

# HIGHLIGHTS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE VILLAGE GREEN OWNERS ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2013



Flood waters at the corner of La Brea and Rodeo. Photo courtesy of Steven Keylon.

## 50 YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE BALDWIN HILLS RESERVOIR COLLAPSE AND THE WATER CAME TUMBLING DOWN

By George Rheault, Court 2

It began with a trickle. Then came the deluge. Then a trickle again. Roughly 77 minutes of flood forever altered the Village Green and Baldwin Hills.

December 14, 1963 began just as any other busy holiday Saturday. For much of the day, until mid-afternoon, virtually everyone in the Village Green assumed it would stay that way. But then, the motorcycle squad of the Los Angeles Police Department began knocking on doors, a police helicopter began flying over blowing warning horns, and a muddy wall of water and debris as high as 15 feet soon crashed down.

### DISCOVERY

Those who had been on La Brea Avenue since noon might have known something was amiss as a

steady flow of water had begun filling gutters from high above the Baldwin hills.

Anyone following its source would have discovered an epic battle playing out at the Baldwin Hills Reservoir, built and run by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. At just after 11 a.m., the reservoir caretaker discovered strange noises of running water beneath the dam's underdrainage system. After another 90 minutes of investigation and consultations, LADWP officials began a race to empty the reservoir before it could unleash its powerful cargo upon the residents below. From reversing massive inlet pipes drawing from the Hollywood, Franklin Canyon and Stone Canyon reservoirs, to diverting into Ballona Creek, everything was tried to safely release the dam's

*(Flood, continued on page 4)*

### COYOTES:

## BETWEEN A ROCK & A HARD PLACE

By Lucy Fried, Court 13

Coyote sightings in the Green this fall and two coyote-suspected cat killings have left many residents frightened and angry. Some wanted the Board to set traps and have the animals killed or relocated far away; others were angry when the manager did call in a trapper, and someone tripped the traps. Questions abounded. What does the law say about trapping coyotes? Why have they suddenly appeared? Will we and our pets have to lose our freedom to enjoy the Green whenever we want to and cede the space to coyotes from dusk to dawn? What can we do?

In response, the Board authorized an information meeting for residents and invited Officer Gregory Randall, a longtime specialist with City of Los Angeles' Animal Services wildlife program. By the end of the presentation and discussion on November 13, there were some answers, but it was clear there are no easy solutions.

*(Coyotes, continued on page 6)*

### INSIDE

- 2** Around the Green
- 3** 50 Plus Club Shutters
- 7** Points of View
- 8** Event Calendar & Passages

# AROUND THE GREEN

By Lucy Fried, Court 13

## SIX SEATS TO FILL

Six seats on the nine-member Village Green Owners Association Board of Directors must be filled at the February 1 Annual Meeting. The top four vote getters will serve two-year terms; the others one-year terms. This will enable the Board to maintain a staggered term structure. The Board and committees have an enormous influence on the quality of life at Village Green. Consider volunteering your service.

## GOINGS AND COMINGS

2013 saw an unusually large number of changes in the volunteer leadership of the VGOA, as three Board directors resigned, five committees changed chairs, and one committee lost its chair and closed down.

President Rob Creighton was the first director to step down in May. Vice president John Keho became president and Joe Koury vice president. In August, the Board chose Lucy Fried to fill Creighton's seat. Next to leave was director Gabriela Worrel in September, who was succeeded by Dee Dee Chappell. Then, in late October, president Keho resigned. His vacancy remains unfilled. Secretary Jerri Allyn was voted president and Lucy Fried secretary.

Four longtime committee chairs gave up their positions this year: Budget and Finance's Pat Brown; Tree Committee's Gordon Brooks; Landscape's Georgia Lumpkin; and Social Recreation's Priscilla Browner. Director George Rheault was appointed to reconstitute Budget and Finance and serve as its temporary chair. Jeffrey Mintz was elected chair of Trees; Wendell Conn was elected chair of Landscape; and Social Recreation ceased to exist. Conn also replaced Steven Keylon as chair



▲ Ben and Bene Gorton are Willie Wonka and Veruca Salt with their little oompa loompa, Phoenix, at this year's Halloween party. PHOTO BY TANYA MILLS.

of the Design Review Committee. The sixth committee head to step down this year was *Highlights'* dedicated and talented editor and Communications Committee chair Shumway Marshall, who announced he would be leaving Los Angeles in December. No successor has yet been identified.

## BUILDING STABILIZATION PROJECT ROLLS OUT

After five years of discussion, studies, passage of a special assessment, and finally, a bidding process and selection of a contractor, the helical piers (piles) project to stabilize Buildings 8 and 14 in Courts 2 and 3 has begun. If all goes according to plan, the work will be finished by the end of March, possibly April, according to Village Green manager Peter Fay. The cost is \$640,000, which includes the restoration of concrete in patio and common areas and landscaping. Both courts will also be re-sewered for an additional \$316,800. No contracts have

yet been signed for interior repairs necessitated by the buildings' subsidence.

## FRACKING, ROUND ONE

Despite the defeat of legislation to ban fracking in California, anti-fracking activists remain upbeat. They are reaching out to communities in California and other states and building a national coalition. This is because fracking and other "enhanced drilling" techniques are occurring in many areas.

Los Angeles City Councilmembers Mike Bonin and Paul Koretz have introduced a motion for a fracking moratorium in the city of Los Angeles. Speakers at an anti-fracking rally also called for petitions and letters to Governor Brown, who has the authority to ban fracking in the state. **VG**

## SURPRISES AT ANNUAL PLANT SWAP

Neighbors who came to the Landscape Committee's plant swap this fall hoping to exchange a plant they no longer wanted for a new one got an unexpected windfall when resident Byron Hudson showed up with a wagon load of gorgeous house plants, succulents, and dish gardens to give away. He and his family were moving soon and could not take the plants with them. Byron filled the wagon a couple more times to the delight of "swappers" and gave away more than 20 plants of various sizes, all in charming glazed or clay pots. Byron's plants spread a lot of joy that day.

—Georgia Lumpkin, Court 12

# THE 50 PLUS CLUB SHUTTERS AS PRISCILLA BROWNER STEPS DOWN

By Joseph Taylor, Court 16

South Africa. China. The Caribbean. Canada. Mexico. It seemed fitting that with all those destinations and more under their belt, the Village Green 50 Plus Senior Club would come together for a final time at the Proud Bird, a storied aviation restaurant located next to a busy runway at LAX. Priscilla Browner, the founder and leader of the organization, was retiring—and as a result, the club was shuttering.

On a sunny Thursday, Aug. 29, some 325 of the organization's 500 members, many of them women, came together for a luncheon to pay tribute and say goodbye.

They easily filled the restaurant's expansive Grand Ballroom.

Once lunch was over and dessert enjoyed, Priscilla, 76, used a walker to take to the podium. "Time waits for no man or no woman," she said, in reference to her decision to leave.

A mild heart attack she experienced in Sept. 2012 had set her back, she explained to friends.

She recounted with pride some of the achievements of the club, not the least of which were the more than 2,000 outings and trips completed since it was founded in 1999 and the fact that the all-volunteer club remained self-sustaining.

"We received no remuneration from Village Green or any other organization," she said in an earlier interview. "In fact, we put money into improving the Clubhouse and tore out its [then worn-out] carpeting." In all, according to Priscilla, the club contributed \$13,000 toward improving the Clubhouse, which served as the organization's meeting place.

Priscilla, who worked 25 years in various adminis-

trative capacities at UCLA's medical center and is now retired, considers organization her strong suit. She and her husband, Melvin, who joined her at the luncheon, have been residents of Village Green since April 1999.

Among the many who spoke at the event in praise of Priscilla and her contributions were two field representatives from the Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks Senior Citizen Section, Edward Woods and Cherie Weatherall. "Leadership is always the key ingredient," said Mr. Woods. "Whether it was leading the club or creating the most successful trip

or tour program, this special lady is truly a woman of valor."

For some time, the club has been considered a model senior club in the region. Partly as an acknowledgment of its success, Priscilla in 2010 was appointed Council President of the Los Angeles Federation of Senior Citizen Clubs, which is comprised of 115 clubs from San Pedro to the San Fernando Val-

ley. For now, she remains active in that position.

The 50 Plus Club began with activities such as bridge and board games at the Village Green Clubhouse. The first outing was a day trip on Sept. 19, 2000, to Wild Bill's Wild West Dinner Extravaganza in Buena Park. The first overnight trip soon followed, to San Diego.

Out of 135 charter members, 20 were able to attend the luncheon, including Guinevere Flavien, who is 100 years old. From her wheelchair, she shared some advice with a couple of younger attendees following the event: "Enjoy the journey!"

As the club grew, more of its members came from  
(Browner, continued on page 6)



Priscilla Browner speaks at the 50 Plus Club farewell luncheon in August.  
Photo by Joseph Taylor.



(Flood, continued from page 1)  
destructive power.

But it was not to be. At 3:38 p.m., the northern wall gave way. KTLA footage (viewable on YouTube via the History Channel) shows how the reservoir's placid waters became a surging cauldron of churn, mud and debris headed north down Cloverdale. Fanning out through the Village Green then out to La Brea and La Cienega, the water met its match against the rise south of Jefferson Boulevard, sparing additional neighborhoods.

Five Village Green residents perished (see inset). While warnings were given, conflicting information about the extent of the threat and the time available to avoid it made some hesitate to flee. Others were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

For those not injured or killed, the events took an absurdist bent. An afternoon drive suddenly became a nautical experience with safety and well-being directly related to your vehicle's ability to float. Shoppers at Fedco (where Target is now) were trapped by three feet of water. The Rodeo Bowl bowling alley (now the Bahá'í Center) saw its shiny lanes inundated with inches of thick mud.

### RECOVERY

Los Angeles Fire Department helicopters picked up 18 people clinging to rooftops and fences. Tales of heroic rescue from waterlogged cars, shops and homes and apartments were plenty. But almost as suddenly as the water came, it abated. The disaster was finite and shockingly brief in relation to the damage done: roughly 8,000 people driven from their homes, 64 houses destroyed, 96 apartment buildings and 117 other buildings damaged with losses exceeding \$10 million. Over 1,900 victims and property holders were impacted, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Fortunately, federal, state and local governments sprang into action with precedent-setting disaster relief. A young Tom Bradley, fresh from election as the first African-American councilman in Los Angeles, was tested as the totality of the disaster was contained within his district. Governor Pat Brown and the State Legislature, in less than 2 months, passed a special insurance bill allowing for LADWP's insurers to pay claims immediately without waiting for a final determination of liability. Aided by millions of dollars in claim payments, many victims bounced back quickly.

# 50

YEARS SINCE  
THE FLOOD

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## COMMEMORATION

Displays, Family Activities &  
Recognition Ceremony

**Saturday, December 14**

12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

**Upper Kenneth Hahn State  
Recreation Area**

Janice's Green Valley

Entrance at 4100 S. La Cienega

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The Village Green also quickly recovered. Destroyed buildings and garages were rebuilt under the direction of one of the Village Green's original architects. By March 1965, the complex had awarded a big 3-month landscape contract to renew the lawns and parkways that had been covered with mud, upheaved asphalt, and concrete. The Merrill Winans landscape from this era is still largely with us today and is what gave the Village Green its reputation as a lush urban forest.

### LIABILITY

Blame for the collapse ultimately settled on oil field activities, includ-



ing ground movements it caused over previously undetected faults. Planned in 1947, the dam and infrastructure connecting it to the rest of the city's reservoirs took four years to build and began operation in 1951. At its dedication, it was heralded as "the safest earth-filled dam in the world."

The liability issues were finally resolved in a court settlement with the oil companies in March 1970. LADWP's insurers recovered a sizable portion, but not all of the claims paid out in 1964. Ironically, Baldwin M. Baldwin, the owner of the Village Green from 1962 until his death in September 1970, was a defendant. Since he owned land around the reservoir in 1963, which he leased to the oil companies, Baldwin himself was liable in part for harming the Village Green.

There was no question the tragedy could have been worse. Had the dam unveiled its flaws at night without warning, the death and injury toll likely would have rivaled the worst U.S. dam disasters.

## REBUILDING

While LADWP had quickly given up any idea of rebuilding the reservoir, replacement water storage such as

a tank farm was long considered but eventually dropped. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, Mayor Sam Yorty tried to convince the Anaheim Angels that the site would be ideal for a stadium, evoking memories of the Dodgers recent relocation to Chavez Ravine. The pitch was short-lived since the adjacent neighborhoods, still raw from raging waters, did not take to the idea of enduring regular waves of baseball fans.

The placid, almost pastoral, reservoir where people had once bicycled and bird watched eventually became a cornerstone of a state recreational area run by the county and renamed in 1988 as Kenneth Hahn Park, in honor of the county supervisor who had worked throughout the 1970s to turn the site into a park.

50 years later, the lasting impacts of the flood are hard to notice from a distance. The event proceeded big changes to Los Angeles, as desegregation in housing and civil rights would soon transform the surrounding neighborhoods. The newly spruced up Village Green would be swept up in this change when it was sold in 1971, quickly converted to condominiums and into the diverse community it is today. **VG**

PHOTOS: The Administration building, now the Clubhouse. Courtesy of Steven Keylon.

Two photos of Building #33 from the Village Green Archives.

DECEMBER 14, 1963

## Village Green Victims

Baldwin Hills Reservoir Collapse

**Hattie Schwartz**, 72, of 5366 Village Green drowned after her car was swept into an excavation pit on Rodeo Road and La Brea.

**Maurice Clifton Carroll**, 60, of 5412 Village Green

**Arch Young**, 58, of 5406 Village Green, was found the day after the flood at Jefferson Blvd. and Higuera Road. His wife was hospitalized after also being swept out of their apartment.

**Orra G. Strathearn**, 70, of 5412 Village Green was found buried in mud and debris about 150 feet from her apartment.

**Archie V. MacDonald**, 70, of 5410 Village Green, a retired executive director of the Los Angeles Home Furnishings Mart, was found beneath debris a half mile from his apartment.

# COYOTES AT THE GREEN

(Coyotes, continued from page 1)

## A HUMANS PROBLEM?

First of all, California law forbids trappers from relocating coyotes far away and mandates that captured coyotes either be killed or released on the property where they were captured. Therefore, trapping is either useless or requires killing. And Officer Randall insisted that killing coyotes is also useless because it does not stop others from coming another time.

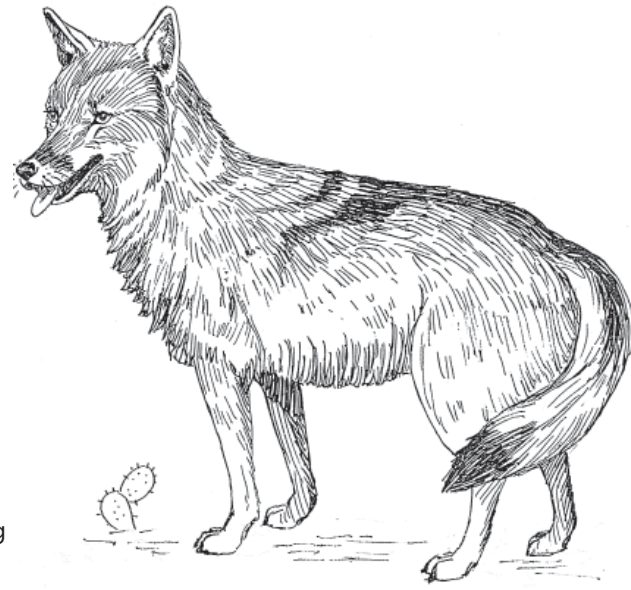
The emphasis today is on changing human behavior to discourage coyotes from intruding and from attacking. Coyotes go where there is food. While we don't know why some have lately expanded their range here, it's better than a good guess that we are a food destination. Besides our plentiful supply of small animals, we have tempting cat food and water set out in some patios, pet and feral cats on the grounds at night, feral cat colonies nearby, open trash bins, and ripe fruit on the ground. Officer Randall stressed that we can discourage coyotes from coming here by removing these food sources.

We can also deter coyotes, he said, by being aggressive toward them. Explaining that coyotes are afraid

of humans and that our actions can increase their fear, he urged the audience to be proactive: open an umbrella outward and move toward the animals; blow a whistle; yell or shake a box of rocks, for example. They like dark and quiet and retreat from light and noise and threatening behavior. He suggested we do not need to stop using the grounds after dark, but that it is a good idea to bring something to "haze" them with and be ready to use it.

## LARGER PICTURE

This situation, imperfect and uncomfortable for many, may or may not continue. Officials have noted an increase in urban coyotes sightings over the last several years. Coyotes, less active in winter, may reappear again in spring, and much may depend on what is done to make the Green and adjacent areas less attractive to coyotes. Officer Randall explained that Animal Services—an underfunded and understaffed program—will return to the area to locate and attempt to address situations such as feral cat colonies that may be drawing these predators.



The meeting drew not only Village Green residents but also members of other homeowner associations in Baldwin Hills and the surrounding community. These neighbors also have concerns about wild animal intrusions onto their properties. In addition, representatives from the Sierra Club and the Baldwin Hills Conservancy working in the Kenneth Hahn Park area and the Baldwin Hills Overlook attended and participated. Board member George Rheault earned a "thanks" from attendees for organizing the timely meeting, as did Mickey Fielding for producing a detailed information flyer. **VG**

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# PRISCILLA BROWNER STEPS DOWN

(Browner, continued from page 3)

outside Village Green. This year only 37 of the group's 500 members were Village Green residents. Priscilla explained that due to city regulations membership in the club always had to be open to all seniors in the area.

Still, many feel the organization brought positive social activity and

a sense of community and exploration to the Village Green and the seniors who reside here. Board member George Rheault told the luncheon audience, "Village Green is a beautiful place to live and a wonderful community, and the presence of the 50 Plus Club has made it infinitely richer. It will be missed." **VG**



## QUALITIES OF A GOOD BOARD MEMBER

By Gabriela Worrel, Court 13

I had the privilege of serving on the Village Green Owners Association (VGOA) Board of Directors for almost two years. I'd like to share what I've learned with the community. Following are three characteristics I value in board directors, and qualities I would like to further develop within myself.

### A TEAM PLAYER

One of the most important characteristics I look for in a director is the ability to be a team player and collaborate productively with others. Being a director requires a collaborative and team approach on many levels. An individual director must work with: the Board as a whole, any Board subcommittees she joins, at least two committees with which she liaisons, the manager and office workers, individual homeowners, and, in some cases, contractors working for the VGOA. It is vital that everyone understand they are on the same team and support others with whom they are working, even when controversial issues arise.

### UNDERSTANDS THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

I believe that directors should understand that the role of board directors is to set policy, not carry out the day-to-day tasks done by our management and staff. Everyone needs to be allowed to do his own job. This is a tough one, even for me, and something I learned the hard way during my time on the Board. As a director, I wanted to be intimately involved in all things that I cared about. However, the reality is individual directors are not there to do the work of those the Association pays to manage the day-to-day activities.

### AT LEAST ONE UNIQUE SKILL

It is my experience no one director will have *all* the skills needed to run the VGOA, but everyone has at least one helpful skill they can contribute. Some folks are good at running productive meetings. Some people have insight into how to proceed with legal issues. Others are skilled with money and budgets. There are many other useful qualities, and inevitably, any director will have much to learn while they serve. The point is, we need many skills on the team, and it helps if a director can identify their unique contribution, understand their individual limitations, and enthusiastically allow others to use theirs.

I encourage everyone to think and talk about what criteria are important to you. **VG**

By Cynthia Singleton, Court 15

Each February, homeowners elect several members to the Board of Directors. Each of the nine board members carry with them some very important responsibilities. Here are some of the qualities I found useful during my four years as a board member.

### DUE DILIGENCE

In advance of monthly meetings, each board member receives a thick binder of materials. I think it is necessary for each board member to take the time to research everything presented to the board for action. Yes, it is time consuming, but that is exactly what a board member has committed to do when running for office, and if they are elected.

This is the key job of a director: their commitment to do their very best to perform their due diligence in making decisions. Regardless of how other board members vote, each should perform her own independent research of the issue, and vote what is best for the Village Green's owners as a whole. It does not mean giving your vote as a rubber stamp to be popular with your fellow board members or to just "go-along-to-get-a-long."

### FIDUCIARY DUTY

In my mind, the next biggest obligation is a director's fiduciary duty. This means as a board member you must always look at the ramifications of your decisions on the Association's finances. You are required to look at, and analyze all contracts, and other financial transactions, which require a vote by the Board.

Cheapest is not always the best for the Association in the long run. Therefore your vote, and your argument on many matters may appear contrary to other board members. Therefore, you might be at odds with your fellow directors. But the position of a board member is not a popularity contest. It is a serious commitment to make the best decisions on behalf of all your fellow owners and that is your first and foremost duty. **VG**

*Opinions of these authors do not represent the policies or opinions of the Village Green Owners Association, its management, members of the Board of Directors, or the Communications Committee. The Village Green Communications Committee encourages all residents to express their points of view. If you have an opinion you'd like published in Highlights, email [highlights@villagegreenla.net](mailto:highlights@villagegreenla.net).*



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Holiday Family Cookie Decorating Party

Saturday, December 7  
10 a.m. to Noon  
*At the Clubhouse*

### Holiday Dance Party

Saturday, December 14  
7 p.m. to 11 p.m.  
*At the Clubhouse*

### Annual Association Meeting

Saturday, February 1  
10 a.m.  
*Baldwin Hills Elementary School*

## PASSAGES

Eugene "Gene" Lambert passed away on Friday, August 1, 2013. Gene, a Village Green resident/owner, moved to Village Green in 1995. He truly loved the Village Green and stayed involved by participating and serving in various activities and committees. Gene served as chair of Court Council and worked diligently on the National Historical Landmark committee. He was an avid gardener and enjoyed tending to his plants and flowers, which were admired by all.



Gene was a pioneer in his profession. For over 30 years, he was dedicated to the education field, making history along the way. He integrated the Pasadena Unified School District's administration, becoming the first African-American vice principal, principal, and assistant superintendent of the Pasadena Unified School District. His greatest accomplishment was working in Pasadena influencing thousands of student's lives throughout the years. He will be missed by his family, many of whom reside at the Village Green. **VG**



Art by Lucy Ravenelle, age 9

Village Green *Highlights* is the community newsletter of the Village Green Owners Association, incorporated on August 9, 1973. We make every attempt to ensure the accuracy of all information. However, we are not responsible for errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in this publication. The editor reserves the right to edit articles and letters for tone, clarity and length. Opinions expressed in *Highlights* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the VGOA Board of Directors or the Management. Please submit submissions or comments to the editor at [highlights@villagegreenla.net](mailto:highlights@villagegreenla.net), or to the Office.