



# BENNETT VALLEY VOICE

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BENNETT VALLEY HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 1986

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bill MacIver, President  
David Steiner, Vice President  
Nancy Batson, Sec/Treasurer  
Tamara Boulton      Warren Watkins  
Bill Jacobs          David Zedrick  
Paul Mowbray        Michael Bates

## BOARD OF DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

The terms of three directors, Mowbray, Watkins and MacIver will expire in October. Mowbray and Watkins have served on the Board for many years—Paul was a founding member of the Association and served as its first President. Warren has been on the Board since 1981. MacIver has been on the Board less than three years, having been appointed by the Board to complete the term of a Director who resigned. Terms of office are three years.

Warren has thrown his hat in the ring for another term. Paul has stated that he would like to see "fresh blood" on the Board and will step aside if other candidates will run. Bill is willing to stay another term because he is just learning the job. However, he could easily be persuaded to retire if others desire the position.

Paul is certainly right about the Board needing new members and fresh insights. Residents are strongly urged to become involved, present nominations and vote. A Board that elects and reelects itself year after year is in danger of becoming out of step with community consensus and interests.

## BENNETT VALLEY DAY CELEBRATION PLANNED

The farmers and wineries in Bennett Valley are sponsoring a day of picnicking and family entertainment at Matanzas Creek Winery on the 18th of October from 1:00 P.M. to dusk. The purpose of this community gathering is to highlight Bennett Valley's farming and ranching activities, celebrate the Valley's commitment to agriculture, and to recognize the community spirit that has

nurtured commercial agriculture and small scale farming enterprise in Bennett Valley.

Bennett Valley Day will feature a barbeque by the Bennett Valley Volunteer Firemen, tasting of wines of the four Bennett Valley/Sonoma Mountain wineries, and presentations by all groups representing Bennett Valley farming and ranching, including 4-H Clubs, horse breeding/stabling, cottage industries, fine wool growing, weaving, garden clubs and other activities that contribute to the Valley's rural economy, character and scenic beauty.

Additional information will be forthcoming as plans develop. Note the date on your calendar and let's enjoy a family day with our community. As with all such volunteer efforts, help is needed. Don't hesitate to let the planning committee know if you have suggestions or need further information. Contact person: Suzanne Hall, 575-3523.

## GRASS FIRES IN BENNETT VALLEY!

We only need to drive into Santa Rosa on Bennett Valley Road to see how vulnerable our community is to grass fire danger. The charred hillside stands as a grim reminder of the threat grass fires pose to life, property and our wooded fields, canyons and hillsides. Fortunately, the only loss this time was scenic beauty for which we can thank the wind direction and hard work by our local and County fire fighters.

Fire Chief Tom Clark and Captain Mattuizzi of the B.V.F.D. report that the cause of Bennett Valley's biggest fire in more than 13 years has not been determined. The working theory is that the fire was started by heat from a catalytic converter on an automobile that had pulled off to the side of road. The Chief urges residents to be aware of this danger and relative new factor involved in grass fire incidents. Motor vehicles should not be operated in grassy areas in any case.

The fire burned 65 acres of grass, brush and oak trees. Our local firemen were augmented by

firefighters from the California Department of Forestry, Rincon Valley, Santa Rosa, Kenwood, Glen Ellen, Cotati and Forestville.

A firecamp was established and four convict crews were brought in to help contain the fire. Helicopters bucketed water from a local pond to aid the effort. As the fire raced up Bennett Mountain toward Annadel State Park, it was stopped by a direct hit on the leading edge with fire retardant dropped by a fire attack aircraft.

Another mysteriously caused fire occurred recently on Inverness Road, off of Crane Canyon, at 1:30 in the morning in the middle of a field. No cause has been established for this incident. 1/4 acre was burned before being extinguished by local firemen.

#### LAND USE UPDATE

The Board of Supervisors have approved the rezoning of the 45 acre Hartman Arabian Horse ranch on Guenza Road from Rural Residential (A1) to Agriculture Exclusive (AE) and authorized a Williamson Act (agricultural preserve) contract to be signed. In doing so the owners will be allowed to construct a new house on the property. The property has been sold to new owners who plan to continue the ranch operations and upgrade the facility. We welcome our new neighbors, Loui and Shalimar Vavra.

#### BENNETT VALLEY ROAD/MATANZAS CREEK BRIDGE REALIGNMENT PROJECT

This project has been suspended by legal action against the County due to its adverse environmental impact, alleged conflict with the B.V. Specific Plan, and traffic safety considerations. This action is private and not sanctioned by the BVHA.

#### TRAFFIC AND SPEED COMPLAINTS

There is a growing number of complaints from residents about excessive speeds and increased traffic on Bennett Valley Road. Neighbors near the road state that they cannot carry on a normal conversation in their living rooms due to high speed road noise. Most complaints heard from residents relate to increased traffic problems.

The BVHA Board took this problem to the California Highway Patrol last year. Though the CHP stated that accident rates in Bennett Valley do not justify frequent patrolling and enforcement, we did notice that a crackdown was initiated and that speeding seemed to subside for awhile. Although the CHP was resistant to a reduced speed limit on Bennett Valley Road, many residents and Board members feel that a lowered speed limit would be beneficial. Comments from residents would be helpful to the Board in considering our action on these complaints.

#### VITICULTURAL GROWTH IN BENNETT VALLEY

A little known fact but one vitally important to the growth of agriculture and preservation of

the rural lifestyle in Bennett Valley is the boomlet of vineyard development taking place in our community. Bennett Valley homeowners are investing heavily in the rebirth of winegrowing in one of the County's best agricultural regions.

If this is news to you, take a drive down Bennett Valley Road and as you approach Enterprise Road look toward the foothills of Sonoma Mountain at the new vineyards of the Dinners, Strotz', and Raffos. These new vineyards augment the slightly older ones of the Katons, Oswalds, and Moores and the longer-established vineyards of the Bergers, Campbells, Brunings, McIntosh's and Farinas in the Enterprise Road area.

Jim Katon has become a major factor in the growth of the Enterprise Road area's vineyards. Besides developing about 60 acres for his family and neighbors, his crews provide a major pool of skilled vineyard workers in the Valley. Jim is also the vineyard manager for several owners in the area.

New vineyards are also being developed along Bennett Valley Road. Although it can't be seen from the road, a new 20 acre vineyard on a 65 acre parcel that was split from the Walker property is being developed by new neighbors, the Nelsons. The Nelson vineyard is just over the knoll to the south of the Walker pond at 6624 B.V. Road.

Other new neighbors, the Wagners, have purchased the Rivard vineyard parcel and are engaged in a major renovation and replanting project that can be seen on the north side of Bennett Valley Road, across from Grange Road. Next door to the Wagners, Matanzas Creek will harvest the first crop off of its new 20 acre vineyard. Matanzas Creek is also planning new plantings to begin next year.

There are numerous small vineyard plantings through out the Valley, such as the Nostrants and McGillivrays who have turned relatively small acreages into serious businesses and are selling their grapes to premium producers at prices far above average. The Nostrants are planning to expand their plantings on the slopes of Mt Taylor.

This story is meant to highlight known recent and planned growth, although it is certainly not exhaustive on that subject. It is not meant to be a compendium of all the vineyards in the Bennett Valley area. Older, well-established vineyards exist in all parts of the Valley, but that's another story.

Our hats are off to these neighbors, both old and new who have invested in keeping our Valley's agricultural economy alive and adding to its scenic beauty.

Bill MacIver

## COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

The Sonoma County General Plan, of which the Bennett Valley Specific Plan is a part, is in the process of being updated. A supervisor appointed citizen advisory committee has been meeting with county planning staff Wednesday evenings at 7 pm at the planning commission room for the past year and will continue this schedule through September and beyond. You are invited to attend and give input at the end of each meeting.

Staff and the committee are preparing drafts on land use, resources, air & ground transportation, noise, safety, open space, housing, and public services. Additionally, there is a special committee advising on the agriculture element because of strong feelings expressed by both farmers and citizens as to the future of this industry.

Predictably, conflicts between public good vs. private rights, or quality vs. quantity, or environment vs. economics, etc. have arisen. Growth pressures are the source of the biggest issues to date regarding agriculture preservation, traffic, resource protection, and community separators. Allocating desired quantities of residential, commercial, industrial, public, resource, and agricultural land uses is the charge of planning staff, the committees, and the supervisors.

As far as Bennett Valley is concerned, our 1978 Specific Plan, which has worked well, is to remain basically intact. It is not the purpose of the update to re-write existing specific plans, but rather to clarify their meaning and provide consistency with the General Plan as required by state law. This is not to say that valley residents need not be vigilant in following the process as it approaches planning commission and supervisor hearings in the coming months. The future of Sonoma County and the quality of our lifestyle is very clearly at stake.

Warren Watkins

BENNETT VALLEY IMPROVEMENT AWARD goes to John and Linda Rutledge. Congratulations for a job well done.

## NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH NIGHT

Privacy is one of the reasons we all enjoy living in the Bennett Valley area. Unfortunately for some residents their privacy has been invaded by thefts and burglaries. Such was the topic when Frank Lange, longtime resident of Sonoma Mtn., spoke at our last Board Meeting.

It was suggested that we sponsor a Neighborhood Watch Night sometime in late October. The date is pending till a location is found. You will be notified when it is determined. All residents are welcome - Tell a Neighbor.

The Sheriffs Office will come and speak to the community on how to better protect your home and property and of the possibility of forming Neighborhood Watch groups in your area.



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