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The
Sunset Beacon

Serving Residents of the Sunset and Parkside Districts

February 2009

Choo-choo's Coming

Photo: Maureen McGettigan

Bill Carson holds his four-and-a-half-year-old son Jack so he can get a good look at the Golden Gate Railroad Express. The exhibit was part of the Lunar New Year Flower Show held at the Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park in January. The railroad exhibit is at the Conservatory until April 19.

Year of the Ox Rings in Lunar New Year

By Karen Kinney

As the Year of the Rat fades, the Year of the Ox, year 4706 in the Chinese calendar, takes over. The ox is often characterized by strength, leadership, good judgment and an ability to generate prosperity.

According to Chinese astrology, ox-year people are driven to improve their surroundings. The ox personality can be difficult to dissuade once they decide on something.

The ox has a steady and trustworthy character and will be entrusted with positions of authority and responsibility. The trials and tribulations this ox year brings will be mainly be on the home front. It is a good time to settle domestic affairs and put your house in order.

One of the traditions of Chinese New Year is to clean the house thoroughly to ward off bad luck and then decorate it with paper decorations that have themes printed on them, such as "prosperity" and "longevity."

Many Chinese believe red is a good luck color because it symbolizes fire, which drives away evil and bad luck. Oftentimes during the New Year, doors and window frames are freshly painted with a new coat of red paint. Additionally, presents are exchanged and lots of food is prepared.

Another trait of ox people is they are trusted associates in whatever career they happen to choose and often shine as entertainers, social activists or politicians.

The San Francisco Chinese New Year celebration originated in the 1860s during the Gold Rush and is now the largest Asian event in North America. The annual parade, which ends two weeks of festivities, will wind through Chinatown on Feb. 7 before thousands of spectators who will witness elaborately decorated floats, Chinese acrobatics, lion dancers and the anticipated finale with the 200-foot-long Golden Dragon, accompanied by more than 600,000 firecrackers.

The Chinese Zodiac calendar recognizes people born in 12 year cycles, such as the ox – 1925, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985 and 1997.

Parkside Library to Close for Renovation

By Jonathan Farrell

The Parkside branch of the SF Public Library is an important center for the community. Built in 1951, it is among the busiest library branches in the City. It serves as a vital resource center and gathering place, and provides valuable educational and cultural programs for the neighborhood.

But 50 years of wear and tear requires the building be seismically upgraded.

On Feb. 7, the branch will close for renovations. The closing marks the end of a long struggle by community organizers to urge the SF Library Commission to find additional funding for the branch when the city's budget fell short back in 2004. When assistance from the California state budget was denied, then-Supervisor Fiona Ma and others rallied for appropriations from a reserve fund to help close the budget deficit.

Currently, the renovation and expansion of the Parkside Branch is estimated at $3 million.

Thomas Hacker Architects of Portland, Oregon has teamed up with SF-based Karin Payson Architecture and Designs to take on the project. Both firms are well established and recognized for designing public buildings.

The firm THA, Inc. will oversee the implementation of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. The U.S. Green Building Council has developed the ecological rating system.

Speaking on behalf of the library, public relations officer Michelle Jeffers said that in addition to seismic upgrades the Parkside Branch needs to catch up to technological advancements and comply with current Americans with Disabilities Act regulations. A new outside ramp will be provided for easier access.

"Both staff and public use areas will become more functional," Jeffers said.

The children's area will be redesigned to make more room for various programs, such as early childhood learning experiences, classroom visits for schools and expanded collections. Outreach to the primary and secondary schools of the neighborhood is essential in helping students reach academic goals.

"These renovations are all part of the Branch Library Improvements Program bond measure passed by voters in 2000," said program administrator Mindy Linetzky. She and city Librarian Luis Herrera, along with Brian Bannon, serving as chief administrator for all the branches, are pleased that the needed renovations are moving forward.

Linetzky explained that the $105.9 million bond measure calls for 16 branches to be renovated. Also, four library facilities currently being leased are to be replaced with city-owned buildings. Three branches will be replaced with new buildings, and the construction of the Mission Bay library will be the first new branch in more than 40 years.

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Sunset Solar Project is City's Largest

By George McConnell

Going green is in vogue, and an eight-block section of the Sunset District may soon play a major role in the greening of San Francisco.

If the SF Board of Supervisors gives the green light, the Sunset Reservoir will become the site of the largest solar photovoltaic system in California, and the largest municipal solar power system in the nation.

The 90-million gallon reservoir, which is located between Ortega and Quintara streets and 24th and 28th avenues, was recently seismically retrofitted to accommodate the system, which will consist of nearly 30,000 solar panels.

The project will be a joint venture between the City, and Recurrent Energy, a San Francisco-based commercial solar energy company. It was authorized by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (PUC) on Dec. 9 and then forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for endorsement. A decision by the board to approve the contract and proceed with construction is expected.

The project is part of SF Mayor Gavin Newsom's plan to accelerate and expand renewable energy sources for the City. Once the system is online, the city's municipal solar energy generation will jump from two to seven megawatts, or roughly a 300 percent increase.

"This is a pretty big thing," said Jim Marks, a spokesman for the PUC.

The power generated will be used for municipal operations,

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11 Critical Home Inspection Traps to be Aware of Before Listing Your Home for Sale

San Francisco – According to industry experts, there are over 33 physical problems that will come under scrutiny during a home inspection when you home is for sale. A new report has been prepared which identifies the 11 most common of these problems, and what you should know about them before you list your home for sale.

If you wait until the building inspector flags these issues for you, you will almost certainly experience costly delays in the close of your home sale or, worse, turn prospective buyers away altogether.

In most cases, you can make a reasonable pre-inspection yourself if you know what you're looking for, and knowing what you're looking for can help you prevent little problems from growing into costly and unmanageable ones.

To help homesellers deal with this issue before their homes are listed, a free report entitled *"11 Things You Need to Know to Pass Your Home Inspection"* has been compiled which explains the issues involved.

To hear a brief recorded message about how to order your FREE copy of this report, call 1-800-597-2108, ID #1203. You can call anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Or Visit: www.sfinspectionpitfalls.com

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Police Beat

Capt. Paul Chignell

We Must Tackle Burglaries

One of the most aggravating and intrusive crimes, short of violence, is burglary.

To have your home or apartment trashed and prized possessions taken can cause emotional and financial angst. The legislature has recognized burglary as one of the most egregious property crimes with severe penalties for defendants who are convicted of burglary.

Here in the Taraval Police District, where 160,000 people reside and where police officers are responsible for almost one quarter of the land mass of San Francisco, we have our fair share of burglaries.

Of recent note are a rash of burglaries of houses under construction where construction crews often do not adequately secure the structures when they leave a job site at night. We have also have had a number of daytime burglaries, where suspects go down the side yards of detached single-family dwellings and then enter from rear sliding doors or windows.

What can we done to prevent burglaries? Many things.

Join a neighborhood watch group where neighbors watch out for each other. San Francisco Safety Awareness for Everyone (SAFE) can help you with that effort as well as giving a free safety survey of your house to assist with prevention. You can access SAFE at www.sfsafe.org or by calling (415) 553-1984.

Additionally, report any and all suspicious activity and do not leave newspapers and other items visible to show you are not at home. Invest in alarms or cameras if warranted.

There are a number of other suggestions – e-mail me at Paul.Chignell@sfgov.org with your address and I will send you some great crime prevention information.

Let's stay safe.

Capt. Paul Chignell is the commanding officer at the Taraval Police Station.

Sunset Solar Plan for Reservoir Roof

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such as Muni, public buildings, streetlights, schools, libraries and San Francisco General Hospital.

Other solar power systems operated by the City include the Moscone Center, San Francisco International Airport and the Southeast Wastewater Treatment Plant.

"The solar power system at Sunset Reservoir will more than triple the energy we generate from the sun atop city facilities," said Newsom when the PUC introduced the project in May 2008.

Recurrent Energy began operation in June of 2006. Two of its recent projects include a one-megawatt system at North Face, a San Francisco sporting goods retailer, and a 400-kilowatt system at a school in Marin County, according to Matt Garlinghouse, a company co-founder and vice president for western region development.

Under the terms of the arrangement, technically called a Power Purchase Agreement, Recurrent will finance, design, build and operate the system and provide all the energy generated to the PUC for a period of 25 years. In return, the City will reimburse Recurrent 23.5 cents per kilowatt-hour produced for the duration of the contract, or about $1.6 million annually.

"It's a fairly common arrangement. We can take advantage of the 30 percent federal tax credit available to Recurrent and generate energy at a better rate, so it's a win-win," Marks said.

Previous municipal solar power projects were financed, built and operated directly by the City. According to Barbara Hale of the PUC's Power Enterprise, a project of this size would cost $45 million up front to build.

The amount of power generated by solar systems can be substantial. The facility atop the Moscone Center, for example, which began operation in March 2004, generates approximately 870,000 kilowatts per year, according to Marks.

Garlinghouse said the power produced by the system at Sunset Reservoir would supply approximately 1,021 Pacific Gas and Electric customers.

San Francisco-based Suntech Power will supply the three-and-a-half foot by six foot panels. The company is the world's largest distributor of solar panels.

Each panel houses about 55 photovoltaic cells and produces roughly 200 watts. Upkeep is minimal, which includes cleaning and testing twice a year. Over time, the cells can degrade and this may affect output, but they are expected to last for the long term, according to Garlinghouse. The system will be monitored from Recurrent's office in the Financial District.

Questions have been raised about whether power output might be affected by the Sunset District's foggy summertime weather, but Garlinghouse said blue-sky days are not needed and the panels can operate effectively with just ultraviolet light, which can penetrate fog.

The PUC currently estimates that once the contract is approved, construction will take approximately six to eight months, and the system could be operational by early 2010.

To allay any potential concerns from neighbors about noise and other problems that might be created during installation and operation, Garlinghouse said the estimated construction time also includes design and engineering time, as well as the actual installation.

"There's no drilling or heavy construction required, and the actual process is very quiet and speedy. Solar is one of the quietest power generating systems," he said.

Library

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Renovation of the Parkside branch also includes a 1,000-square-foot addition to be constructed on the east side of the building. The addition will provide space to offset new elements in other parts of the building as a result of the renovations.

"The branch intentionally chose to add on to the east side of the structure because this is non-programmable open space and was approved by the SF Recreation and Park Commission," Linetzky said.

Addressing concerns about the addition, Payson said: "The location of the addition is an area that is not usable as park space so it would have the least impact."

Plans for the branch include a 24-hour book return, express self-serve book check-out stations and more infrastructure to provide the latest in technologies and flexibility for the future, including wireless Internet access.

During the renovation, Parkside's Tuesday storytimes for children will be held at the Taraval Police Station, 2345 24th Ave.

In addition, Bookmobile service will be provided at 1281 Santiago St., on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 1 to 5 p.m.

The renovated branch will reopen next year.

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