

NEWS Briefs

Man rescued after deliberately driving over cliff

PVE – A 19-year-old man was hospitalized Friday after he deliberately drove his car over the side of a cliff in Palos Verdes Estates and into the ocean in what was believed to be an apparent suicide attempt, authorities said.

“Statements made by the 19-year-old driver to investigators and evidence collected at the scene indicate he intentionally drove off the cliff’s edge in what may have been

a suicide attempt,” Palos Verdes Estate Police Capt. Mark Belez said.

Belez and Los Angeles County Fire Department Dispatch Supervisor Miguel Ornelas said the vehicle landed in the water just below the cliff after it was driven over the edge in the 1300 block of Paseo del Mar at about 2 a.m.

A broadcast report said the 19-year-old Los Angeles man signaled rescuers with a light. The

report said the rescue took two hours.

When officers arrived at the scene, Belez continued, they spotted the vehicle at the water’s edge and heard someone calling for help. Those officers then called the L.A. County Fire Department for help to rescue the driver.

Because of the location of the car, a helicopter was called in to assist in the rescue.

County paramedics removed the driver and he was taken to Harbor UCLA Medical Center in serious condition, Belez said. Media reports said the rescue took almost two hours. Police called in heavy equipment and a helicopter to retrieve the vehicle from the water. The driver’s name was being withheld.

– City News Service

Four burglary suspects arrested in Rolling Hills

Four Gardena men were arrested Dec. 23 on suspicion of committing residential burglaries in the city of Rolling Hills.

Deputies from the station received a call of a suspicious person at 60 Crest Road East on Dec. 23 about 11 a.m. Arriving deputies saw someone matching the description in the call. The deputies checked the canyon and found jewelry items strewn in some thick brush at the bottom of a nearby canyon, said Sgt. Mark Moffett of the Lomita Sheriff’s Station. A bloodhound scent dog was brought in, who led deputies to the suspects. Detectives also found evidence connecting the men – who have worked in the area for some time – to two burglaries that occurred in close proximity in the two weeks prior to the arrest.

Rocio, 46, Torres, 35, Bustos, 27, and Salas, 25, were arraigned Dec. 26 in Torrance Superior Court.

– City News Service



2013 The Year in Review

2013 offered a lot of interesting stories. Plus there was a lot of movement in high-ranking positions. The News takes a look at the top stories from the past year.

By Mary Scott
Peninsula News

Local man has close call in Boston

The bombings at the Boston Marathon in April captured headlines around the world. It hit home when it was learned that several Peninsula residents were there. One came within minutes of being a victim.

Phil Norman stood along Boylston Street waiting for his wife, Tawnie, to cross the finish line. Since he had a little time, Phil stopped at The Atlantic Fish Co. The restaurant was packed and he couldn’t get in. He tried The Forum next door. It, too, was packed. Phil decided to continue on to the finish line. About 20 seconds into his walk, an explosion rocked the street in front of him.

Then people started pushing down the barricade to get out into the street, away from the devastation. Phil got up and ran down the street in the direction he had just come from. A second explosion shocked the ground.

“I was trapped between the two of them,” the Rancho Palos Verdes resident told the News afterward.

“It was just a few steps here and a few steps there ... it was very fortuitous that I did not get hurt,” he later continued.

Phil made his way to the finish line. His wife had finished the race about 10 minutes before the first bomb exploded and had been ushered to the Runner’s Village. The couple managed to communicate via text messages but was apart for 45 minutes before seeing each other.

“That was a scary 45 minutes for her, for both of us,” Phil said.

Safe at home, Phil saw a picture of the younger bombing suspect, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, taken just seconds before the second explosion. The photo, used on a number of news programs, showed Dzhokhar in front of The Forum. His backpack, which allegedly held the homemade pressure-cooker bomb, was propped against a tree. Martin Richard, the 8-year-old boy who lost his life in the explosion, was a few feet away, standing on the guard rail. His mother and little sister, both of whom were seriously injured, stood next to him.

A few feet away from the Richards, Dzhokhar and the backpack was Phil.

“Every time I see that picture,” said his wife, “I think about how I could have lost the most important person in my life. ... He was in God’s hands that day, thank goodness. He carried him right out of the way.”

Body found in charred sports utility vehicle

Residents near the block of 30100 Miraleste Drive in Rancho Palos Verdes were stunned on April 23 by the site of a burning sports utility vehicle. After Los Angeles County firefighters extinguished the flames, they found the body of 42-year-old Christopher Waters, of Long Beach, who had been killed in his hometown. His body was driven to RPV, where the SUV was set on fire.

Four days after Waters’ remains were discovered, 17-year-old Adrian Berumen walked into the Long Beach Police Department headquarters and asked to talk to homicide detectives. He and Jose Angel Martinez, of Compton, were arrested for Waters’ murder. In December, the two were



This photo used by a number of news agencies shows how close Rancho Palos Verdes resident Phil Norman was to the youngest Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev just minutes before the bomb exploded.

ordered to stand trial.

Citizens’ group files suit against PVE, PVPUSD and PVHA

A closed-door deal struck in May 2012 among a city, a school district, a homes association and a private homeowner settled two longstanding disputes. But in 2013, the deal created another legal headache for all involved.

Alleging the deal that transferred a 1.7-acre parcel of public parkland on Via Panorama to the private ownership of homeowners Robert and Delores Lugliani was illegal, a group of Palos Verdes Estates residents, as the Citizens for Enforcement of Parkland Covenants, filed a complaint in June with the Los Angeles County Superior Court to reverse the transaction.

“The sale of parkland without citizen approval is illegal and establishes a dangerous precedent that should not be allowed to happen,” said John Harbinson, a Via Panorama neighbor and a member of the CEPCC.

The deal was negotiated quietly among the four parties. It resulted in a \$1.5-million donation to a cash-strapped Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District, which in turn dropped a two-year lawsuit against the Palos Verdes Homes Association regarding the association’s deed restrictions on two vacant district-owned lots in PVE. In addition, the district transferred the ownership of the lots back to the association, preserving them as open space.

The Homes Association transferred ownership of lots to the city, in exchange for the 1.7-acre parkland. The association then transferred ownership of the parkland to the Luglianis for the purchase price of \$500,000. The city also forgave the Luglianis for past illegal encroachments on the parkland, which wraps around their property.

At the time, the deal was heralded as a win-win for everyone. But when the Luglianis applied to change the parcel’s zoning from open space to residential so the couple could add “accessory” structures (including a sports court, gazebo and barbecue) and fencing around the property, it caught the attention of neighbors just learning about the 2012 deal.

With growing public dissent, the city’s Planning Commission recommended denial of the zoning application and a month later the City Council followed suit. But there was still a matter of properly permitting some of the illegal improvements, like the 20-foot-tall retaining walls. While illegal, the council and the commission recognized the

In the above left photo, investigators examine a burned out SUV in Rancho Palos Verdes. Christopher Waters, 42, was murdered in Long Beach and his body put in an SUV, which was set ablaze. Center, Hu Zhicheng, a Chinese-born U.S. scientist and RPV resident, returned home after being held for nearly five years in China after he became involved in a dispute with a competitor businessman. Right, the RPV City Council break ground on the San Ramon Canyon storm drain repair project, the city’s largest infrastructure project in its 40-year history.

walls are beneficial in stabilizing the hillside. Neighbors tried unsuccessfully to convince the homes association and the city to reverse the transaction.

“It really bothers me to see ... the sale of parkland. It’s never been done before and it should not have been done this time,” said Joe Barnett, a former city council member.

Public discontent with Common Core grows

As the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District moves forward in implementing the Common Core State Standards adopted by the state of California in 2010, some community members ask, Why does Palos Verdes, a high-performing school district, need them?

A group, Concerned PV Parents, formed in 2013 to push against the new standards, saying that the district does not need them and has urged the PVPUSD Board of Education to opt out.

At times, conversations about the standards became heated, proving just how divisive the Common Core is in Palos Verdes.

During a town hall meeting at the Palos Verdes Intermediate School in November, the district put together a panel to explain the standards to interested parents and community members. But it seems the panel worked against the district.

One panelist in particular caught the ire of residents.

Dr. Eunice Krinsky, a math professor at California State University, Dominguez Hills, presented examples of math questions and explained the new math standards were developed by people who, “trust me, do know their mathematics.” She also used enrollment numbers for Palos Verdes High School as an example of math enrollment, especially in the upper grades, is in decline.

Krinsky’s presentation sparked an outburst in the auditorium. While she later said that PV students could “walk ... in blindfolded and get a CST score of 800,” she added that “doing well on a CST mathematics test doesn’t say much,” and “one of the things the Common Core is doing for us is saying, ‘OK, they know the basics in PV. Let’s go deeper.’”

Krinsky was interrupted by a man in the audience saying that he was appalled by the “condescending” tone of the town hall meeting. He added that the Common Core standards are “so below” where the district already is.

Further fueling the fire was the discovery that Krinsky had used inaccurate information regarding PV High’s math enrollment.

PV High has seen an increase in the number of students enrolling in math courses, not a decrease as presented during the town hall, said Principal Charles Park.

In an email to Park, Krinsky wrote that in checking the data she could not reproduce the results of the information she presented. In another email, she wrote, “I am deeply sorry that this has

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