

Published August 29th, 2012

Zip Code 94516: Necessary at 90?

Canyon residents defend post office's usefulness

Cathy Dausman



Postmaster Elena Tyrrell graciously accepts a plaque in her honor surrounded by, from left, County Supervisor Candace Andersen, long time resident Deva Rajan and Canyon Steinzig, President of the Canyon Community Association Photo Ohlen Alexander

didn't want a local person to serve as Postmaster.

Apparently the job runs in the family: Tyrrell's mother, Virginia Menge, was also Postmaster, although her technical title was Officer in Charge.

Menge worked when the post office was located inside Joe and Grace Knipe's Canyon Grocery Store. The store and its post office were destroyed in 1969 during a Shell Oil pipeline explosion, and the post office was then housed in a trailer. Another Canyon resident, Tyrrell's neighbor Deva Rajan, built the current post office on land the community purchased as the Canyon Store Trust.

So why is this post office so important? Tyrrell calls Canyon Post Office, with its 290 boxes, a "necessity" office. The U.S. Postal service is not so sure. The Canyon location, along with 13,000 other post offices nationwide, is currently being considered for closure or service cutbacks. But residents see their post office as the heart of their community.

Goodwin said it embodies the true nature of a rural post office. He explained that the office routinely gets five-star reviews online from customers who know they can get same-day passport application service, and the Postmaster "is a career employee committed to her job and the community."

As Central Co-coordinator of the Canyon Fire Council, Goodwin also values having a Postmaster who can direct fire and medical emergency responders to sites on the winding, often unmarked back roads.

Canyon residents vote by mail because they lack a physical polling site. Take away the post office and the votes might go away too, said Lorenz.

Canyon Steinzig, the aptly-named president of the Canyon Community Association, said at Saturday's event, "We are here to celebrate this community and its vital heart. . . . The post office has always been supported by the U.S. Government - it's part and parcel of our identity as a nation."

Goodwin said Canyon representatives want the Postal Regulatory Commission to ask the U.S. Postal Service Headquarters "to take Canyon off the POSTPlan list and order the local postal district to work with us to create a business plan to grow our way to more prosperity."

Lorenz explained that residents hope "to protect a beloved institution that supports and connects our community," and to avoid possible cutbacks or closure. "We don't want our community to crumble," she said.

View a discussion of the POSTPlan from the League of Postmasters point of view online: <http://www.savethepostoffice.com/postplan-qas-faq-and-other-fact-sheets>.

Cathy Tyson contributed to this article.

Canyon Post Office forms what resident Jeanne Lorenz called a "unique gateway to the community." Nestled in a secluded glade of redwood trees barely two miles from Moraga where trout still swim in the brook on site, cyclists speeding by lean into the roadway curves, the building doesn't look its age - perhaps because of a face lift in the mid-1980s - but the grand dame of Canyon is now 90 years old.

Naturally there was a party: the Canyon community held a birthday celebration August 25 to celebrate the post office and to raise awareness of its importance. Lorenz kicked things off, pointing out to the dozens of post office fans in attendance, including a handful of Lamorinda dignitaries and a television news crew, "The post office is the straight arm of our curvy community."

Canyon Fire's Jonathan Goodwin welcomed new County Supervisor Candace Andersen, describing his home as "an unusual community, old west or perhaps from the Jurassic period; dinosaurs have been sighted here. Andersen, making her first official visit to Canyon, said the post office is "a tribute to what's really important-human interaction."

Elena Tyrrell, who started working Saturday relief in Canyon in 1990 while also working at a Moraga post office, has been Canyon's Postmaster since 1998 and received multiple accolades at the event. She had to apply twice for her current job, she said, because postal officials originally



Dozens of Canyon residents came to Saturday's event to support their post office. Photo Ohlen Alexander

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

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