



From the City Manager's Desk

a weekly report from Scott Ochoa, City of Monrovia



June 15, 2007

City Council Meeting Preview

The June 19 City Council meeting will be dominated by the discussion and consideration of the 2007/08 & 2008/09 fiscal years' budgets. As you know, the City of Monrovia works with a two-year budget cycle. The purpose of utilizing a two-year process is that it allows the City Council and staff to be more strategic in considering expenditures and projects. Additionally, it minimizes the inefficiencies associated with doing an annual budget – usually, staff spends a good chunk of time in the spring preparing for the coming fiscal year's budget, which needs to be adopted every July 1. Thus, instead of spending 25% of the year focusing on the upcoming budget, we can effectively cut that amount of time in half by doing a two-year budget. And, while we monitor revenues and expenditures at six-month intervals during the 24 month period, these updates are nowhere near as exhaustive and time-consuming as the formal budget adoption process.

The staff report and accompanying presentation provide a snapshot of the City of Monrovia's overall financial health.

The City of Monrovia is in strong financial shape. While the City's cost of doing business has escalated based on market forces, our revenues have also grown to keep pace. Staff is recommending appropriations for fiscal year 2007/08 of \$64,020,468; and for fiscal year 2008/09, \$58,048,866. The reason the FY 2007/08 appropriation is higher is that there are a number of capital improvement projects (for example, the Corporate Yard; Fire Station No.1; Historical Museum) and property acquisitions (mostly in the Station Square project area) included in that fiscal year.

The two largest sources of revenue for the City of Monrovia are property tax revenue and sales tax revenue, respectively. We expect property tax revenues, based on secured and unsecured assessed values, to increase approximately 8% next year. We expect sales tax revenues to increase by 2%. Keep in mind that the City of Monrovia does not set or change these tax rates but rather, the increased revenues are based on increased property values at the time of resale (for example, a home that had been purchased 20 years ago for \$200,000 was just re-sold for \$600,000; the new property taxes are calculated from the new sales price), and from higher prices for taxable items. To be sure, the recent housing boom and new homebuyers in Monrovia have fueled this increase.

Despite the overall plateau in the LA regional housing market, year over year housing prices in Monrovia rose from 2006 to 2007. And while the volume of sales fell, this is still an indication of the strong market and high level of desirability that Monrovia continues to enjoy.

As always, if you have any questions about any item on the agenda please feel free to contact me directly.

Trail-gate

Next week, the City Attorney and I are meeting with the property owner (and his representative) who installed gates across the LA County Flood Control easement. We've had preliminary discussions this week with a wide variety of interested parties, and I remain hopeful that we may develop a consensus agreement in the not too distant future. There is a wide variety of options and solutions on the table, and I believe reasonable people can always arrive at a reasonable accommodation.

While I still believe that it will take a little bit of time to cultivate a lasting resolution to this problem, I also expect to make incremental progress as we go. In the end, I remain confident that we can satisfy all of the various, if competing, interests.

Articles Attached

- **The Chapter is Closed.** This article addresses the situation that I discussed in last week's Report. While it is unfortunate that this particular retailer is going out, this vacancy in a great location along Myrtle Avenue is already sparking significant interest from new investors. Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the marketplace is seldom a gentle pat on the back, but rather a slap upside the head.
- **Faster than Fast.** Another great story about an exciting high-tech Monrovia company. The growth and expansion of the tech sector is contributing greatly to the regional commercial office boom. Commercial vacancy rates in Monrovia are now less than 3%.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Planning Commission Meeting June 13. The Planning Commission had another full agenda at its meeting on June 13. The Commission rendered the following decisions:

- Recommended approval of General Plan Amendment/Zone Change for recently acquired 143 acres of hillside properties to change the zoning designation to Hillside Wilderness Preserve. This will be heard at the July 3 City Council meeting.
- Recommended approval of General Plan Amendment/Zone Change for the property at 805 South Shamrock Avenue to Planned Development Area 23a (PD-23a) to allow certain uses. This will be heard at the July 3 City Council meeting.
- A Conditional Use Permit for 805 South Shamrock Avenue to allow a veterinary care facility to begin operations, pending approval of the General Plan Amendment/Zone Change request above was approved. This is a great proposal that will preserve and upgrade an original Route 66 building. The Historic Preservation Commission will review the final exterior improvements.
- A Conditional Use Permit for 319 South Heliotrope to allow a long term acute care hospital facility was approved. The facility will offer on-site radiology, laboratory, pharmacy, diagnostic, surgical, physical, occupational, breathing and speech therapies.
- A Conditional Use Permit for 614 South Myrtle Avenue for sale of beer and wine at a restaurant with both indoor and outdoor settings was approved.
- An amendment of Conditional Use Permit for 428 West Chestnut Avenue (J P Paper Shredders) to allow outdoor activities including the storage of bins used for depositing recyclable materials along the east side of a parking lot of this established recycling center. As you remember, this was a business that sustained total damage from a fire several years ago. The rebuilding of the business required a Conditional Use Permit, which included certain conditions about outdoor

storage. After several discussions with the owner, staff recommended an amendment to the CUP to bring the needed changes into conformity with the conditions. The Planning Commission approved the amendment to the conditional use permit.

- A variance for 1127 Orange Avenue for a single story addition was approved. The applicant has requested a variance to encroach 5'-6" into the required 15'-6" side yard (west) setback.

Development Review Committee Meeting June 13 Recap

- A request for a minor exception to encroach into minimum front and side yard setback for a 6' high wrought iron fence at 253 Canyon Crest Drive was denied with instructions to the applicant to meet the requirements of the Municipal Code, including a set back of 25' from the front property line (facing Canyon Blvd.), a set back of at least 5' on the side yard (Canyon Crest), and a 20' set back at the driveway.

Nearly a dozen neighbors came to the meeting to vocalize their concerns about allowing fences in the front yards of this area and stated concerns about the wildlife that currently roam freely there. The applicant was amenable with the neighbor's wishes and will work with staff and neighborhood representatives to come to some compromise in the location of the iron fencing.

- Signage and landscape plan for Doubletree Hotel at 924 West Huntington Drive was approved. Next week, the applicant will present a request for a minor exception for a monument sign.
- Review of arborist report for oak tree removal at 740 Mountain View Ave was continued to a later date to allow the applicant to submit a more detailed arborist report and contact the Parks Supervisor Scott Smith to arrange inspection of the tree by the City.

Monrovia Area Partnership (MAP) Update

On Saturday, June 9, members of the Community Neighborhood Strategy Team (C-NST) came together with more than 100 residents to fulfill a continuing request for neighborhood get-togethers. The Fig Avenue gathering provided opportunities for neighbors to visit with each other and speak to City staff about issues in their neighborhood. This is the third Get Together & BBQ we have held and we are finding that although specific issues vary by block, there is a commonality in the desire of residents to improve the quality of their lives and neighborhoods. Many expressed the need to get more involved and partner with City services and private businesses to achieve these goals.

The Monrovia Reads and Plays van was on hand for the first time at a neighborhood gathering. The timing could not have been better as about half of the attendees were children. The van and the activities presented were a hit with the many children who attended. Parents also took the opportunity to visit inside the van and see for themselves the reading programs and games being offered at nearby sites on Ivy and Sherman streets. Again, we were able to identify several neighborhood Points of Contact who wish to host future block meetings.

The Monrovia Area Partnership is very well received within the community. These gatherings are truly a team effort with the continued support of all of our city departments, community organizations and residents that make up the C-NST. The MAP philosophy and strategies has enabled us to provide even higher levels of customer service designed to decrease blight, crime and promote citizen activism.

Neighborhood Services Section Update

Alexis Newell, Neighborhood Services Specialist, also wears the hat of a We Care Committee member. This works well as Alex is well-connected in our neighborhoods, especially MAP Area #1. Recently, she became aware of the sudden death of a resident in MAP Area # 1. This tragedy left a

mother (a cancer survivor) and her two young adult daughters grief-stricken and in dire financial straits. Alex visited the family and worked quickly to put through a We Care Grant request, along with requests to the Police and Fire Associations for additional assistance.

By the end of the day, representatives of We Care, MFD and MPD presented the family with \$2,500 in cash and \$250 in food gift coupons to get the family through these hard times. Understanding that this is only the beginning of hardship for this family, Alex contacted the Monrovia Providers Group for future financial planning assistance. The husband and wife were past Neighborhood Pride Award recipients as well as MPD Neighborhood Watch Captains. The family was very appreciative for the assistance and the assistance of the We Care, MFD and MPD Committees and Alexis' help.

Filming

Huntington Prep., LLC will be filming scenes for a feature film entitled "She Lived" at the former Monrovia Community Hospital site at 323 S. Heliotrope Avenue. They will be filming on Friday, June 15 from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. All of the scenes will be shot in the interior of the hospital and all parking will be contained on the property.

COMMUNITY SERVICES HAPPENINGS

LIBRARY DIVISION

Library's Summer Hours. The Monrovia Library's summer operating hours begin on Monday, June 18. The hours are Monday and Tuesday 10:30 a.m. – 9 p.m.; Wednesday 10:30 a.m. – 6 p.m.; and Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 10:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. The Library resumes its fall operating hours on Monday, September 10.

Summer Reading Club for Children and Teen. The Library's popular Summer Reading Club starts on Monday, June 18 with a mystery theme. The children's reading club is titled *Get a Clue* and includes the reading portion with incentives and an array of events including Storytimes, Tuesday Specials, Dinner Theaters, Best Books Program and Great Adventurers. The Reading Club is also going on the road to the summer schools and the Boys & Girls Club.

The reading club for middle school and high school students is called *You Never Know @ Your Library*. Teens are encouraged to read throughout the summer and produce a book report for each book. However, teens can choose from a variety of creative book report options including: writing a letter to the author, creating diary/journal entries, making a photo collage, writing a poem and more. For every book report turned in, students receive a chance to win tickets to Disneyland. Teens can also participate in a City Photographic Treasure Hunt as well as other activity challenges. Special events planned for this age group include: An art and drawing program, a science experiment program, a hip-hop dance lesson and a workshop conducted by well-known graphic novelist Phil Yeh.

Increase Your Knowledge of Being Green. This summer, the Library's Adult Services Section is presenting a series of interactive displays that will provide information and tips on gardening to enrich the environment. *You Never Know How GREEN You Can Be* will include displays on vermin-composting with live worms in the library; composting; water-wise gardening; fire-wise gardening; attracting birds, butterflies and bees for pollination and germination; and using insects to keep the environment in balance instead of chemical pesticides.

Literacy. The Library's Literacy Coordinator Melanie Goodyear has received certification from the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration. Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA) is the

only international professional certification in the field of volunteer resources management. Originally developed by the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) several decades ago, the program is now sponsored by the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA). The CVA credential reflects mastery of the knowledge required of practitioners in this field as measured through an examination process and a peer assessment process. Ms. Goodyear is currently managing over 50 volunteers in her capacity as Literacy Coordinator.

RECREATION DIVISION

2007 Concerts in the Park. "Summer Sets". The City of Monrovia, Department of Community Services, is pleased to announce the return of the Concerts in the Park, Family Concert Series, "Summer Sets." Bring the entire family to Monrovia Library Park for an evening of free musical entertainment from 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m. The concerts are held ten consecutive Sunday's starting June 17 and concluding on August 19. Food vendors will be on hand to provide delicious summer foods to enhance your picnic. Bring your lawn chair or blanket, sit back, relax and enjoy the Family Concert Series.

The Sunday, June 17 concert is the Doo Wah Riders. Come and celebrate Father's Day and enjoy an afternoon of country/western music.

FROM THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Personnel responded to 58 emergency calls from 0800 hours June 6 to 0800 hours June 13. Significant incidents include:

Structure Fire. On Friday, June 8, afternoon firefighters responded into the City of Arcadia on a reported garage fire to the rear of the property. Firefighters located a two-car detached garage fully involved in fire. The fire was extinguished and damage confined to the garage.

Motor Home Fire next to a Structure. On Friday afternoon, June 8, firefighters responded to the 100 block of east Cherry on a reported motor home fire next to the structure. Firefighters quickly extinguished the fire inside the R.V. preventing any spread to the home.

TRAINING AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Several members of the Monrovia Fire Department will be attending Urban Search & Rescue, Confined Space Operational Training. The training will be administered in the City of Arcadia, June 25 through 29. The final class roster was sent to the California State Fire Marshal's Office confirming the attendance of ten (10) of our personnel. Confined Space Operational Training is one of the four core classes designated by the federal government for USAR Certification. Following this class the Monrovia Fire Department will have ten (10) members fully certified to the National Response level. Our hope is to continue this rotation of our personnel through all four courses and achieve 100% USAR certification for the entire department!

FIRE PREVENTION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

Fire personnel attended the MAP block party this weekend. Personnel spoke to citizens and gave tours of fire apparatus. On that same day fire personnel assisted Monrovia and Arcadia Rotary in a volunteer cleanup of the road leading to Trask Camp. Personnel assisted in clearing the roadway to meet the 10' compliance.

The Prevention Bureau attend two classes based on the new Wildland Interface building standard set to release in 2008. These classes were sponsored by the State Fire Marshal and outlined the new concerns associated with brush fires and residential building construction standards.

The draft of the Hazardous Materials Area Plan has been completed. Personnel are currently reviewing the document and amending changes as necessary.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

The Monrovia Fire Department will be participating in the 2007 International Fire and EMS Safety Stand Down, being held the week of June 17-23. The Stand Down is sponsored by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section of the IAFC.

The Stand Down, themed "Ready to Respond," will focus on preparing firefighters and EMS personnel for their daily duties by reviewing their training and the proper use of equipment to ensure safe response, mitigation and return from all emergency situations. Failure to remain cautious can cause routine activities to become hazardous, as has been shown in the many fire service and emergency medical service line-of-duty deaths and injuries.

In 2006, 105 firefighters died in the line of duty; already this year, 44 have been lost. The purpose of the Safety Stand Down is to reduce these deaths and injuries by calling attention to safety practices and improving them. Stand downs have been used by the military for years to correct issues that have been identified as a problem throughout the ranks.

The Monrovia Fire Department knows the dangers of the job and the Firefighters are willing to take calculated risks to provide life safety to our constituents, but we also want to stress safety for all of our employees. We will use the safety stand down to discuss safety strategies, develop strategies for staying healthy and learn lessons from actions on incidents that led to death and injury, such as the Esperanza Fire in which five U.S. Forest Service Fire Fighters died.

ON THE POLICE BLOTTER

During the last seven day period, the Police Department handled 571 calls for service resulting in 123 investigations. Following are this week's highlighted issues and events:

Robbery. On June 9 at 10:08 a.m., a business in the 100 block of Stedman reported a robbery. A male suspect had approached the manager while she was walking to her vehicle and was in possession of a bank deposit bag containing cash. The suspect asked the manager to give him the bag. She saw a bulge in the suspect's waistband, and the suspect moved his hand toward it. He then grabbed the bag from her hand. The suspect fled north on Stedman on foot, no weapons were seen. Investigation continuing.

Stolen Vehicle Recovery. On June 9 at 16:30 p.m., an officer was dispatched to the 200 block of West Cherry regarding a public assist. When he arrived, he spoke to the reporting party, who said his son had bought a car from a subject in Pasadena. The man said his son told him the subject who sold the car was going to report the car stolen, because the son is on drugs and possibly had not paid for the car. The father did not know for sure what car it was, but thought it was around the corner from the location. The officer drove around the corner and saw a car with paper plates. He ran the VIN number and it returned stolen out of Pasadena. Prints were taken.

Burglary. On June 10 at 3:07 a.m., officers responded to a business in the 600 block of West Huntington on a burglary alarm. Officers discovered a smashed out store window at the location.

They searched the business, but no suspects were located. Officers met with the store owner and it appeared no merchandise had been taken from the store, but some customer account paperwork in the back office appeared to be ransacked. Investigation continuing.

Death Report. On June 10 at 6:24 p.m., while returning to his unit after handling an alarm call, an officer noticed a motor home parked on Chestnut had its side door ajar. Officers opened the door to check and found a 50-year-old man deceased. A small vehicle was parked in front of the motor home with the keys in the ignition. There were numerous prescription bottles in the subject's name with a local pharmacy and physician. The physician was notified and stated he would sign the death certificate. There were no indications of foul play.

Assault with a Deadly Weapon. On June 11 at 7:40 p.m., officers went to Mayflower and Palm regarding a fight with a victim bleeding from the head. Officers arrived, but the suspect had fled. Officers interviewed the victim and witnesses and determined the victim had been struck over the head with a bottle, causing a two inch laceration on the victim's head. While the officers were interviewing the victim and witnesses, the suspect returned to the scene. The suspect has a previous arrest for assault with a deadly weapon, and he was arrested and taken to Eastlake Juvenile Detention facility. The victim was transported to the hospital where he was treated for his injuries.

Robbery. On June 12 at 9:01 a.m., an officer was dispatched to Monterey and Huntington regarding a purse snatching that just occurred. The victim was carrying her three month old child when she was pushed from behind by an adult male suspect. The suspect took the victim's purse and fled on foot. Property taken was a black leather purse containing identification and some cash. Investigation continuing.

Suspicious Subjects. On June 12 at 6:05 p.m., an officer went to the 300 block of Melrose. A heavy set male adult and a boy about 10 years old knocked on the door of an elderly couple. When the female opened the door, the child stepped across the threshold, where he was stopped by the woman. The male adult said he had lived in the area years ago and was moving back, and he was just trying to meet the neighbors. After a brief conversation the subjects left. The female waited about 30 minutes to notify the Police Department. Officers made an area search, but did not locate the suspicious subjects.

Suspicious Subjects. On June 13 at approximately 7:35 p.m., officers responded to the 200 block of Magnolia. A heavy set male adult, an adult female, and a boy approximately 10 years old were driving in a vehicle and called out to a man riding his power wheel chair northbound on Magnolia. The child seemed to call the victim by his first name. As the man drove his scooter to the rear of his residence, the subjects drove into the driveway and followed the man to the rear door.

At the rear door, the child offered to carry the shopping bags for the man in the wheelchair. Before the man could comment, the child picked up his groceries and carried them into the house. The man and woman went into the house, too. After the man got water for the woman and allowed the male to use the bathroom, the male and female got calls on their cell phones simultaneously. They both answered their phones and left the location abruptly. While there was no obvious crime at either location, the coincidental matching descriptions caused officers to document the events for future reference.

Kidnapping. On June 13 at 7:00 p.m., a female met with her ex-boyfriend at a local grocery store. After a lengthy conversation about their failed relationship, the male suspect convinced the female victim to allow him to drive her back to her house. After she got in the car, the suspect locked the doors and started to drive to Las Vegas, forcing the victim to go against her will. The victim called her mother at approximately 12:25 a.m. The mother reported the kidnapping to the Monrovia Police Department. Notifications were made to local agencies in an attempt to locate the car.

The victim and suspect both had Sprint cell phones, and Sprint was able to activate the GPS system and locate the suspect vehicle. The suspect had turned around and was headed back toward Los Angeles. The suspect told the victim he would kill her before they got back to Los Angeles. Police

were not able to find the vehicle until the suspect tried to return to his house in Azusa. Officers from the Azusa Police Department stopped the car after it exited the freeway and detained the subjects. Monrovia officers picked up the suspect and victim and returned them to Monrovia Police Department.



ENGINEERING:

Colorado Commons Update. Construction is moving forward. Staff is reviewing the Shared Parking Facility Easement Agreement and the Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs) for the development. The agreement and CC&Rs provide the framework for the operations, maintenance and responsibilities of the project after construction is complete. This formalizes the public-private development after construction.

Street Resurfacing Project – Update. All paving operations are complete. The alleys between Alta Vista and Mayflower south of Foothill; and Ivy and Myrtle south of Palm were repaved. This week, the final punch list items are being finalized and the entire project will be completed by the end of next week.

OPERATIONS – Environmental Services – Facilities – Parks:

Motor Oil Discharge. On Tuesday, June 12, 2007, Environmental Services received a call from the Police Department regarding a traffic collision on Huntington Drive at Primrose Avenue. The accident created a large pool of motor oil near the intersection, stretching approximately half a block. With the assistance of the Streets Division and Fire Department and their quick response, the oil did not spread any further and did not enter the storm drain.

Community Center Tile Project. The Community Center tile flooring improvements will be completed this week with the front entrance and reception area open and accessible for regular business. The new tile accents the Spanish-style architecture of the building with small, decorative tile pieces. Please stop by and see the new entrance and reception area.

Recreation Park Tennis Courts. Parks staff will be making repairs to the tennis courts net straps and anchors that were damaged from vandalism.

We were also notified that the night lights for courts #3 and #4 are not working. Staff is investigating the problem and will try to repair it and have the lights back to normal operation as soon as possible.

Tree Trimming. The City's contractor, TruGreen, trimmed trees along Olive and Myrtle Avenues this week in preparation for the 4th of July festivities and fire works.

Library Park. Our Parks staff is getting Library Park ready for the Summer Concert Series, which starts on Sunday, June 17 and is scheduled to run through Sunday, August 19.

STREETS:

Driveway Approach Rehabilitation:
177 McKinley Pl.

Graffiti Removal from Traffic Signs:
Removed graffiti from 21 traffic signs

Traffic Sign and/or Painting Installation/Replacement:

- Installed 50 ft. of red curb at 425 & 427 S. Myrtle Ave.
- Installed 30 ft. of red curb at E. Lemon

- Installed a city limit sign on Hillcrest Blvd. west of Fifth Ave.
- Installed two Church Parking Only signs in the parking lot--southeast corner of Primrose/Lime
- Re-installed missing handicap sign in the 100 block of W. Lime Ave.
- Moved a downtown trolley sign from 118 S. Myrtle Ave. to 200 S. Myrtle Ave. on light pole.
- Installed 35 ft. of red curb at 118 S. Myrtle Ave.
- Installed skateboarding and bicycling prohibited signs in downtown district.

Miscellaneous:

Weed abatement along Central Ave. from Mountain to Mayflower.

UTILITIES:

Customer Service

- 1,893 water meters were read and recorded
- 92 work orders were completed
- 1 water meter was replaced
- 2 water meter lids were replaced
- 11 backflow preventer were tested
- 140 shut-off notices were distributed
- 5 water services were reactivated

Water Production

Water consumption was 60 million gallons, which was the same as last week's water usage.

The following weekly water samplings were collected by staff per the requirements of the Department of Health Services:

- 17 water system samplings
- 3 water treatment facility samplings

Our Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) for the year 2006 has been completed. This is a report concerning the quality of our water supply and is required by the Department of Health Services once a year. Copies of the CCR will be available at City Hall, Community Center, Library, and is also posted at the City's web site in the Public Works/Utilities section. Residents will also be receiving a copy of the CCR in their water bills for the month of July 2007.

Utility Maintenance

- 4-1" residential water services were installed
- 1-1" service leak repaired
- 1 new fire hydrant installed at 1825 S. 10th Street
- 40 water main system valves were inspected and operated
- 9 underground service alert's utility location requests were completed
- 12,400 feet of sewer mains were cleaned

2006 -2007 Water Main Replacement Project Update. The water project at Stedman Place, Oaks Avenue, and Highland Place was completed on schedule. Minor work will continue as part of the final construction punch list.

2006-2007 Sewer Main Replacement Project Update. The sewer line construction at Canyon Boulevard will start on June 25. The second location at Colorado Boulevard and Primrose Avenue is anticipated to start on July 23. Affected residents and business owners will receive advance notice including a telephone number to call for the upcoming sewer construction.

Have a great weekend!

FOR YOUR CALENDARS:

Sun., June 19, 6:30 p.m.	Family Concert Series “Doo Wah Riders”, Library Park
Tues., June 19, 7:30 p.m.	Regular Council Meeting
Thurs., June 21, 5:30 p.m.	Chamber Mixer, Four Monkeys Studio
Sun., June 24, 6:30 p.m.	Family Concert Series “UnderCover Girls”, Library Park
Tues., July 3, 7:30 p.m.	Regular Council Meeting
<i>WEDNESDAY, JULY 4</i>	<i>INDEPENDENCE DAY, CITY HALL CLOSED</i>
Tues., July 17, 7:30 p.m.	Regular Council Meeting

CMO ATTACHMENTS:

The chapter is closed

Mystic Sisters bookstore departing Old Town Monrovia

By Emanuel Parker Staff Writer
Pasadena Star-News

MONROVIA - Tina Carey's dream of a community center where people could gather and find culture, learning and healing, ended Sunday with the closure of Mystic Sisters bookstore.

Formerly at 417 S. Myrtle Ave., Mystic Sisters offered an eclectic mixture of books, cards, gifts, works by local authors and artists, healing sessions, workshops and classes, and served as a meeting place for Native American groups and Baha'i faithful.

It had been a struggle to keep the bookstore going since it opened in 1999, Carey said, and street improvements that closed Myrtle for several months didn't help.

"That was the icing on the cake," she said, "the fact that the streets were torn up from September through February, so it ruined the fourth quarter for all of us. A number of merchants would say this sidewalk closure killed us."

But city spokesman Dick Singer disputes that. He said rising rents are causing businesses to leave the Old Town. "If Old Town weren't doing well," he said, "rents would not be rising."

Carey also said it's been difficult getting residents to participate in the bookstore's charity events and book fairs. Two groups that did flock to Mystic Sisters were authors and artists. "Local authors who couldn't get into Barnes & Noble could actually get their stuff on our shelves," Carey said. "We had more than 300 artists on consignment here. We displayed their works, sold them and split the sale price."

Kathryn Esche of Glendale heard about the closure and brought flowers to console Carey and her sister, Carole Smith, who ran the bookstore. "I think it's sad," she said. "I came over and brought some flowers just 'cause they've been wonderful for the community. They always opened my mind to other things. They've been wonderful friends." The bookstore closed Sunday after what Carey called "a good cry party."

Scenes from "American Pie II," "Species III" and "Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star," were filmed at Mystic Sisters. Steven Tyler, lead singer for Aerosmith, once dropped by to buy incense.

Singer said Mystic Sisters is one of several Old Town businesses closing because of rising rents. Carey said the rent had gone from \$1,800 in 1999 to \$4,000 a month, and Singer said the property owner wanted \$6,000 a month.

"It's a cyclical thing," he said. "Five years ago, when the \ theatres opened, rents went up. Those leases are expiring and leases are going up again. It's a natural market cycle. Rent increases always have this effect."

Singer said seven businesses, including Mystic Sisters, have closed recently; they include Sinful Souls, a high-end clothing store; and Sweet Garlic, a Thai restaurant that moved to Pasadena and will be replaced by another Thai restaurant.

Others that closed were Ice Spice, an Indian restaurant that will be replaced by an Indian-Mexican restaurant; Pets Delight, which lost its lease; Colburn's Candles; and Amori, a restaurant.

Singer said Valley Hardware left town and was replaced by Valley Hardware and Toys, and Frank and Joe's, a Southern-style restaurant, which closed. Carey said Natick Stamps and Hobbies also will close soon.

City officials are concerned about the closures, Singer said, and will host a July 18 brokers' reception for property and business owners. "To reintroduce them to Old Town and the opportunities there," he said. "To show them Colorado Commons, the street improvements and to generate some interest in Myrtle Avenue."

Meanwhile, Carey, 55, who lives in Duarte, said she'll take a sabbatical. "But I'm the kind of person who needs face-to-face involvement." She teaches Reiki, a Japanese healing technique, and said she will find a place where she can treat clients.

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Faster than fast

Start-up's technology hastens e-file transfers

By Kevin Smith Staff Writer

San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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MONROVIA - In the world of Internet data transfers, speed is king. Slow downloads can be both frustrating and costly for businesses that want to remain efficient.

No company knows this more than FastSoft Inc., a Monrovia-based business whose technology significantly speeds online data transfers.

FastSoft just completed a \$4 million round of private equity funding, led by Miramar Venture Partners. The money will be used to accelerate sales, marketing and product development, company officials said. "We are at a point now where we know much more what the right markets and right strategy are for us," said Steven Low, FastSoft's co-founder and CEO. "This money will allow us to better execute that strategy."

FastSoft's Aria 1050 network appliance - a device about the size of a pizza box - makes Internet data transfers go significantly faster. How much faster? Low explains it this way:

"Honda R&D is using our Aria 1050 to send their car designs from their design center in Los Angeles to their headquarters in Tokyo. That's a long distance with very large files. Without our product it took them 16 minutes to transfer a design file. With our product it takes less than 30 seconds."

The technology has allowed engineers in California and Japan to work together in real time, instead of waiting for critical files to download.

And unlike similar products produced by competitors, FastSoft's technology doesn't require the recipients of files to install a separate hardware device or additional software.

Dan Henderson, FastSoft's vice president of product and market development, said the technology eliminates many of the inefficiencies that until now have been inherent in data transfers.

"It's like if you were using a water hose," he said. "Our technology squeezes out the air bubbles so the water can travel faster."

Pacific Internet Exchange, a company that provides fiber optic bandwidth connecting North America and Asia, is another FastSoft client.

Because of high hosting costs in Japan, Pacific specializes in hosting Japanese Web sites in the San Francisco Bay area.

The company is using FastSoft's technology to overcome the lag caused by transferring large files over a long distance.

"The Aria box gave us a way to speed up our connections without having to reconfigure our network," Pacific President David Grieshaber said. "One customer is doing streaming video and this has made an increase of 100 times in speed."

And quicker means more cost-effective. "The return on investment is pretty high," Grieshaber acknowledged. "The customer is able to download data quicker, which means they can get more done."

Post Group, a post-production TV and film company that works on such television shows as "CSI," "House" and "Numbers," also uses FastSoft's technology.

"We send audio and video files and it was taking us forever," said Darin Harris, Post's chief information officer. "Now we don't have to tie up our Internet connection as long and our clients are much happier. They're getting files 10 to 15 times faster."

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