

Winter 2012

We Got a Grant!

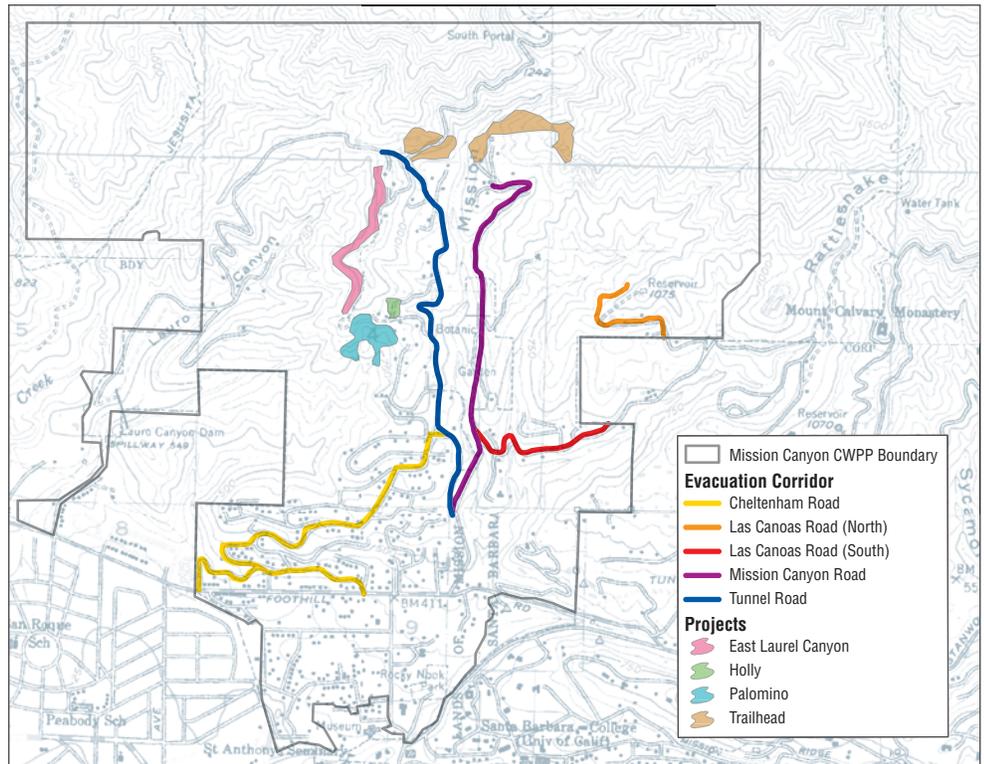
By Laurie Guitteau

Thanks to a last-minute rush of letter writing, MCA is proud to announce that it won a Fire Safe Council (FSC) grant for over \$67,000 for the coming year. We could not have done it without the swift agreement to write commitment letters by many residents because the Council's matching requirement went from 25 percent to 50 percent with little notice. Getting "matching" funds, or an equivalent contribution from homeowners, doubles the funds available for brush reduction work, an effort that some residents, particularly those in the Tunnel Trailhead area, believe helped save their homes during the Jesusita Fire.

MCA was the only group to receive funding on the South Coast. Federal grant money for vegetation control is something of an endangered species; the total grants awarded went down to \$4 million this year from a high of \$35 million in 2007. One thing that gave us an edge was Mission Canyon's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), which was completed and approved over the past year in a tortuous process that involved the county, environmental groups, and residents. The Plan, which is posted at MissionCanyon.org sets out the why and how of managing vegetation on the wild and not-so-wild lands, and was a grant requirement.

As MCA gets deeper into the mysteries of the grant process, we have learned that homeowners within the project areas can still help with the matching necessary to keep this grant. Many Mission Canyon residents either clear brush or garden in project areas, and that work can count toward matching. By letting MCA know those costs, you can contribute to our grant requirement.

To help us meet our match requirement for this grant, we ask that residents keep a record of the time they spend working—or receipts or records for gardeners, arborists, landscapers, or any workers you hire—in these areas this year. This would be like the defensible space work we homeowners do year-round to trim trees, brush, grass, shrubs,



This map shows areas where MCA hopes to implement vegetation reduction measures using the 2012 Fire Safe Council grant awarded to our community.

SOURCE: Santa Barbara County Fire Department

hedges, and remove dead matter, but in the project areas.

The project priorities were set with the help of Captain Bob Tanner, vegetation management officer for Santa Barbara County Fire. To get permission for and participation in the vegetation work, Owen Guitteau has volunteered to work with Capt. Tanner to contact homeowners. With years of experience in construction and life in the canyon, Owen Guitteau will be in charge of managing the contractors hired to do the actual clearing. We will undoubtedly use a variety of methods, including a goat herd, depending on the terrain.

Our escape routes—Mission Canyon Road, Tunnel, Cheltenham, and Las Canoas roads—are on the project list. If you live along these roads, the work you do within 10-20 feet of the roadside can be counted as matching. As the map shows, some other

project areas are in the Tunnel Trailhead and the Holly and Palomino Road areas.

The trailhead at the top of Tunnel Road is a priority, not only because it lies between the National Forest and homes, but because of the increase in traffic on the trail. On weekends and holidays, cars and people often clog the roads and the trail. We have counted over a hundred cars on a given day. With that many people, many of them from out of town, the risk for fire prone behavior is high. Thus, it is most important to build on the work that the Jesusita Fire did in clearing the old brush and maintain as much of a firebreak as possible.

Holly Road suffered more than any neighborhood in Mission Canyon during Jesusita, as it sits on a ridge within eyeshot of the fire's origin. Several projects there will

Grant (cont. p.2)

Grant (cont. from p.1)

create a large firebreak along the road and also remove dead trees and tame the brush in a couple places just south of the road. Again, help from homeowners in these areas would be a big help in making this project successful, and some of the property owners have already committed to matching funds.

Maps of the project areas will be posted on the MCA website so that all can see what we are attempting. Areas that impact the most residents have top priority. We may not be able to fund the work for all the projects we have identified, but we will do as much as we possibly can. Hopefully, the homeowners' match will be generous, allowing more projects to be completed.

We are excited to gain this grant and hope you share our enthusiasm. Feel free to contact MCA if you have questions or concerns. For full information on qualifying types of brush work, to receive time sheets, and to have any questions answered, please call Laurie Guitteau, 682-4474, guitteau@cox.net (except in February), or write to FSCgrant@MissionCanyon.org.

How We Prepared for "The Big One"

By Barbara and Albert Lindemann

As many people know, the three members of our family who happened to be at home when the Jesusita Fire broke out decided not to follow evacuation orders. The decision was not taken lightly and was a reasonable one only because over the 40-plus years that we have lived next to the National Forest, Al took many measures to protect our house in the event of the wildland fire that we knew would come one year. It is hard to say that we "saved" our house by remaining during the fire; even with all the protective measures described below, our house might have been one of those lost to the fire. So many chance factors are involved when a house survives or is lost that there can be no absolutely sure preventive measures. However, we know that we had significantly reduced the *probability* of losing our house.

We bought our house in an estate sale in March of 1968, less than four years after the Coyote Fire had raged through Mission Canyon, destroying the garage on our property and two houses close to it. Barbara is from the East Coast and knew little about the California fire environment. Al, in contrast, had grown up in Santa Monica, the son of a fire department employee and brother of a firefighter. He understood the dangers of living in an area like upper Mission Canyon.

Al worked with several main goals, gradually refined and largely achieved over 25 years of observing Santa Barbara fires: Clear the brush as far from the house as possible; protect the house from chance embers or heat combustion; make it safe enough that we could take shelter in it if unable to flee from a fire. He observed that most houses are consumed by flames only some time after the fire storm had passed over. The plan was not to try to fight that storm, but to stay inside, and go out afterward, when the heat was bearable, to put out spot fires that threatened the house.

Our neighbors in 1968, who had rebuilt after the Coyote Fire of 1964, said that the rows of pine trees on "our" property had led the fire directly to their house. The then-

owner of our property replanted all those pine trees! As they grew, they were beautiful, but we recognized their danger once they became large. Our property four years after the fire was already remarkably overgrown with brush near the house. At first we could barely afford the mortgage, so we needed to do the clearing ourselves and were limited in other measures we might have taken. After laboring to clear the canyon side, Al decided he had to get some help, and thus we acquired our first donkey, and a while later a goat. The donkey was a keeper, but the goat turned out to be a handful, overgrazing the hillside and escaping frequently to nibble on neighbors' trees and roses, so we had to sell her, but we've had donkeys ever since. They don't eat everything, and we still eventually need to hire workers seasonally to clear and haul out the brush, and for many years, Al burned brush piles in the winter months. It was actually 10 years before Barbara permitted the beloved pine trees, grown 40 feet tall and surrounding the property, to be cut down.



Surrounded in smoke as they keep an eye out for falling embers and spot fires during Jesusita are Tim Lindemann (left), his cousin Cody Shirk and uncle Walter Shirk.

PHOTO: Barbara and Albert Lindemann

Changes to the house occurred as we could afford them: Cover all exposed eaves; enclose the overhanging porch; add rooftop sprinklers; replace the patio covering with metal frames and 8x8 wood beams (instead of 2x4), and use noncombustible screening.

At first, Al devised plywood covers that could be installed over the windows. As fire season neared every year these were placed against the house for easy access, thereafter to be stored in the garage (after the first real rains of the season). Over time the plywood became warped and the boards ever harder to put up and take down, so five years before the Jesusita Fire we made an investment in European-style metal folding shades that can be rolled down manually on short order. Al also bought Barricade (a foaming agent to be sprayed on before a fire got close), smoke masks, and portable firefighter tents that can be used for emergency shelter once outside the house. Barbara thought he was going overboard at times, but she no longer thinks so!

Fire danger is, of course, not just the concern of individual land owners but of the whole neighborhood. Once one house catches fire, it often ignites the others closest to it. Every year we got together with our closest neighbors to review our respective plans for evacuating people and pets, to check on where the gas turnoffs were in each of our houses, and to make sure we had current phone lists. We coordinated brush clearance, sharing equipment and expense. In the two years before the Jesusita Fire, the Mission Canyon Association used federal grant money to clear defensible space behind the houses that border the National Forest. The fire department used this area as the first line of defense.

Barbara spotted the first smoke from the Jesusita Fire, called Al and our son, Tim, and all set to work. Al and Tim nailed up plywood or asbestos sheets over all the outside vents, filled all available garbage cans with water, pulled out the Barricade and sprayed all surfaces they considered vulnerable, especially on the sides of the house facing the chaparral areas. Barbara rolled down the metal shades, filled the bathtubs and searched for the smoke masks and fire tents. The reserve water was in case the water supply failed: boots, buckets, and wet towels can be used to put out spot fires. In fact, it is hard to see how these would have been adequate in the case of the Jesusita Fire, which lingered

much longer than the usual wildland fire, and left much burning behind. Fortunately, fire trucks arrived before the fire (as did Al's brother and his son, also a firefighter).

This article is about our preparation for wildland fire, so we won't include what could be a lengthy report on our experiences during the fire. We are confident that the firefighters took a stand in our neighborhood not only because it was the last one before the chaparral area but also because the brush was well cleared from our houses. We felt protected inside our house, where in fact the heat never got above about 85 degrees, though the smoke did get bothersome (but never to a dangerous degree, and we did have smoke masks). Aside from that, we cannot say with absolute certainty that our house would have been spared if we had been entirely on our own and the firefighters had not been there. At one point, with their hose at the ready and blazes starting near our house, the firefighters discovered they had no water pressure. Fortunately, they had a pool pump in their truck; it took them less than a minute to put the pump in our neighbor's pool, hook it to the hose, and start to douse the spot fires.

The crews did a remarkable job on both sides of the upper canyon. From inside the house, peeking out our metal shades, we could watch them fighting, and we gained a profound sense of their courage and professionalism.

Aside from the details mentioned above, we might note a few other "lessons." Perhaps most of all, wildfires seem always to have a surprise in store, something not expected (for example, the Jesusita fire was in early May, not usually considered fire season); that means "over planning," or to think through various scenarios, is a good idea. More obvious, one needs to recognize that remaining in the house while a fire is raging all around will be stressful, and no one should contemplate staying unless he or she is prepared physically and mentally. (That said, we should also note that we never felt in real danger and did not experience any panic attacks — though we did of course feel horror as we saw houses burning in the distance, though not any house directly neighboring ours.)

Every fire is different, and generalizations about them are risky. The Jesusita Fire was extreme, since the area had not burned for so many years. Other fires may be less extreme, but predicting the severity of a fire is difficult, above all if wind is a major factor, as it usually is. Although we stayed — and would stay again — we agree that for most people and in most instances it is best to be on the safe side, getting out while the getting is good. The worst eventuality is to panic and try to escape once the fire has arrived. No, there is something even worse: not to prepare at all.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Roadwork Update

MCA has received notice from the city that water main repair work will close Exeter Place for a time in February. The county says that a repair of a washout on upper Tunnel Road will close a lane in March or April. As of this writing, it is too early for any better prediction of dates for these partial road closures. To receive updates from MCA, make sure we have your email address. Send to webmaster@missioncanyon.org.

Jesusita Rebuild Stats

Sadly, of the 80 homes lost to Jesusita, County Planning's Petra Leyva tells us, only 40 have pulled permits, but happily 24 have finals. By contrast, of the more than 200 homes lost in Tea Fire, about 160 are either completed, rebuilding, or in plan check. Many have asked us if insurance woes are the reason many have yet to rebuild. We don't know. If you have a rebuild story (or nightmare) you'd like to share, we'd like to hear it. Contact us at webmaster@missioncanyon.org.

Parking Ban

For times of Red Flag Warning when fire dangers are at their height, 1st District Supervisor Salud Carbajal has sponsored a resolution to close roadside parking to Tunnel Trail. This ban is in effect from the trailhead to Montrose Road and will be enforced by CHP and Sheriff's deputies. Why? Evacuation and emergency response will be much faster and safer without the presence of hikers (who sometimes number in the hundreds) and their often illegally parked cars.

Pets and Coyotes

MCA continues to get complaints about dogs barking, particularly late at night in Mission Canyon Heights where everyone is much "cozier." We know you love your dog, but your neighbors also love their tranquility. And speaking of pets, the coyotes are back. A Ben Lomond resident recently saw a coyote running down his driveway with the remains of a small animal in its mouth, and coyotes have been spotted on Cheltenham as late as 10 a.m.

MCA Officers & Directors

Ray Smith: President; Fire; 682-5583, ray@eri.ucsb.edu

Laurie Guitteau: co-Vice President; Membership*, Newsletter; 682-4474, guitteau@cox.net

Alastair Winn: co-Vice President; Museum*; 687-5682, alastair@appliedsilicone.com

Jean Yamamura: Treasurer; Fire, Newsletter*, Ordinance; 845-3051, jean.yamamura@gmail.com

Richard Axilrod: Museum, Traffic & Parking*; 687-5296, sbbaldy@gmail.com

Ralph Daniel: Fire, Mediation*, Ordinance, T&P; 682-2889, rdaniel@fambus.com

Susan Davidson: 770-2713, susan@sbms.org

Kellam de Forest: History, Museum; deforek@aol.com

Cass Ensberg: Garden Volunteers*, Trails; 898-8004, cassejd@cox.net

Alex Feldwinn: Webmaster*; alexanderfeldman@gmail.com

Darby Feldwinn: 845-6522, feldwinn@chem.ucsb.edu

Tom Jacobs: ADRC*, Museum; 898-8004, tomejd@cox.net

Barbara Lindemann: lindebar@gmail.com

Milt Roselinsky: Fire*; 563-9212, milt.roselinsky@cox.net

Kevin Snow: 448-6653, haybarn@cox.net

*Chair of committee

The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of Lee Anne Dollison, graphics, production and photography.

Board meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at the Natural History Museum's MacVeagh House. All are welcome to attend.



Mission Canyon Association
P.O. Box 401
Santa Barbara, CA 93102

Prst Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Santa Barbara, CA
Permit #139

Your MCA Newsletter Winter 2012

We Got a Grant! (p. 1)
How to Survive a Wildfire (p. 2)

2012 Annual Dues of \$35 Are Due Now! Send to: P.O. Box 401, S.B., CA 93102

Santas and Turkeys and Bunnies, Oh My!

Kudos to Evelyn and Mindy at 2709 Foothill for brightening our holiday seasons! These creative gals fashioned the whimsical Santa and droll turkey that winked at us as we drove by each day. Can't wait for that flirtatious Easter Bunny to reappear. The sad thing is that the same vandalism that has plagued the Nativity Scene at the Old Mission resulted in the turkey losing his head and Santa being egged. (The parish had to hire a guard to protect



PHOTO: Laurie Guitteau

its display this year; visitors' dogs so terrified the live animals that they escaped.) We suggest a Neighborhood Watch to protect our local displays that bring goodwill and joy to so many.

You'll be hearing more about Evelyn and Mindy and their exceptional garden in a future newsletter. These two artists have created an oasis of calm and beauty right on busy Foothill Road. Stay tuned.

Three a Day

Since the Jesusita Fire many invasive species of plants have taken over Mission Canyon. The fire temporarily removed native plant coverage, and human intervention has allowed some exotic species to flourish. Preserving the native ecosystem in the upper canyon watershed has become a focus for my family. Our first target is the castor oil plant (pictured here), which is an easy mark with its distinctive leaves and its toxicity to humans and animals, even goats.



We pull out the plant when it is small, or cut the larger shrubs near the ground and carefully paint the stems with Roundup. We bag all the spiky seedpods and deposit them in the trash—not in green waste or compost.

Our approach to getting the invasive plant population under control is "Three a Day, Make Them Go Away." We invite every member of the canyon community to participate. Our 1,100 residents could be removing 3,300 invasive plants every day. Over the course of a year, that's a lot of weed removal—a doable solution and one that we can all join in to preserve the beauty of Mission Canyon.—Susan Davidson