

Bell Gardens Winter 2015 Today



IN THIS ISSUE

- CITY INVESTMENTS
- NEW CAPTAIN
- SAFER STREETS
- NEW CITY CLERK
- S.T.A.R PROGRAM
- BICYCLE CASINO HOTEL UPDATE



Everything you need for WINTER - Complete recreation program information inside.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR
CITY MANAGER

Welcome to the Winter Edition of Bell Gardens Today full of information and exciting news about construction, promotions, new faces at City Hall, and some great achievements by staff.

Long-time residents will remember the vacant lots and run-down buildings in some areas that were rescued when the City formed a Redevelopment Agency in the 1970s. Funds made available by redevelopment paid for new construction that changed the quality of life in Bell Gardens for the better. Today, redevelopment agencies have been eliminated by the state legislature, but City staff is working hard to maintain the benefits of those properties that changed the face and future of Bell Gardens.

Despite occasional rains, the drought in California is far from over. Remember that water conservation is everyone's responsibility and the City is doing its part by using reclaimed water in parks and municipal lawn areas. Thanks for working with us to save water. For more ideas for water saving, visit www.bewaterwise.com.

Since 1999, a very special group has been meeting on Fridays at Veterans Park, as part of the Special Time



for Adaptive Recreation (S.T.A.R.) program offered to children and young adults with physical and mental challenges. Our recreation staff works with the participants' families to make every day rewarding and fun. Signups for the program open in December.

And of course, information on the wide variety of recreation programs is included. Bell Gardens has something for everyone - we look forward to seeing you in our parks, along our bike paths or at City Hall. Bell Gardens is your city and we'd like to hear from you. Get in touch with City Hall at www.bellgardens.org.

Philip Wagner

CITY MANAGER

CONSTRUCTION UPDATES

WIN-WIN: BICYCLE CASINO HOTEL NEARS COMPLETION

Things are getting really exciting around the Bicycle Casino, where construction on the seven-story hotel addition is nearing completion. Rooms are getting finishing touches and soon guests will be able to enjoy luxurious accommodations along with live entertainment, world-class gaming, a top-notch brewery, sophisticated cocktail lounge and unique dining experiences. Grand Opening ceremonies are planned for early December. For the latest look, watch the Construction Cam that runs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at

<http://oxblue.com/open/rdolson/bicyclecasinio>



CITY OFFICIALS

Bell Gardens City Council

Jennifer Rodriguez, Mayor
Pedro Aceituno, Mayor Pro Tem
Priscilla Flores, Councilmember
Jose J. Mendoza, Councilmember
Maria Pulido, Councilmember

Philip Wagner, City Manager
John Oropeza, Assistant City Manager

The public is welcome at all city meetings, which are held in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 7100 Garfield Avenue, Bell Gardens:

CITY COUNCIL

2nd and 4th Monday of the month at 6 p.m.
Notice of Special City Council Meetings will be posted at City Hall and City facilities.

EDUCATION COMMISSION

2nd Thursday of the month at 5 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

3rd Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m.

RECREATION, CULTURAL AND YOUTH COMMISSION

3rd Thursday of the month at 6 p.m.

SENIOR CITIZEN COMMISSION

2nd Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY COMMISSION

1st Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m.

WHITE CURB FOR SAFE LOADING AND UNLOADING ONLY

A senior project for one Bell Gardens High School student prompted City engineers to research and the City Council to approve changes in the drop-off area in front of the school.

The student noted that the drop-off area was only large enough for two or three cars, which was not sufficient given the high volume of school traffic, as some students were being dropped off in the middle of the street.

On August 24, the City Council approved the following changes:

- * Doubling the length of the white curb in front of the school on Agra Street from 80 to 160 feet.
- * Installing "No Parking" signs on Agra noting the designated hours of 7:15-8 a.m. and 2:45-3:30 p.m. on school days only.
- * Increased presence by Bell Gardens Police Department to provide enforcement and ensure traffic and pedestrian safety.

**On the Cover:
Park View Terrace Senior Apartments**

Bell Gardens Today Winter 2015

WATER SAVING EFFORTS



The City would like to thank everyone for doing their part to conserve water during the current drought conditions. Parks and municipal lawn areas are being irrigated with reclaimed water and medians around the city will be watered sparingly until drought conditions subside. Look for these signs to sprout up around town as a reminder that the City is doing its part to save water!



Pardon the appearance of our lawns. The City of Bell Gardens is doing its part to conserve water during the drought.



PLEASE DO YOUR PART!



Bell Gardens Today is published quarterly by the City of Bell Gardens to provide information to the community about the City's programs, services and activities.

Visit us at www.bellgardens.org for updated city information.

Go to www.bgrecreation.org for recreation programs and events. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

CITY FIGHTING TO PROTECT INVESTMENTS



A good business decision that improved the fiscal health and forecast for the City of Bell Gardens is now in jeopardy, threatened by the elimination of Redevelopment Agencies statewide leaving Bell Gardens to fight to protect its investments.

In the 1950s, the concept of redevelopment was introduced in California. With its introduction, California cities were allowed to form "Redevelopment Agencies" (a new type of public agency) the sole purpose of which was to eliminate blight, provide affordable housing, and create jobs through the provision of financial incentives. Funding for these redevelopment agencies came from loans from the sponsoring cities, bonds, and property taxes generated by the redevelopment agency's activities ("Tax Increment").

Before redevelopment, there were no new shopping centers, no casino, and insufficient affordable housing in Bell Gardens. There were many vacant lots and run-down buildings and crime was a real problem in several areas. In addition, the City faced some serious problems:

- ☀ **11% of parcels in the project area had major code violations**
- ☀ **53% were found to be in serious disrepair**
- ☀ **9% had faulty construction or hazardous additions**
- ☀ **45% posed fire hazards due to over-occupation**
- ☀ **The poverty rate was more than two percent higher than the rest of Los Angeles County**

Bell Gardens' Redevelopment Agency ultimately became the model of responsible redevelopment with the financial assistance of the City of Bell Gardens. The City of Bell Gardens loaned more than \$20 million to the Redevelopment Agency to acquire property, tear down abandoned buildings, clear vacant lots, relocate adult book stores, improve facades, build new apartment buildings, offices and shopping centers, and pave the way for the establishment of the Bicycle Casino.

Redevelopment changed the landscape at the intersection of Florence and Eastern Avenues by funding the development of properties that Bell Gardens residents use every day, such as the Bell Gardens Marketplace, Village Square and the Los Jardines shopping centers. Redevelopment was also used to create the world class Bell Gardens Sports Complex, completed in 2007, develop two municipal parking lots in the downtown area, expand part of the Bell Gardens Police station, and provide additional parking for The Bicycle Casino. In addition,



Sacramento is currently exploring several workarounds to resolve the issues in a way that satisfies affected agencies and cities.

“There is some hope that they may come up with a replacement that mirrors the redevelopment model, but we’re not confident that it will ever be as valuable a tool as redevelopment,” said Bell Gardens Community Development Director Abel Avalos. “The demise of California’s redevelopment agencies obligates local government and developers to explore new funding methods including private financing.”

Redevelopment agencies used public-private partnerships to achieve proven results for decades. The challenge now for Bell Gardens, and other California cities, is to build on these partnerships without the benefit of tax increment financing.

As Bell Gardens and other cities transition away from the redevelopment agency, private financing will become critical to funding redevelopment of blighted areas, new affordable housing, and commercial and industrial projects.

“It will be a challenge, but redevelopment will continue in Bell Gardens as we actively seek interested developers and private investors interested in being part of the continued growth of our community,” Avalos said.

funds were used to provide numerous affordable housing opportunities for Bell Gardens residents, including the Parkview Terrace complex, which provides 72 affordable senior apartments and a center for socialization.

In response to the state's budget crisis in 2011, the California legislature decided to eliminate the state's more than 400 redevelopment agencies and eliminated California cities' primary financing source for economic development, elimination of blight, and provision of affordable housing. Those tax revenues are now being used to pay the state and other public agencies.

With the dissolution of redevelopment, California cities lost a proven tool for spurring economic development in their communities. The legislation that dissolved redevelopment also requires cities to sell off valuable assets and send the proceeds to the state. City officials have been working with legislators and the Governor's office to resolve the issue in the best interest of Bell Gardens residents, but the state continues to force cities to sell properties purchased with redevelopment funds. This, coupled with existing cuts to the City's budget, will negatively affect public safety, economic development and other municipal services. The forced sale of properties to satisfy the state would result in a net loss of \$4 million dollars per year in revenue and a loss of more than \$21 million in assets to the City of Bell Gardens and its residents.



EXPERIENCE PAYS OFF FOR NEW CAPTAIN

Bell Gardens Police Chief Robert Barnes recently promoted Lt. Scott Fairfield to the position of Captain, putting him in command of the station where he has worked for the last 24 years.

"Scott is one of the most dedicated and driven individuals I know and he's done a tremendous job and will continue to do a tremendous job that will benefit this department and this community," said Barnes.

During a pinning ceremony held August 26 in City Council Chambers, Fairfield's wife, Mary, pinned the silver Captain shield on his uniform before an audience of family, friends and law enforcement colleagues.

Fairfield's responsibilities will include handling the budget, supervising the 90-member staff, dealing with day-to-day incidents and making sure Chief Barnes' mission is achieved as well as continuing to oversee the Special Operations Team.

Since he joined the Bell Gardens Police Department in 1992, he has been active in youth mentoring programs, such as the Explorers, youth boxing, the Police Athletic League and the BGDPD Honor Guard. He created the Holiday Adopt-A-Family program 22 years ago to help those in need. His service as an instructor and innovator in providing excellent public service is extensive, including providing drug education to businesses and child welfare workers, firearms and vehicle training for law enforcement professionals and creating a Social Media Program for the Police Department.



Captain Fairfield gets pinned by his wife, Mary (top), at left, Chief Robert Barnes with Mary and the new Captain, Scott Fairfield.

Fairfield has been recognized by the County of Los Angeles for Outstanding Community Service and by the City of Bell Gardens for service to the youth. He was Bell Gardens Police Officer of the Year in 1994 and named California Police Officer of the Year in 1996.

Outside of work, he and Mary run Helping Hearts for Friends, which has raised more than a million dollars to support individuals and families affected by serious illness or injury.

Perhaps his dedication to law enforcement, especially when it comes to the younger population, can be tracked back to his high school days, when he observed that police officers had a unique potential to be a positive influence. He studied Sociology in college with the intent of counseling delinquent youth, but realized that becoming a police officer himself could be the way to make a difference. Twenty-four years later, he's confident he made the right choice.

SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS PRIORITY OF BELL GARDENS POLICE

The Bell Gardens Police Department would like residents to be aware of two pieces of legislation, one adopted by the state legislature the other approved by voters that may have an effect on crime in our community.

AB109 Public Safety Realignment Act of 2011 reduced the number of inmates in state prisons in accordance with a Supreme Court order. It mandates local custody for non-violent, non-serious, non-sex offenders and changed the parole system to include "Post Release Community Supervision" (PRCS).

In 2014, voters approved Proposition 47, known as the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act. Under this Act, seven crimes - forgery, passing bad checks, receiving stolen property and grand theft if the value does not exceed \$950 - and possession of controlled substances under 11350, 11357(a) and 11377(a) of the Health and

Safety Code - were reduced from felonies to straight misdemeanors. It also allowed those incarcerated for these offenses to petition the court for reduced sentences.

AB 109 reduced probation and parole from three to five years to six months, as long as the offender does not violate the terms and conditions of their release and Prop 47 no longer requires offenders to attend treatment programs for substance abuse and releases offenders after a shorter sentence.

Locally, the PRCS is enforced by a team of law enforcement officers from Bell Gardens, Vernon and Bell Police Departments and the LA County Probation Department. During periodic checks of about 40-45 offenders on the list, it has been discovered that several offenders have been deported (with outstanding warrants awaiting their potential return); many have evaded monitoring, which resulted in active

warrants being issued; some are in jail for other offenses; several have given false address information and a small percentage belong to active street gangs.

In Bell Gardens, Part I Violent Crimes (homicide, robbery, rape and aggravated assault) have decreased each of the last four years and Part I Property Crimes (burglary, larceny, arson, and theft from a motor vehicle) have decreased three of the last four years. While law enforcement officials are pleased with the results, they remain vigilant and cautious due to the shorter confinement and lack of treatment programs required for the offenders. In addition, state funding that currently pays for enforcement efforts for AB109 and Prop 47, is not guaranteed to continue.

METRO GRANT MAKES FOR SAFER STREETS

A joint effort by engineers and grant writers from the Bell Gardens Public Works Department resulted in a \$900,000 grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to improve conditions at two critical intersections in Bell Gardens.

The request focused on improving the safety of the crossroads at

Florence and Ira Avenues and Florence Avenue and Jaboneria Road by adding exclusive right-turn lanes on Florence at Jaboneria and upgrading the traffic signal at Ira. In addition, ADA ramps for pedestrians will be added. With these upgrades, safety will be enhanced and the flow of traffic on Florence will improve. During a Technical Advisory Committee meeting at the MTA in late July, Bell Gardens' funding request was granted. Additional funding in the amount of \$258,000



has been secured by I-710 Early Action Funding in FY 20/21. The project is now fully funded.

NEW CITY CLERK IN FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Family and romance are always good reasons to come home; when your dream job beckons as well, it's a match made in heaven.

Kristina Santana, Bell Gardens' new City Clerk, has been honing her government skills out of town, most recently as the Deputy City Clerk for the City of Santa Cruz in Northern California where she worked for just over two years and as Deputy City Clerk in Lynwood for four years.

When her fiancé proposed in February, she started looking for something closer to home and was the successful candidate out of more than 45 individuals who applied for the job. She was appointed to the job of Bell Gardens City Clerk on July 28, 2015.

A Bell Gardens High School graduate, Kristina received her Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley and her Master's degree in Public Administration from California State University, Los Angeles. She is also an Annenberg Foundation Alchemy Leadership graduate.

She was awarded the designation of Certified Municipal Clerk in 2012 and recently was named Master Municipal Clerk, the highest professional designation conferred by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. Kristina is fluent in both English and Spanish and is a Notary Public.

"I like linking people to their government," she said. "It's rewarding to give them a way to get involved in their democracy." She enjoys serving the community, City staff and the City Council in an impartial and neutral manner.

She is also involved with East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, a local nonprofit organization that holds workshops for youth and community members and mobilizes the community to work for a safe and healthy environment.

Her City duties keep her busy, attending meetings and providing municipal accountability, but she embraces a healthy lifestyle and always finds time to

exercise. City staff are getting used to seeing her dressed in cycling gear for her twice-weekly bicycle commute. She also enjoys playing slow pitch softball and racquetball.

JUST WHAT DOES A CITY CLERK DO?

The list is long and detailed, but some of the highlights are:

- * Prepares and distributes agendas, minutes and other documentation
- * Records and communicates all legislative actions and proceedings of the City Council
- * Administers elections in coordination with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder
- * Authorizes municipal corporate documents and maintains records
- * Publishes legal notices
- * Administers contracts and deeds on behalf of the City
- * Files campaign reports and Statements of Economic Interest; coordinates filings for the Fair Political Practices Commission
- * Maintains the Municipal Code



S.T.A.R. PROGRAM CREATES BONDS AND MEMORIES



Fun is one word describing sports and activities offered by the City of Bell Gardens. Inclusive is another. For the last 16 years, S.T.A.R. - Special Time for Adaptive Recreation - has been a welcoming place for special needs children and young adults between the ages of 6 and 16. Every Friday afternoon, S.T.A.R. brings kids together at Bell Gardens Veterans Park for socializing, swimming, games and other activities.



"Dancing. There's always a lot of dancing," said Angie Contreras, who supervises the program. "We do everything that everyone else does. They golf, they have potlucks. In the summer, the pool is everyone's favorite place."

Parents and family members who come along (each participant must bring an adult with them) provide assistance with the program as well as creating special bonds of understanding.

"It's not really a support group, but it functions the same," Contreras explained. "They are sharing their experiences and coping skills and creating real friendships."

When recreation staff discovered that there were not many city-sponsored after school programs for this group, they created S.T.A.R. for youth with physical and mental challenges.

Donations from local service groups and individuals have provided partial funding for special equipment such as a

swim chair or holiday gatherings. Participation in the program is free to Bell Gardens residents; non-residents pay \$20 a year.

"We are always being thanked for the program, especially when families bring other kids and everyone gets involved," Contreras explained. "When our (S.T.A.R.) kids are here, they're the life of the party. There is such a reward in watching the kids grow and develop."

Registration for the S.T.A.R. program is open once a year, from December 1 through January 30. Visit the Parks and Recreation office at Ford Park to sign up or call Angie Contreras at (562-806-7650) for additional information.

