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## School access is the No. 1 concern for Canyon residents

By Nick Marnell



Everyone is welcome, but they'll have a tough time getting there. Photo Nick Marnell

secluded, sparsely populated community of 250 that shares his name. "We're a resilient bunch," he said. And while Steinzig noted that residents will travel to Oakland to satisfy most of the needs of their daily lives, he agreed that getting kids to school and getting them back home has become a real issue.

According to school officials, 18 students from outside the district attend Canyon Elementary and 16 kids who live in Canyon go to school in Lamorinda. "If they would only open the bridge to foot traffic, we could shuttle the kids across," Steinzig said. But Moraga Town Manager Bob Priebe told Canyon residents at an April 24 community meeting that the bridge was unsafe. "A sudden landslide would take out the bridge," Priebe said.

Canyon residents said they fear that school and community evacuations will be impeded if either Pinehurst Road or Redwood Road shuts down, as occurred April 20 when a big rig jackknifed on Pinehurst and closed the artery for six hours. "Parents are hysterical and very concerned. You can't run a school when there is no safe access," said Sullivan, who suggested that the school may lose interdistrict transfers because of the access inconvenience. Canyon Elementary Superintendent Gloria Faircloth pleaded with the supervisors to repair the slides and metal plate on Pinehurst, which will now carry more traffic. "It could be a matter of life or death," she said.

The tone of the community meeting was not entirely negative. Residents praised the performance of the Oakland Fire Department, which will respond into the community under a mutual aid agreement with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. "They came the next day," Sullivan said of OFD. "They toured our area, had lunch with the kids, let them play on the fire truck." Meeting attendees cheered Battalion Chief Nick Luby after he assured Canyon that it will receive the same resources as the city of Oakland.

Spirits remained high when officials confirmed that Republic Services will not miss a beat with garbage collection and recycling, and that Horsemen's Association members will be able to care for their horses by going through the road barrier near the Valle Vista staging area. Lt. Jason Haynes said that, considering the curiosity seekers who may come to the community, the county sheriff's office will beef up its Canyon patrol during the bridge closure. Residents appealed for signage alerting the visitors to stay off of the community's private roads.

But the focus always returned to access. "Caesar could cross the Rhine in 10 days," barked a resident at the community meeting. "We can't wait years to fix this problem."

The closure of the Canyon bridge may present an inconvenience to Moragans seeking a traffic-free route to Oakland, but to Canyon residents, the closure poses a serious life safety issue.

"On April 18, the town of Moraga precipitously closed the Canyon Road bridge, endangering the Canyon community and especially the Canyon school students," Canyon Elementary School board member Brian Coyle told the county Board of Supervisors, his statement an allusion to the opening sentence of Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." He said that Moraga has demonstrated engineering incompetence by not providing a temporary walkway, and he asked the supervisors to assume authority of the project. Moraga closed the bridge indefinitely after it determined earth movement had compromised the structural integrity of the bridge.

School Principal Lucia Sullivan also requested that the county step in.

"Moraga may believe they are acting in the best interests of Moraga, but this issue is greater than the town," she said. The supervisors, though sympathetic, acknowledged that the bridge lies under jurisdiction of the town of Moraga.

Canyon Steinzig, the president of the Canyon Community Association, was born and raised in the

"It's a strain on our emergency resources too," Priebe said. "We have a vested interest in getting this solved."

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