



Wandering & Wondering

John Maybury

LUCKY TOWN

Few if any towns of Pacifica's size have the great good fortune to read not only a community newspaper but also three websites where citizens can go online to find local content and post their own comments. As the longtime Pacifica Tribune columnist in this space (12 years and counting), I took the plunge five years ago and started Pacifica Riptide (pacificariptide.com), mainly as an environmental site to celebrate the victory of the open-space forces (No on L) over Peebles Park, my pet name for developer Don Peebles' housing "proposal" for Rockaway Quarry. Over time, Riptide has evolved into a broader domain, covering everything from politics and government to music, food, and sports. We even have cute critter photos, book reviews, and endless arguments over every issue in town. One outgrowth of those arguments was a friendly disagreement, which ended in my challenging Steve Sinai to a blog duel. I basically suggested that he ought to have his own blog. Steve, being up to the task, and with help from Kathy

Meeh and others, started Fix Pacifica (fixpacifica.blogspot.com). Steve and Kathy have had their own problems controlling the trolls and herding the wild cats on their site, but now they have established a more-or-less smooth-running operation. Finally, just this past year, along came AOL (now Huffington Post) with its Pacifica Patch (patch.com), run by young recruit Camden Swita from Seattle. Camden has quickly sussed out the local political scene and is ambitiously expanding Patch's coverage of education and other coastside beats. Meanwhile, I continue to work closely with my friends here at the Tribune (Elaine Larsen, Jane Northrop, Victoria Monroe and Jean Bartlett). We have a non-compete agreement of sorts. The Tribune (also online and on Facebook) publishes this weekly column of mine to keep my print readers informed of the news and noise from the blogosphere. But I urge you faithful Tribune readers to keep buying and subscribing to this hometown newspaper, because in our ruthless economy, the rule is harsh: Use it or lose it.

COMMUTER TAX BREAK

Employees and employers can take advantage of tax savings available through a federal pretax commuter benefits program. Federal legislation signed by President Obama in 2009, and extended until the end of this calendar year, nearly doubled the allowable pretax commuter benefit amount from \$120 to \$230 per month. Up to \$230 is allowed for parking expenses, as well. The hitch is that employers must participate. What's more, The Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance is offering financial and other aid to San Mateo County employers interested in setting up a commuter benefits program through its Commuter Benefit Employer Incentive Program. This program provides assistance and cash awards from \$75 to \$1,000 to defray some of the initial employer program startup costs. The amount of the cash award depends on the size of the company and the level of transit or vanpool participation in pretax commuter benefit programs. The benefit to pay for transit passes works one of three ways so that employers have more flexibility:

- (1) Employers give their workers up to \$230 for transit as a tax-free benefit.
- (2) Employers give employees the option to use payroll deductions to avoid paying taxes on up to \$230 a month in commuting costs.
- (3) Employers and employees share the costs of the benefits.

Employees also do not pay federal income or payroll taxes on commuter transit benefits, except on the amount, if any, in excess of \$230 per month. For information, call 650-588-8170 or e-mail alliance@commute.org or visit commute.org. Alliance staff also will provide free consultation to companies considering starting a program.

SITSEER

- Vintage car photos: americantorque.com
- Protect your identity and credit: myidscore.com

BOOK OF THE WEEK

California Rocks: A Guide to the Geologic Sites of California, by Katherine J. Baylor

SWAMI SEZ

"I would like to paint the way a bird sings." (Claude Monet)

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Paul Donahue photographed this whimbrel on a Pacifica beach. Whimbrels are one of Pacifica's many shorebirds.