How humans have changed fire frequency in our region."

-- "How we can best protect our communities from the inevitable."



Keeley works for the U.S. Geological Survey and is also an adjunct professor at the University of California at Los Angeles and an author of numerous publications. His research has focused on chaparral ecosystems

and historical fire patterns in California and their relationship to climate, urban development and invasive plants.

How do chaparral-covered hills differ from other fire-prone landscapes?

Over the last century, forest fire management has drastically reduced fires in the Sierras, but our coastal chaparral environment is significantly different from the forests of the Sierras. Climate and weather are different. The plants are different. There are chaparral plants that cannot exist without fire, indicating that chaparral burns naturally, although today it is burning much more frequently than it used to.

Lightning-ignited fires probably burned in coastal California once or twice a century prior to the arrival of Native Americans. Today, because of human activity, lands are burning often enough that we are at risk of losing some of those fire-resilient plants. That is because the increased frequency of fires does not allow these plants enough time to accumulate seeds sufficient for regeneration after fire. Global warming may be also a factor, as it favors fast growing, non-native invasive grasses over the native-shrub regeneration.

Humans have changed fire frequency in our region

Keeley began his talk by discussing the October fires in the North Bay. He put up a graphic that superimposed the fire boundaries of the 2017 Tubbs Fire with the 1964 Hanley Fire. The graphic made it immediately clear that the Tubbs fire was almost a mirror image of the Hanley fire half a century ago. We've had increasing fires in past 50 years, yes, but we've also had big fires in the past. The significant difference is that in the 2017 Tubbs Fire, 43 lives and 5,643 structures were lost, whereas, in the 1964 fire, no lives and relatively few structures were lost. There are two reasons for the difference, according to Keeley: Population growth (more people are living in fire-prone areas today) and freak weather events (in this case a high-pressure cell in 2017, generating extreme winds).

The local Thomas Fire also had atypical winds created by a high-pressure cell in the interior with low pressure off the coast. This was a weather event and Keeley made the point that climate does not tell us about events such as:

1. Heat waves and extreme wind events.
2. Long-term droughts.
3. Patterns of ignition.
4. Land management and use (pre- and post-fire).

All of these things affect fires, along with climate change. Research suggests that in coastal California, global warming probably won't have a large impact on the number of fires or area burned, but may favor annual exotic species that come with their own set of problems.

What about temperature, precipitation and fire?

Studies show that in the Sierras, spring and summer temperatures can dictate how much burns, but spring and summer temperatures do not affect our chaparral-covered South and Central Coast. The same thing goes for annual variations in precipitation: It is significant in the Sierras, but not so much on the coasts. The Sierras don't burn every year because they don't dry up enough every year for that to happen. Here in Southern California, it is hot and dry enough to burn every year, so there are other things that determine our fire situation. We can explain the variation of fires in the Sierras better than we can here and all of the Sierra forest research is not applicable to our area.

What do we know?

According to an infographic of seasonal temperatures taken at the Chesebore Weather Station in the Santa Monica Mountains, this past year's winter temperatures were not abnormally high, although summer and autumn temperatures were higher than average. Data from this same site, however, has shown that most of the last six years have been abnormally dry. Although this past winter there was higher-than-normal rainfall, the long-term drought has resulted in mortality of many shrubs in the chaparral and this is thought to have contributed to the size of the Thomas Fire.

Freak wind events

Many climatologists are weighing in "new normal," said Keeley, and a lot depends on the period of time one is looking at. Santa Ana winds are typically associated with autumn. November is the peak. Significant fire in December here is not typical, but is not an anomaly, either. Keeley brought up charts that showed several significant December fires in California

WILDFIRES:

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Measure T Committee reviews spending 1-cent sales tax

By Peggy Kelly
Santa Paula Times

The Measure T Advisory Committee recently welcomed a new member and elected a new chairperson, but finances took center stage.

Jose Melgar's term came to an end and Andy Sobel now chairs the five-member committee that offers advice to the city on the expenditure of Measure T funds, a 1-cent sales tax approved by voters in November 2016.

The intent of Measure T is to fund public safety, youth programs and roadwork. As a general tax, the money is placed in the General Fund and the Santa Paula City Council approves revenue and expenditures.

Annual revenues were initially estimated at \$2.1 million, but are expected to be much higher, the committee, including new member David Garcia, was told. Recreation Director Ed Mount updated the committee on the Needs Assessment study approved by the council on April 2 and already under way.

Mount said the consultant attended a Youth Town Hall meeting and has scheduled interviews with community members and stakeholders; still to come are a community survey in August and subsequent workshops to determine needs.

He said he hoped it would all be completed in November.

When Sobel questioned the cost, Mount said it is approximately \$33,000.

"That's a long story and it was hard fought to get that under \$40,000," said City Manager Michael Rock, who added that much of the work is being done by staff "to keep costs under control."

The timing of the Needs Assessment report is timed well, Rock said, since the committee would receive the "official close-out" of the current fiscal year in November, which closes June 30, but has to undergo an audit.

Committee member Rose Chacon asked if the consultant would also be reaching out to private and home schools as well, and was told all could be involved in the process.

The committee also heard from city Finance Director Sandy Easley who noted the city had to pay state charges for setup and administration, but, "hopefully," the city will receive more than \$3 million in Measure T funds, she said.

Auto sales are "way up," Rock said, and the increase in Measure T revenue is a "very significant number" due to that and an overall stronger economy.

Some questions concerned expenditures for the Fire Department, which is in the process of being annexed into the county Fire Protection District.

"Code enforcement fire, what

is that?" asked Chacon, who was told an inspector was hired in November and inspectors are paid out of different funds depending on which department and/or function they are serving.

Chacon asked about community service salaries listed. "We went over this when we adopted the budget," said Rock, who noted that youth services/programs are allotted 20 percent of Measure T revenues and 5 percent is dedicated to community services.

Police services were also discussed, with the committee hearing that a portion of Measure T funding was used for "retention, recruitment and equipment" via raises given to existing officers, new hires with starting salaries set higher and equipment upgrades. "It's a yin and yang there," said Rock, with officers on and off duty, leaving for other agencies, new hires and overtime costs.

The council directed that \$150,000 of Measure T funding be placed in an account for the planned police station expansion/upgrade.

After more discussion, Sobel recommended that youth services have a reserve.

Rock suggested the committee wait for the Needs Assessment recommendations for study and then approach the council: "They can do a budget adjustment at any time," he said. "I think your

Wildfires: Continued from Page 1



The mountains behind the city of Santa Paula are on fire on Dec. 4, the day the Thomas Fire started near Steckel Park. Naomi Pitcairn took this photograph from the yard of her South Mountain home in Santa Paula.

history that were blown up by hot winds. Due to the unusually stable high/low pressure event of this past December, however, a remarkably persistent weather pattern developed over North America and the Pacific. This weather pattern caused the Santa Ana winds to blow far longer than any previous wind event, about 10 days. The Matilija fire wind event, in comparison, lasted five days. Is that to be the new normal?

Ignitions

Ignitions have been declining since 1980, although not necessarily burn acreage. Fire-prevention programs in the last 40 years appear to have had an impact. This decline has not happened with all sources of ignition, however. Arson is down, but power-line-ignited fires have not declined. Power-line fires generally don't start, except in high-wind events that that either blow down lines or cause them to arc. An audience member mentioned that our power line poles are only rated at 55 mph. Although Keeley suggested that one viable solution would be underground power lines in Santa Ana wind corridors, San Diego Gas & Electric Co, which was heavily sued after the 2007 fires, claims underground lines are too expensive. Instead, they are monitoring wind speeds and plan to shut off the power grid when winds exceed 80 mph.

Of course, people will complain and maybe go buy generators, which can start fires as well, so the situation is not ideal. Other solutions that have been brought up include stronger power poles and solar. It is the opinion of some that the courts are probably going to force the power-line companies to rethink things in some way or other.

Pre- and post-fire management

Prescription burns seem to have had no impact on the spread of the Thomas Fire and no real impact on stopping wind-driven fire events. In Montecito, Keeley said, maybe pre-fire management could have had an impact in some areas where vegetation was substantially older than other areas within the Thomas Fire because older chaparral accumulates more sediment, but it's not entirely clear because the extremely steep landscape was a big factor.

The majority of Southern California fires burn in August and September during Santa Ana

winds. Fires in July and August, however, indicate that big fires can occur without these extreme winds. Big fire events seem always to be preceded by extreme drought, meaning droughts that last several years. The huge Cedar fire followed 54 months of extended drought. Extended drought creates a dieback of foliage, which increases the fuel load. Records from the Cheseboro Weather Station near the Thomas fire area indicate that the drought didn't end after 2014 as it did in the rest of California.

There was extensive dieback in local chaparral, likely the legacy of the four-year extended drought. Extended drought likely plays a role by producing dieback that creates lots of fine fuels that help spot fires start. If embers land on live shrubs, they probably will not ignite, but dieback could increase spotting behavior. Dieback is one thing that makes Keeley sometimes rethink prescribed burn.

Seeding vs. physical barriers

Seeding works in other places, but physical barriers are more effective in California where rains come all of a sudden in winter, washing everything off of the slopes, including the seeds. Non-native rye grass has been used for seeding, but doesn't seem to reduce post-fire erosion. Native flora comes back better than seeded species. New problems also can arise from

new solutions. When mustard was used for seeding, it washed down into orchards and farmers complained. Diverting sediment that runs off with sandbags and hay bales and other physical barriers is the most effective post fire management, according to Keeley.

Home preservation, defensible space

Brush clearance is mandatory 10 feet from roads and 100 feet from dwellings in our local counties. Clearing around houses is important for providing defensible space for firefighters. Most houses however, studies show, burn from embers. There are two main ways homes in our area burn:

1. The correct protective vents were not installed and embers were sucked into the buildings because of temperature potential (difference).

2. Trees hanging over roofs. The issue being that the dead leaves that accumulate on the roof and in the gutters ignite when embers land in them. It would appear that these affordable improvements could make the crucial difference in preserving a structure.

Methods and priorities

Fact: Firefighters don't put out fires in extreme wind events. They evacuate people in front of the fire and try to contain the edges of the fire and wait for wind to calm. Agencies are

primarily concerned with keeping people alive. Keeley stressed the importance of having one person in charge during a fire event. You have to have one person in charge and it has to be decided ahead of time. It is too hectic during a fire to change strategies easily. Different agencies can have a difficult time working together. An audience member asked about why military help was not used during the Thomas Fire and we learned that the military is not even on same frequencies as our CalFire and Forest Service. It can be dangerous to try to coordinate different groups with different leaders in an event like this. One leader. Really important — a fire event is extremely chaotic.

Fuel breaks

Several studies have found that vast fires never affect the majority of breaks because fires didn't happen to occur where they were created. Fuel breaks are effective when they provide access to firefighters to start backfires, but not effective on their own.

Fuel breaks need to be installed strategically to provide access to firefighters where there is something specific to protect. Fuel breaks are not firebreaks. The difference is that fuel breaks are constructed prior to fire events where firebreaks are constructed during a fire event.

There was some discussion on shaded fuel breaks as well. Shaded fuel breaks have a reputation for being effective in forested systems where fires burn in understory. But this is another example of how forest fires are different from chaparral fires. In forests, winds are more suppressed, which creates a different kind of fire system and makes it hard to apply what works in the forest to chaparral.

Repeat fires

Fires are on the increase partly because humans have been replacing perennial vegetation with annual vegetation that produces more food crops. Our native Ceanothus would not survive without fire, but repeat fires replace native with exotics. Repeat fires can happen within several years now. Some species like Ceanothus need about 20 years to recover, so frequent fires will eliminate certain species. Invasive annuals move in with

repeat fires, which creates a trend. More reading on this topic is available in the Los Padres Forest Watch's Spring 2018 issue.

-- Naomi Pitcairn watched the Thomas Fire from her South Mountain Road home for 11 straight days in December.



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