

Homesick for My Hometown

Carolyn Jones wrote a great piece about San Rafael for the San Francisco Chronicle "Insight" section (December 6) called "Homesick for my hometown." (I am reprinting a few of her thoughts here, and I hope you will think about them in relation to what is going on today in Pacifica.) At her 30-year San Rafael High School reunion, Jones realized she did not recognize or relate to any of her former classmates because they and the town had changed so much. She wrote, "Those middle-class kids I grew up with are still middle-class – cops, teachers, nurses, office workers – but today they all live in Sonoma County, priced out of Marin decades ago. San Rafael now reflects the same economic disparities affecting many cities in the Bay Area, if not the entire country: high-earners and immigrant laborers, and not many folks in between...The powers of global economics are far stronger than local zoning or rent-control laws. Cities change, people migrate, capitalism has its winners and losers...Back in the 1980s, I don't recall anyone trying to stop the changes occurring in San Rafael. No one protested at City Council meetings, petitioned for tighter zoning or insisted on affordable housing. Those who benefited rejoiced; those who lost just shrugged and moved to Rohnert Park. But maybe we should have tried harder. Passed a few zoning restrictions....Offered breaks to small businesses. Capped rent increases. Said no to McMansions and luxury condos...Is it possible for one city to save its soul in the face of tsunamis of wealth? Maybe not. But for the sake of all those kids destined to feel disoriented and homesick in their own hometowns, it's worth trying." (Carolyn Jones is a former Chronicle staff writer.)

New Businesses on Highway 1

Speaking of local changes, Dave & Lou's Valero is now an Alliance gas station owned by Half Moon Bay's Keet Nerhan, and right across the highway, the old Fresh & Easy store has become a Grocery Outlet advertising itself as a "bargain market." If you have patronized either of these new businesses, let me know what you think about them. Any hints or suggestions?

Hot Corner

A Los Angeles entrepreneur felt so sorry for the hired hands waving commercial signs in the brutal Southern California heat that he came up with a way to robotize mannequins that could do the same job without suffering heat stroke. But of course the sign-waving folks weren't too happy about being replaced by automatons, and that has set off a wave of retaliation, vandalism, and patent disputes. The robots are a hot business worth at least a million bucks for one company. Meanwhile, a human sign waver can continue to sweat it out in the sun for \$600 a week. See a video

about all this at the Wall Street Journal website wsj.com/ahedvideo

Swami Sez

“Too few people understand a really good sandwich.” (James Beard)

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