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# MENTONE MATTERS

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## THE FIRE TAX IS PASSED, ANYWAY!

On Tuesday, October 16, beginning at 10 a.m., the Board of Supervisors heard protests of the proposed fire tax to be imposed over the whole County of San Bernardino. Representatives from many unincorporated areas, such as Joshua Tree, Bloomington, Muscoy, Oak Hills, Pioneertown, as well as Mentone, were present, according to Angie DeLaRosa who, with her husband, Gabe, attended from 9:30 a.m. until 7 p.m., “There were at least 40 speakers from the unincorporated areas. Bud Long, from Mentone, had a display for Mentone out in front of the building regarding the unconstitutional fire tax. After all those people were against it, each unincorporated area, and hours of comments against this tax and Josie Gonzales reprimanded the fire chief that they need to cut back and the county can't keep taking from the General Fund, they STILL PASSED it. Chairman Lovingood and Supervisor Janice Rutherford voted AGAINST it.

“Our Supervisor James Ramos, Josie Gonzales, and Curt Hagman voted FOR IT. There were a couple of attorneys that got up to speak, Margaret Michaels, and Gavin Erasmus. On the website of the San Bernardino County Fire, a page speaks about Service Zone FP-5 and under the ‘Current Situation’ heading there is a bullet for PROCESS. Under this bullet: It states ‘All unincorporated county areas, except those already receiving fire and EMS through other districts, and EXCEPT UNINCORPORATED AREAS WITHIN THE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE OF THE CITY OF MONTCLAIR’ are under this tax.

“We spoke with the people of Lucerne [Valley] and the people of San Antonio [Heights], and a gentleman from Forest Falls who all want to do lawsuits. We may wind up with a class action. People stated to the supervisors that they are going to sue at this meeting.”

Perhaps the origin of this tax may be found in history: for several years, mountain residents and those in the most susceptible areas paid a “Fire Prevention Fee.” However, according to CalFire’s website, “On July 25, 2017, Governor Edmund G Brown signed Assembly Bill 398, which suspended the State Responsibility Area (SRA) Fire Prevention Fee until 2031. CAL FIRE will continue to provide the same level of fire prevention services and programs which have proven to be very valuable in protecting habitable structures and communities from wildfires. The change in funding occurred with the renewal of the state’s Cap-and-Trade program, which is designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Fire prevention activities help maximize carbon sequestration in healthy wildland habitat and minimize the uncontrolled release of emissions emitted by wildfires. Fee payers are still responsible for paying their SRA Fee bills that were generated prior to July 1, 2017, including those which are overdue that may have potential penalties and interest. No new bills for periods on or after July 1, 2017 will be generated after July 1, 2017. The fee suspension takes effect July 1, 2017. All SRA fees that were assessed to homeowners in previous years are still in effect.

“The State Responsibility Area (SRA) Fire Prevention Fee was enacted following the signing of Assembly Bill X1 29 in July 2011. The law approved the new annual Fire Prevention Fee to pay for fire prevention services within the SRA. The fee is applied to all habitable structures within the SRA.

“Effective July 1, 2013, the fee is levied at the rate of \$152.33 per habitable structure, which is defined as a building that can be occupied for residential use. Owners of habitable structures who are also within the boundaries of a local fire protection agency will receive a reduction of \$35 per habitable structure. This fee funds a variety of important fire prevention services in the SRA. Such activities include fuel reduction activities that lessen risk of wildfire to communities and evacuation routes. Other activities include defensible space inspections, fire prevention engineering, emergency evacuation planning, fire prevention education, fire hazard severity mapping, implementation of the State and local Fire Plans and fire-related law enforcement activities such as arson investigation.

“The State Responsibility Area (SRA) is the area of the state where the State of California is financially responsible for the prevention and suppression of wildfires. SRA does not include lands within city boundaries or in federal ownership. To see if a parcel is within the SRA enter in the parcel address in the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's State Responsibility Area Viewer.”

Mentone Matters was unable to import the SRA map from the website into this issue; however, it was basically the uninhabited area surrounding Mentone on the east and south. MM

### OP-ED

As reported above, Governor Brown (in one of his few – or maybe his only - act with which MM agrees) suspended CalFire’s imposition of its fire tax imposed on mountain residents, of some \$152 per year. Now, our esteemed County Board of Supervisors attempted to sneak – and perhaps succeeded in large part in sneaking - the same tax past most of us County voters: as MM reported last month, Maribeth Lotito reported that a meeting was held in the Lotitos’ Diamond Jim Saloon, which only 10 people attended *because the rest of us were never notified*. Is that sneaky, or what? Also,

unlike CalFire's previous fire tax on only susceptible areas, the Board imposed the fire tax *over the whole County*, other than most cities who provided their own fire protection services and, somehow, Montclair's sphere of influence, unlike the previous, suspended \$152 CalFire tax, thus *including those of us who are not subject to wild- or brush fires*. Perhaps they thought the "miniscule" - albeit higher - amount of "only" \$157 per year, even with promised yearly increases, would be acceptable to all of us, but they were wrong. It will certainly rake in millions of dollars *for them to do with as they please*. What a windfall! It's called a "Fire Protection" tax but what protection? What will they actually spend it on? Who will hold them accountable for its actual use? What happened to the CalFire grants to our county in the total amount of \$305,764? Just added to the newest windfall?

As MM reported last month, our own area Supervisor, Democrat James Ramos - who now wants to be elected to the California State Assembly - *actually introduced* the fire tax and, of course, voted for it. What a legacy of his misrepresentation of our area and harbinger of what he would do - particularly to Mentone - as Assemblyman (and whatever else he "has up his sleeve"). The election is only three weeks away. 'Nuff said?

According to the notices that went out in September, protests by at least 25% of the number of landowners within the affected territory who own at least 25% of the assessed value of land within the territory affected would require it be submitted for confirmation by the voters; protests by greater than 50% of the number of landowners within the affected territory who own at least 50% of the assessed value of land would require it to be withdrawn by the District Board. Otherwise, it would be passed. There were also several criteria for written protests, without which they would not be accepted. *We need to know exactly how many written protests were actually counted, excluding duplication by personal appearances*. Mentonites should join in the lawsuit(s) reportedly filed by other such areas, and demand that information.

Perhaps MM's readers were already aware of the passing of the fire tax; however, MM's role is to report local happenings and particularly Mentonites' views - in conjunction with other local organizations - and galvanizing them to act to protect our community. MM apologizes for the lack of identities of the Cook-Off winners at press time; it only has the information forwarded to it and appreciates the information it does receive. MM is unable to attend events for various reasons and is looking for a reporter who does attend and can get more information for it. Anyone out there willing to help?

Also, the Chili Cook-Off broke even except for an additional payment of \$129. It was intended to be a fundraiser; the same few folks who are involved in all of Mentone's fundraisers did all the work and also contributed. If MM's readers have ideas for additional fundraisers they would like to see done in Mentone and are willing to help out, please e-mail MM. As ever, we welcome your news and announcements that are of general interest to the whole community. Just e-mail [mentonematters@gmail.com](mailto:mentonematters@gmail.com) or [mentonematters@aol.com](mailto:mentonematters@aol.com). You may have noticed information is missing from some articles: we publish all information we receive. So please include all information, such as the names of people in any photos, dates, times, etc., of coming events. In short, what *you'd* like to see in the newspaper. MM

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**FIRE** (cont'd)

**CAL FIRE Announces Over \$15 Million in New Grants** - December 2, 2016, Sacramento - More than \$15 million spread across 34 California counties will be used to remove dead and dying trees and thin fuels that could otherwise exacerbate wildfires, CAL FIRE announced today. Using state funds and fees collected from homeowners who live in California's urban-wildland interface, CAL FIRE awarded the \$15.75 million in 107 separate grants to fire safe councils, resource conservation districts, cities, **counties**, park districts, fire departments, and other entities. The funds will help reduce the public safety threat of trees at risk of falling on roads, homes, and other infrastructure.

**"2017 SRA and TM Project Grant Recipients:** San Bernardino Big Bear Fire Authority Fuels Treatment \$96,000; San Bernardino Big Bear Fire Authority Removal of Dead or Dying Trees \$41,000; San Bernardino Mountain Rim Fire Safe Council Fuels Treatment \$60,797; San Bernardino Mountain Rim Fire Safe Council Planning \$107,967," for a total of \$305,764 to San Bernardino County. MM

## FOURTH ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF TAKES PLACE

The Fourth Annual Chili Cook-Off, designed to raise money for the Chamber's and MACA's activities, took place on Saturday the 29<sup>th</sup>, from 2-6 p.m., across from the Stater's parking lot. The first place winner received \$50 and a plaque; the second place winners received \$25 and a plaque, and the People's Choice winners received a \$50 value gift basket for third place. Gift baskets were available, as well as pony rides and face painting. After expenses, the Chamber and MACA paid \$129 over and above the revenue, said Warren Wendell, treasurer of both events; nevertheless, the hosts considered it a success. T-shirts are still available, according to Amber Mahaffey. Scroll down past "Local Organizations" for still photos of the winners and some things that were available, provided by Angie DeLaRosa; a PowerPoint of the event, including vendors and other chili-makers, is on the Republic of Mentone's Facebook page.

## **LOCAL CIVIC ORGANIZATION MEETINGS:**

**MACA** (Mentone Area Community Association) meets the second Tuesday of each month in Diamond Jim's Saloon (at the rear of the Mill Creek Cattle Company) 1874 Mentone Blvd., 6:30 p.m. Ample parking wraps around a neighboring home.

On October 9 Rachel Achilly, spokesperson for the Sheriff's Department, stated that deputies come often to perform probation compliance checks: those who are on probation should not get into trouble and should check in with their probation officer. The oversight depends on how the probationer acts. The Sheriff's deputies have discretion to handle warrant-ed people: if they are causing problems the deputies can take them to jail.

There were more vehicle burglaries: surprisingly, some people leave their purses in their unlocked car. Lock the car, put valuables away and even better lock the car in a garage, she advised. Other burglars take paperwork out of cars. Victims will have to go and testify in court. An audience member stated that the Sheriff's department protects Mentone better than Redlands P.D. protects its residents.

In response to an audience member's question about disputes over boundary trees, Achilly said that the Sheriff doesn't get involved unless someone breaks the law – fighting, etc. In regard to the upcoming election, particularly on propositions, she advised looking at who is supporting it: big business vs. employees, for example.

CHP officer Saucedo stated that he will call again about a radar gun on streets where drivers are gunning the engine and speeding. He will send a letter to those who speed if given the license plate number. Also, CalTrans is working on a traffic survey on the Boulevard.

Regarding the lack of crossing guards at Mentone Elementary on Crafton: Crafton Elementary on Wabash has a crossing guard provided by the American Guard Company, whose pay is split by the school district and the school.

**C.O.M.E.T./CHAMBER OF COMMERCE:** Meetings: last Tuesday of the month, 7 p.m., at Rocky Point Fellowship in the back meeting room.

**Mentone Senior Center**, 1331 Opal Avenue (in the Library building): Senior Breakfast on Tuesday mornings. Call 909/794-0327 for more information.

**OTHER LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS\*:** (Religious organizations meet on Sundays unless otherwise noted)

Rocky Point Fellowship  
2116 Mentone Blvd.,  
Mentone, 92359

Avodah Fellowship (Friday nights):  
Rocky Point Fellowship (in the fellowship hall)  
2116 Mentone Blvd., Mentone, 92359

Faith Chapel  
1259 Agate Ave.,  
Mentone, CA 909-863-8145

Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Mentone (English and Spanish)  
(Saturdays 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.)  
1230 Olivine Ave., Mentone  
Mentonechurch.org

Mentone Indonesian-American Seventh-Day Adventist Church  
(Saturdays)  
1331 Turquoise Ave.,  
Mentone, CA 909-799-3521

New Life Christian Women's Luncheon @ Mill Creek Cattle Co.,  
Mill Creek Cattle Co., 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month

AA/NA Rocky Point Fellowship,  
2116 Mentone Blvd.,  
Mentone, 92359, Tuesdays

Republican Committee Tea Party,  
Mill Creek Cattle Company,  
1874 Mentone Blvd., Mentone, First Wednesday each month, 10-2

\*Organizations that aren't listed here are welcome to contact [mentonematters@aol.com](mailto:mentonematters@aol.com) to have their information included.

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Chili Cookoff's First place winner



Chili Cookoff Second place winners: CalFire



Second place winners being congratulated by Pastor George Everett



People's choice winners of \$50 value gift basket.

Some of Maribeth Lotito's gift baskets.



Pony rides for the kids



T-shirts were available in two background colors: green and white.