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## New Sufi Sanctuary opens in Saranap area

By John T. Miller



From left, Ira Deitrick, Project Manager Bob Carpenter and Murshida Carol Weyland Conner. Photo provided

After four years of planning and debate and nearly five years of construction, Sufism Reoriented, located in the Saranap area, inaugurated its new sanctuary with a series of events over the last few weekends.

The formal ribbon cutting took place at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, Feb 24, which corresponded to the exact time in India when the group's spiritual leader and founder, Meher Baba, was born.

Their current leader, or Murshida, Dr. Carol Weyland Conner, unveiled a pair of plaques outside the sanctuary and led approximately 350 members inside. In her inaugural address, Murshida Conner stressed the deeper meanings of the sanctuary: "My primary aim was to create a beautiful building as an expression of our worship. In all spiritual traditions, design of a sanctuary strives to give outward material form to the still, sacred space at the center of the human heart."

On Saturday, the self-described nondenominational group celebrated the design, construction and operation of the new sanctuary and honored all those who helped build it. The afternoon presentation focused on one of the groups more important precepts, "Mastery in Servitude." Meher Baba taught that true mastery of life comes through devoting one's life completely to the service of God's world. The program highlighted four of the main ways that the group gives back to the community:

The Meher Schools in Lafayette, created by Murshida Duce in 1975, has provided nonsectarian education to thousands of children.

White Pony Express was created by Murshida Conner to redistribute the abundant surplus of material wealth in Contra Costa County to those in need. The food rescue program picks up close to 5,000 pounds of surplus food every day and delivers it free to those who feed the hungry.

The Free General Store and its mobile boutique has given away 255,000 articles of new or like-new clothing and 92,000 children's books, games, and toys to people in neighborhoods of need.

The renowned Francis in the Schools program was started by Murshida Conner to serve urban neighborhoods of poverty, neglect and abuse. Volunteers create an Umbrian Renaissance Faire for the children and treat them to an afternoon of fun and respect. To date, 12,000 children have attended the programs.

One of the most moving events occurred Saturday, when all the people who worked on the building, along with their families, were invited and honored. Later they saw a 10-minute video presentation of their work. Many of the construction workers were visibly moved by their recognition. One worker who helped with the waterproofing of the underground facilities said, "I've never before been thanked by anyone for the work I've done."

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## Pleasant Hill Road Corridor

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The Pleasant Hill Road corridor — the area running from the north at the Lafayette border as far as the 680 intersection to the south — has long been a problem for motorists during the morning commute hours.

The city heard concerns and answered questions from residents last year at a packed outreach meeting at Acalanes High School. A major concern was the traffic on Reliez Valley Road and the difficulty turning onto Pleasant Hill Road at peak times.

The revised signals from the side streets, which run the green light now for the maximum allowed time regardless of traffic, has the effect of "metering" the traffic further up Pleasant Hill Road, which in turn allows better management of traffic further south. It also eases access onto Pleasant Hill Road for drivers turning right from Reliez Valley Road.

Coe said that they have studied the diversion rate — those cars choosing to use Reliez Valley Road from Withers Avenue fur-

ther north in order to cut through — and have found an insignificant increase of 4 percent. However the study recommends continued monitoring of the situation.

The council had questions for Coe, particularly regarding how to discourage drivers from using Reliez Valley Road as an alternative route and raised the possibility of engaging with the traffic navigation app Waze to ensure out of town traffic traveling through is not being automatically recommended to use this route.

The four members of council present voted to adopt the staff recommendation and asked for quarterly reports from staff.

The council passed a second motion to have the city staff come back with an outline of additional measures that could be implemented if necessary to divert traffic from Reliez Valley Road, to look further into Waze, to study the implications of extending the right hand turn lane towards Deer Hill Road and to look at the left turn onto Stanley Boulevard.

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