

West Nile Virus

Mona Miller, DVM

West Nile virus (WNV) encephalitis is a neurologic disease causing inflammation of the brain that primarily affects humans, horses and birds. It is fairly new to North America, having been simultaneously diagnosed in these species in New York in 1999. It is now established throughout most of the United States. Transmission is by a mosquito bite. Some types of birds are reservoir hosts, which means that mosquitoes become infected when taking a blood meal from an infected bird. Then the mosquito transmits the virus to the next individual bitten. Mammals are “dead-end” carriers, which means that the amount of virus in the mammalian bloodstream is too low for a mosquito to acquire the virus during a bite.

WNV disease symptoms are related to the neurologic system, and include stumbling, circling around, hind leg weakness, inability to stand, tremors and death. Not all species and not all individuals are equally affected. In humans, less than one percent of those infected will develop serious neurologic disease. About 20 percent of infected people might experience flu-like symptoms, and the majority of people who are infected don't actually get sick.

Crows and other corvid birds (such as jays, ravens and magpies) are most sensitive to the effects of the virus. Other birds such as sparrows and finches can also develop disease and die. Interestingly, chickens and turkeys can become infected but quickly develop bloodstream antibodies to clear their viral load, so do not get sick. Due to this resistance to disease, these birds are often used as sentinels to ascertain the presence of WNV in a geographic location. In California, there are 200 chicken flocks throughout the state that are routinely tested with a blood test during mosquito season to determine if West Nile virus is in the area.

Pets are exposed to WNV in the same way as other species – through a mosquito bite. However, dogs and cats are very resistant and very rarely become ill. Cats might exhibit very mild signs such as slight fever or lethargy, and it is not likely that a pet owner would notice unusual symptoms or need to seek treatment for this. There is no specific treatment other than supportive care. Dogs and cats do not pose a risk of transmission to other animals. Likewise, because mammals are “dead-end” carriers, affected tree squirrels do not pose a threat of transmission to other mammals.

The best precautions against mosquito bites are to protect skin with an insect repellent, to avoid the higher level of exposure that usually occurs at dawn and dusk, and to eliminate sources of standing water on your property. If you find a dead bird or tree squirrel, you may file a report at www.westnile.ca.gov or call 1-877-WNV-BIRD. This can be important because these dead animals might be the first indication that the virus is active in your area.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her young son, two cats and Luka a new puppy. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.

St. Perpetua School's "Garden of Learning" Feeds a Café and Young Minds

Submitted by Margot Dunphy



Photo provided



St. Perpetua student Liv Drey smiles with Monette Meo.

Photo Kerry Armistead

The comforting scent of orange blossom and rosemary surrounds parents on a warm late summer morning as they sit listening to distant laughter of children. This hidden sanctuary is the “Garden of Learning” and has become a vital teaching tool at St. Perpetua School in Lafayette.

The garden is a labor of love for long-time Lafayette resident Monette Meo and her entourage of volunteers. Several years ago, Monette and a group of dedicated parents transformed this patch of dirt into a thriving bed of creativity and learning. “I

want to give them the experience of an outdoor classroom,” Monette says, “to teach the children that their food doesn't need to come from three thousand miles away.”

To maintain this special place, Monette needed a fundraising vehicle. So, 10 years ago, she launched Café St. Perpetua. The garden produces key ingredients for menu items at the café, and students help create them. Established as the sole support for the garden, the garden feeds the café and the café feeds the garden. “The café was a financial tool to build and support the garden,” Monette says, “Now it's a wonderful gathering place of different generations – and one supports the other.”

Café St Perpetua is open to the public from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. Friday mornings during the school year. On Friday, December 7 St. Perpetua School invites all incoming kindergarten-age children and their parents to get a taste of kindergarten, the Café and the Garden of Learning. Come for coffee at the Café between 8 and 9 a.m., followed by conversations with school staff and a visit to the Kindergarten classroom from 9 to 10 a.m. Space is limited. Pre-registration required: <http://stpsparenteducation.eventbrite.com/>. Contact school Development Director Natalie Deininger for more information: ndeininger@cndo.org.

Animals Blessed at SMC

By Cathy Dausman



Photo Cathy Dausman

A four-footed flurry of dogs, cats and rabbits gathered on the steps of the Saint Mary's College chapel during an annual Blessing of the Animals ceremony October 14. The event honors Francis of Assisi, known as

the patron saint of animals. It was organized by the Episcopal congregation of St. Giles, which holds its services at the chapel. “St. Francis is one of my favorite saints,” the Reverend Justin Cannon said. Cannon is priest-in-res-

idence at St. Giles. He also said it was important that participants remember all who work for the good of animals, for “less fortunate animals” and for working animals. No fur flew during the brief, outdoor service.

MOFD in the Pink for Cancer

By Cathy Dausman



Back row, from left: Jared Costanza, Sr., Matt Epperson, Mark DeWeese, Jacob Airola, and Mike Rattary. Front row: Angela Davison-Lee, Grace Santos, Nancy Amino-Lee, Kim Kennedy, and Isabella Kennedy. Photo Cathy Dausman

Moraga Orinda Fire District employees and their supporters are on fire this month . . . and

all for a good cause. The firefighters are promoting October's Breast Cancer Awareness month by wear-

ing pink t-shirts emblazoned with the district logo and selling them to the public. Proceeds from the sales benefit the Susan G. Komen foundation. MOFD firefighter Mike Marquardt brought 300 shirts through the International Association of Firefighters Local 1230 to sell at the Moraga Fire Station 41 open house October 13. Marquardt said shirts are available “until we run out,” during regular business hours at Fire Station 43, 20 Via Las Cruces, Orinda. “Last year we had only two [shirts] left over,” Marquardt said. “We get a lot of requests from the local hospitals for t-shirts. It's usually individuals in the ERs asking after seeing [emergency] personnel wearing them.”

In November MOFD turns its focus to prostate cancer awareness.

JM Gets a New Hydration Station

Submitted by Stacy Giglio



JM's ECO Club members in front of the new Hydration Station.

Photo Provided

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School installed its first “Hydration Station” at the school last month, and paid for it from savings the school achieved by diverting food waste and turning it into electrical energy.

The new Hydration Station is an automatic water dispenser for water bottles that turns on when it senses a bottle under the tap. Not only does the Hydration Station provide water to thirsty students, it also counts the number of plastic water bottles that have been saved as the Hydration Station is used.

“It's great to have a way to fill up your water bottle easily between classes. Before the new Hydration Station, I sometimes went all day without getting a drink,” commented Kaveh Boostanpoor, a member of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School's (JM) Environmental Conservation Organization (ECO) Club.

JM eighth grader Lev Garcia said, “I ride my bike to school so it's really helpful to have a place to fill up my water bottle on hot days.”

Last year, JM's ECO Club began collecting food waste, and sending it off to the waste water treatment plant

in Emeryville, where it was broken down by bacteria and turned into methane to produce electricity. The plant uses the electricity to operate, and sells excess power back to PG&E.

More than 300 pounds of food waste is diverted weekly at JM. It also improved its recycling collection and the two together were enough to reduce the number of trash pick-ups from twice a week to once a week, a savings of \$1,150 per month. In six months, the program saved JM and the Moraga School District over \$6,000, which was used to purchase the Hydration Station, pay for an ECO Club field trip, and some additional options on the club's wish list.

Last spring, JM custodian John Behr won the 2012 Contra Costa County Solid Waste Authority Custodian Award for his dedication to the new recycling program.

“I'm happy the money the ECO Club helped save by collecting food waste could come back to the students and our school. It's important for the kids to see that their hard work benefits their school,” said Kim Lockett, JM Science

Teacher and ECO Club Leader.

The Hydration Station idea isn't new; Orinda Intermediate School installed one over two years ago, and cut back on the number of bottled drinks provided with lunch. At their Green Summit meetings, OIS, JM and Stanley Intermediate School share ideas about how to make their schools more environmentally friendly. An average school child creates 67 pounds of trash a year, which provides opportunities on many levels to address the waste.

JM's ECO Club is comprised of about 30 students and seven teachers. They monitor the recycling and food waste disposal stations during lunchtime to make sure the waste is separated properly. JM previously had 30 trash cans on campus; these have been replaced with four recycling stations and only 7 trash cans. The ECO Club also sponsors Green Movies once a quarter, plans events for Earth Week, works with the hot lunch program to improve the containers used, and helps JM become a ‘greener’ school.