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Famous Tree Takes a Break

By *Sophie Braccini*



Last year's lights on the tree in front of Diablo Foods
Photo Andy Scheck

Every November the proud redwood tree that stands in front of Diablo Foods lights up for the holidays. But not this year. Arborist Thomas Raeth of Lafayette Tree and Landscape, who has been taking care of the tree for 20 years, advised the Stokes family to give the tree some room to breathe, and not turn on the bright garland of lights enjoyed by passersby over the last several seasons.

"We were told that the tree was stressed and needed more oxygen," says Connie Collier, daughter of Diablo Foods founder Ed Stokes, "so we dug up the asphalt around the trunk to increase the size of the bed, aerated the dirt around the roots and fertilized it." The garland, which has lain amongst the branches for seven years, was removed.

"What happens with a tree is that when something stays on it for a long period of time, the tree tends to try to incorporate it," said Raeth, "I saw signs that the tree was trying to 'digest' the wire and that could become dangerous. Additionally, the tree needed an extended footprint to continue to be healthy."

As the asphalt was removed from around the trunk, Raeth discovered a deep ring of concrete that was choking the tree down to its root system. "It took two days to remove it," says Raeth, "but now, with the new planter, we've been able to inoculate mycorrhiza fungi and nutrients in the root system and we anticipate seeing some healthy growth from that tree."

"It's sad not to see the tree lit, but its health comes first," states Collier, "this is a landmark and we want to take good care of it." Although the Stokes family does not own the building or the parking lot, Collier says that they feel a sense of responsibility toward the tree.

"Next year we'll take out the dead wood, lightly prune it, and we'll be able to string new lights," says Raeth. He's expecting new white LED lights from Germany to be available next year, which will be "energy saving, longer lasting and less heat generating," adds Raeth's wife Tamara. "We are looking forward to lighting it again next year," said Collier.

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