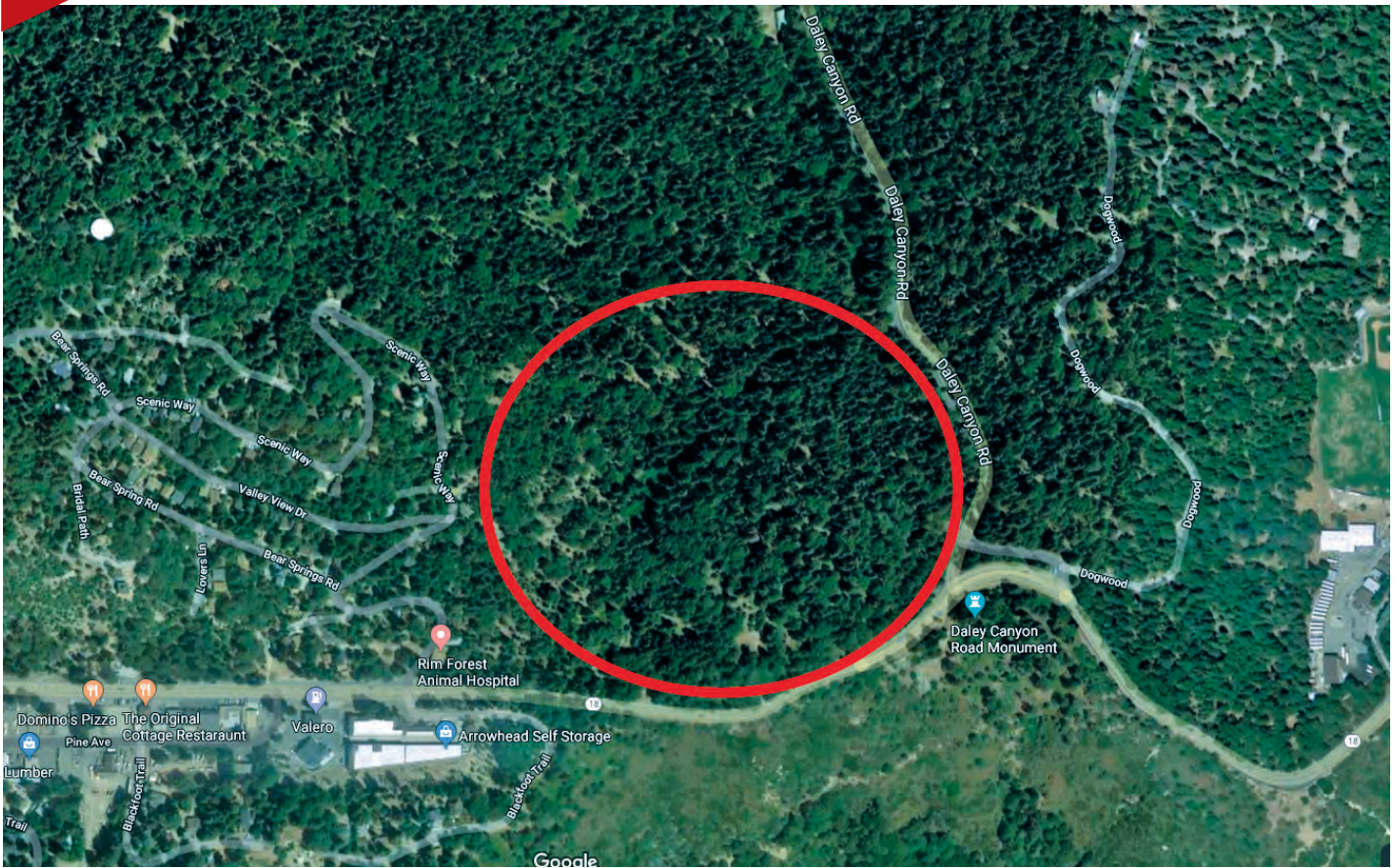


Church Development Project Divides a Community



The Church of the Woods Project site is located on 27 acres of forest between Daley Canyon Road and Bear Springs Road.

It's 8:11 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 12. A coyote moves up a hill in Rimforest and emerges at the opening of the woods. It trots past a white cross erected near Highway 18. Looking like it might cross the road, the coyote stops. A car traveling eastbound rushes past. The coyote reacts, running back from the direction it came — back into the forest.

This forested area is a 27.12-acre parcel of land situated between Daley Canyon Road and Bear Springs Road. It is owned by the Church of the Woods, a Christian congregation of between 300 and 350 people, as estimated by its pastor Rod Akins. Since 2003, the church has attempted to construct a campus on this property but has been met with constant resistance from portions of the mountain community. Years of continued persistence from each side has generated controversy over the development project.

Church leaders, including Akins, have been scrutinized for their plan to level 13.5 acres of wildlife, in a project that would ultimately impact an estimated 16.9 acres during construction, according to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR). The church has faced opposition from environmental groups such as the Save Our Forest Association, The San Bernardino Mountains Sierra Club

and residents stretching from Crestline to Big Bear.

Thus far, the opposition has kept the project grounded in its planning stages, forcing Church of the Woods to partake in the County of San Bernardino's regulatory process.

According to Pat Hopkins, church member, advisor of the Church of the Woods Project and President of Icon General Contractors, the process has cost the church upwards of \$1 million — and that's excluding the purchase of the land.

So what exactly has the church spent this money on? The answer — environmental consultants and the surveys these firms conduct, all in the hope that their findings will satisfy the state and county requirements. On Jan. 10, 2020, the FEIR was released. In it are the survey findings deemed to be most significant by regulatory bodies and the mitigation measures that the church and its contractors must follow should the County of San Bernardino Planning Commission approve the project. Akins and Hopkins expressed confidence with the thoroughness of the FEIR and the diligence of the county-approved consultants who they hired to collect the data. They voiced enthusiasm about providing residents with a safe, centralized, drug-free venue — one where kids can hang out and



A draft rendering from sonriseinthewoods.org. "It obviously won't be an eyesore. We believe, and we think most would agree, the structure and its surroundings will be a match made in heaven."

people can build community.

But those hoping to conserve the pristine beauty and keep the habitat intact find the FEIR to be a document riddled with disingenuous findings and dangerously vague details based on an amorphous regulatory framework. They fear that without more precise surveying, the impact of erosion in Daley Canyon, potentially toxic water runoff beginning at the headwaters of Little Bear Creek and irreversible wildlife destruction and riparian habitat decimation will cause profound damage and yield unintended consequences to the mountain communities.

Further, opponents cite concern of increased traffic flow, light and noise pollution and destruction of wildlife. Depending on who one asks, the property abuts or is part of a wildlife corridor which, according to the 2019 Draft EIR, provides a suitable habitat for three special-status species in the region. These species include the Southern Rubber Boa, California Spotted Owl and San Bernardino Flying Squirrel. In addition to these special-status species, other animals like, deer, bears, raccoons and coyotes use the corridor.

The 2019 Draft EIR also references mandatory changes to Highway 18. The report stipulates the highway must be widened to address traffic flow at the site. An eastbound, left-turn lane and westbound deceleration/acceleration lane will be paved.

Traffic signals will need to be installed as well. But the question of how many signals has been hotly debated. In a blog post on the Church of the Woods' website www.Sonriseinthewoods.org, the group wrote, "The San Bernardino Planning and Traffic Division determined just one [traffic signal] will be necessary, and it will be a trip light."

However, Highway 18 is a state highway and therefore falls under state jurisdiction. This means the Church must consult with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). According to the 2019 Draft EIR issued by the County of San Bernardino, Caltrans will require the installation of a minimum of two traffic signals — one at the intersection of Bear Springs Road and Highway 18, the second at Pine Avenue and Highway 18. Likely, a third signal would be placed at the entrance to the Church of

the Woods' parking lot. By the time the project comes to completion, mountain residents could be facing seven new traffic signals, according to the 2020 Final EIR.

Despite these drawbacks, many members of the church believe the amount of time and capital already spent on the project is enough of an impetus to build their new facilities and finally bring their project to fruition.

A PRAYER FOR APPROVAL

At the corner of Calgary Drive and North Bay Road, a sign with an arrow reads, "Church of the Woods." The street winds uphill, passing multi-level residential properties lining Calgary Drive. Many of their driveways are level with the road. Some homes are positioned downslope, while others are partially obscured by tree cover.

The street curves and dips before coming to a parking lot. The church building is situated towards the back of the lot. Near the entrance to the church, congregation members talk and laugh.

At 11 a.m. the last of the congregation filters into the building, greeted at the door by members distributing the service's program and a collection envelope. Church hymns resonate from inside the hall where a band plays on stage. The walls of the room have painted quotes from biblical passages. Above either side of the stage, screens display the hymn's lyrics. Music notes reverberate through the church. Members sway to the music. Others close their eyes and sing the words. A man — his eyes shut — raises an arm, extending it toward the stage. A couple embraces, arms wrapped around each other in a side hug. The service is mostly full.

After the band finishes, Akins walks onto the stage, a microphone-headpiece curled around his ear. He smiles, greets the congregation, and instructs everybody to walk around the room and introduce themselves to each other. They follow the instructions, exchanging handshakes and pleasantries. Eventually, the congregation returns to their original seats and a prayer is said.

"I want to ask you to be in prayer for our Jan. 23 meeting with the planning commission," Akins says to the room. He is speaking about the hearing for the FEIR when

the Planning Commission will announce its decision on whether or not to approve the Church of the Woods Project.

There's a "Woo!" from a member of the audience. "If God wants this to happen it's going to happen, if he doesn't we don't want any part of it," Akins says. "This is going to be a great campus of influence to provide needs on the mountain that aren't being provided in other areas."

FAITH IN THE PROCESS

The FEIR details the scope of the Church of the Woods Project and outlines the mitigation measures necessary during development. According to the report, the church campus will include a two-story building consisting of a 27,364 sq. ft. gymnasium and 41,037 square foot assembly building/children's ministry, a 1,500 square foot two-story maintenance building, caretaker residence and lavatory facilities and a 54,000 square foot ft. sports field, sports courts and children's play areas. Additionally, a 311-space parking lot will be paved. If approved, the campus will rest on 13.6 of the 27.12 acres of land. Though, under the plan's section "Construction Details" it states "...the Project would disturb approximately 16.9 acres as a result of grading..."

Church of the Woods members and leaders have voiced their excitement about ministering to the community. Akins said the ultimate goal of Church of the Woods is to help minister to people spiritually. But admitted that in order to reach someone spiritually, it may mean helping with his or her physical, emotional, relational and financial needs. He believes the new campus will help them accomplish this type of outreach.

"We're a church made up of community people who want to serve the community — that's the heartbeat," he said. "We want to minister to [organizations] like Operation Provider right there in Rimforest. We would probably allow them to utilize our facility to minister to people in need." Additionally, Akins believes the church will provide a safe space for youth to relax and have fun — the type of space he feels is lacking in the mountain communities.

Members from the Church of the Woods congregation shared the Pastor's sentiment.

"I'm in favor of it because as a mom on the mountain my kids participated in pretty much all the sports — soccer, baseball and basketball. I helped coach soccer and every time it was a battle for a field," said Teresa Alexander, a youth group leader. "One of the major things this development is going to do is give fields to the community."

Her understanding was the fields would be open to anybody — from the Church of the Woods congregation or otherwise — with no fee. "This will be another place for the kids to hang out. But also we'll be able to do services there, too," Alexander said.

CONSERVING NATURAL HABITAT

While the church and its members said the new campus will be a safe facility for kids to have fun, those wanting to preserve the natural habitat and wildlife question the location and size of the campus.

On Jan. 13, President of the Save Our Forest Association and mountain resident Dr. Hugh Bialecki stands in front of a projection screen in a mostly darkened room. He speaks to a group of about thirty members from the San Bernardino Mountains Group of the Sierra Club and other residents who have come out to voice their concerns about the church development. He details how the Final EIR fails to abide by the Lake Arrowhead Community Plan — a plan crafted by community members in 2007 and adopted by the County of San Bernardino. It was implemented to preserve the character and identity of the communities in the area when considering land use and development.

Bialecki continues, listing how the Draft and Final EIRs violate the community plan — from the undocumented erosion at the corner of Daley Canyon and Highway 18 to the riparian lands not included in the Final EIR. The perennial stream flows towards Daley Canyon and is the headwaters of Little Bear Creek. According to Bialecki, Little Bear Creek provides between 50 to 66 percent of the water flowing into Lake Arrowhead. Added runoff from impervious surfaces, like the parking lot the church plans on building, will mean more pollutants affecting these waters.

Further, a promontory is one of the highest points in elevation on the project. The church plans to level the promontory, pushing the soil into the "valley" below. However, Bialecki says how that gets accomplished remains vague.

In the FEIR, it states, "According to the Church of the Woods Earthwork Analysis Report preliminary grading qualities are calculated to be 195,297 cubic yards of excavation or cut materials and 119,313 cubic yards of fill material."

Organic topsoil may cause an even greater challenge to the project. According to the Final EIR, the organic topsoil is not suitable for fill, meaning it cannot be used to fill in the "valley." Consequently, it needs to be moved off-site. The Final EIR states, "There is approximately 42,368 cubic yards of material on project site consisting of highly organic topsoil that is not considered suitable for reuse as engineered fill. This unsuitable material would be transported to Heaps Peak Transfer Station by truck as a part of the project's construction process."

The Final EIR stipulates that trucks will move this soil, approximately five miles, along Highway 18 to Heaps Peak Transfer Station. From there the soil will be loaded into larger trucks and transferred approximately 37 miles to the Mid-Valley Landfill in Rialto. "The hillside would be leveled and the valley would be filled," Bialecki says.

THE STRAWBERRY CREEK CORRIDOR

In an interview and during his presentation, Bialecki discussed how construction would be a devastating impediment to wildlife movement through the Strawberry Creek Corridor — a stretch of land designated to connecting wildlife populations that are otherwise separated by human-made structures or activities. According to the Habitat Assessment used in the FEIR, the Strawberry

Creek Corridor “provides movement opportunities [for wildlife] between the San Bernardino National Forest and the Mojave River.”

Depending on who one asks, the project site either abuts or is within the corridor. The Final EIR states: “The eastern boundary of the Strawberry Creek Corridor abuts the western boundary of the project site, indicating minimal overlap.” However, in the Habitat Assessment, a map shows the project site outside of the wildlife corridor.

ELMT Consulting, an agency based in Santa Ana, was hired by Church of the Woods to perform the Habitat Assessment surveys at the project site. According to the Habitat Assessment, ELMT visited twice, once in November of 2017 and again in February of 2018. They determined that the project site lies outside the Strawberry Creek Corridor.

Bialecki and opponents believe that the corridor extends onto the property. Akins, however, did not think animals would migrate through church property and across Highway 18. “There’s Highway 18 right there and right across [from] Highway 18 is the drop-off. That is not a corridor that animals pass through.” Akins said. “The animals aren’t going through our property, crossing Highway 18, and going down the front of the mountain.” Bialecki disagreed.

“Periodically, there are animals that are killed on Highway 18 that are in the process of crossing the highway. Yes, there are animals living on that property now and the surrounding areas,” he said. “You’re going to have migration of wildlife through areas that are undeveloped and areas that are partially developed.”

President of the San Bernardino Mountains Land Trust James Asher challenged Akins’ conclusion.

“If the project passes, I believe that [the project] will reduce the passage of animals through the corridor as it would be another impediment within the corridor.”

FREEDOM OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

When asked about the motivation behind having the church on Highway 18, Akins affirmed that a portion of the motivation was to bolster the congregation’s numbers. But having the new church campus along Highway 18 means Church of the Woods is more centrally located than in its current building.

Currently, the Church of the Woods congregation has between 300 and 350 members, according to Akins. However, sixteen years ago, when the Church of the Woods Project began, the congregation was larger.

“The [population] on the mountain has dropped and so has the attendance. We’ve had numerous families move off the mountain or out of state,” Akins said.

Church elder, George Stalzer echoed the pastor’s sentiment. “I think it’s going to be good for the community because of its location and its ability to serve the mountain a lot better than from this location here,” said Stalzer.

Though he did not know what the activity schedule would be like, George said he was certain the church would be open to anybody who wants to use the campus. When

pressed as to why he feels the church must be constructed at the large scale and in the location along Highway 18 in order to deliver a spiritual message, Akins responded.

“Well, first of all, did you know in the San Bernardino National Forest there is 677,982 acres?” Akins said. “That’s the National Forest in the San Bernardino Mountains. We have 15, privately-owned acres. Don’t you think property rights are still valid? We should be able to develop a campus to minister with, with our own property.” Alexander replied, citing the steps the ministry had taken to protect the environment. “There was an environment report done and it showed that it’s not going to disrupt the environment—that the animals and all of it is going to be just fine,” said Alexander. When asked where the animals will go to stay safe Alexander answered, “There’s still going to be a lot of forest all around us because we gave up the land to the county.”

She was referring to the sale of 10 of the original 37-acre parcel the church sold to the county. The county will be developing the Rimforest Storm Drain Project to address water flow down the mountain. The drain project will be completed before the Church of the Woods Project, if approval is granted to the latter.

While the Final EIR makes little mention of animals being displaced, the Habitat Assessment states, “The project site has the potential to support the movement of mule deer, bobcat, coyote, and black bear through the project site and surrounding areas. Wildlife movement through these areas will be impeded by project-related disturbance” It goes on to say that adjacent habitat will remain open space and provide the opportunity for movement. The assessment then says, “As a result, the project site and the surrounding open space will continue to provide opportunities for local wildlife movement and will remain as a corridor for highly mobile wildlife species.”

The relocation of animals has also been concerned raised by those opposing the development. When asked about the concern those opposing the project voiced about the development being abutting a wildlife corridor, Stalzer said that he thinks it’s a hypocritical argument considering some of the opponents have likely developed their own properties on wildlife corridors. “I’m sure we have just a minute fraction of the available wildlife corridors on the mountains.”

Akins agreed. “We have a whole bunch of other acreage that is the same environment that they can be a part of. But the most important species on planet earth is human beings,” he said. “Humans matter—and I know some people think animals are more important than humans but I beg to differ. I think animals are important, we care for them, we have provided mitigation acreage for all of these species.”

RESIDENTS ON SCENIC WAY

On Sunday, Jan 16 between the hours of 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. the Mountain News conducted door-to-door interviews with residents living close to the proposed devel-



Church of the Woods currently outside

development site along Scenic Way and Bear Springs Road. Six residents gave interviews — all of who were opposed to the development. Two residents on Scenic Way and two residents on Bear Springs Road had not heard of the project and did not wish to comment on the record. At two homes nobody answered the door.

Tamara Gayle has lived in Rimforest since Nov. 2016 and had read portions of the draft EIR.

“I think that their building is obscenely huge,” Gayle said. “I’m highly opposed to it for multiple reasons. Firstly, they’re going to be leveling so much terrain — they’re going to be removing hundreds of trees.”

She mentioned the disruption of the animal habitat, water runoff and the probability of increased traffic along Highway 18. She felt that the impact statement in the Draft EIR did not take into account all the species. She has seen coyotes, bears, raccoons and a variety of birds, yet these were not mentioned in the Draft EIR she said.

“I moved up here because I like the quietness of the mountain community. And, despite the fact that Highway 18 is so close, it is very quiet right here where I live. To look out my window or sit out on my back deck, it’s like I’m living strictly in the forest. All I see are the trees and the wildlife and it’s serenity to me.”

Holly Griffiths has lived in on Scenic Way for two years and in the Mountain communities for twenty-three.

“I don’t see why we need to develop more land. We

can fix up other spots,” Griffiths said. She mentioned a property in Valley of Enchantment where a trailer park used to be as a viable alternative location.

“If I wanted to live somewhere without the woods or without wildlife I would go anywhere down the hill in Southern California,” Griffiths said.

“This isn’t a vendetta against the church at all. I just don’t think that this is the right spot,” said another resident, Judy Weber. “There are times when I am home and it’s so quiet and serene. I don’t want to wake up to the sound of construction. I might as well go live down the hill.”

PROMINENT COMMUNITY RESIDENTS SPEAK UP

Scott L. Rindenow, Lake Arrowhead resident:

“I would question on a project like this whether they have the where-with-all to complete the project and I would be concerned as a resident that this could possibly start and not get finished. But that aside (...) what they’re putting in there are great elements for the community but where they’re proposing it is not so great,” Rindenow said.

RICK DINON, CREST FOREST MUNICIPAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHAIR ALSO COMMENTED ON THE PROJECT.

“The Church of the Woods Project is difficult personally and is polarizing within the mountain communities,” Dinon stated. “While I am a strong supporter of property owner rights, this church and recreation campus project

Continued on Page 44

is large, disruptive and visually clashing with the existing mountain aesthetic. I appreciate the church has significantly downsized the scope of this project and has incorporated modifications to it to address concerns. Still, the project will change the area materially.”



Strawberry Creek Corridor located south of proposed development

A TANGLED COUNTY BUREAUCRACY

The Church of the Woods was permitted to find their own consultants to conduct environmental surveys. While this is not uncommon, according to opponents of the project, this methodology presents a problem.

“The consultant on behalf of Church of the Woods doesn’t verify much. They misconstrue things and they obfuscate things. They purposely have disingenuous interpretations,” said Bob Sherman, a certified wetlands scientist. “Then when you turn around and challenge them, they say, ‘Well, we covered that on page 36.’ That’s their modus operandi,” Sherman said.

Bialecki and Sherman agree that the EIR has serious gaps when it comes to hydrology and water flow from the mountain into Lake Arrowhead. Not everybody shares this thought. Tom Nievez, Planner at the County of San Bernardino, Land Use Services Department, defended the methodology used to validate the FEIR.

“The drainage regulations are very strict. By law, the developer cannot increase the amount of water that leaves the site.” Nievez said. “So if 100 gallons historically leaves a site during a storm, they cannot put 150 gallons down there. They cannot by law.”

Nievez added that whatever given quantity of water leaves the project site must avoid causing corrosion downstream and must be clean. Additionally, he indicated that the water quality management plan must be submitted for review and approval to the County to make sure all the conditions are met. Hopkins emphasized that every report required by the EIR has been completed, including hydrology, a complete water quality management plan and a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan.

“These are really good, good reports that really (...) intelligent consultants and licensed professionals,” Hopkins said. “The guy, Bob Sherman who claims he’s a wetlands expert. Well, we don’t have any more wetlands on our project. We sold that whole streambed to the San Bernardino Flood Control.”

In a written comment to the 2019 Draft EIR, the Sierra Club of San Bernardino states “We believe this [Draft EIR]

remains functionally insufficient[...]. “Fundamental project information and predictable impact information is still missing, deliberately skipped or seemingly deferred (to) until after the project is approved.”

They concluded that because vital information is missing a thorough action/analysis cannot be performed on the project’s environmental impact.

The Planning commission responded to this comment: “The DREIR was prepared in full compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), State CEQA Guidelines, and the County of San Bernardino Guidelines including project definition, foreseeable impacts, and feasible mitigation measures.”

Additionally, the County scheduled the Church of the Woods Project hearing on the same day as the Point-in-Time Count. The count is used to determine how many homeless people are living in the mountain communities and affects funding to address homelessness. Many members in opposition to the project also actively participate in homeless outreach. Due to the timing conflict, opposition leaders to the Church of the Woods Project sent written requests to Second District County Supervisor Janice Rutherford, the County Land Use Services Planning Director Heidi Duron, and Contract Planner Tom Nievez.

Supervisor Rutherford declined to intervene and request a schedule change. Instead, she deferred to the departments. Duron also declined to reschedule the hearing.

“There are often scheduling conflicts that can arise,” she said about her reasoning.

She went on to say that people don’t have to be present at the hearing to submit a comment.

According to Duron, ten days is the minimum for the amount of time for availability between the Final EIR’s release and the hearing.

Akins likened the church to the biblical story of Zerubbabel — a story he has shared with his congregation: After the Israelites were exiled in Babylon, the first group to come back to Jerusalem was led by Zerubbabel. The man laid the foundation for the temple but was met with political opposition.

“So he stopped building the temple for sixteen years until they started again and built and finished the temple.

“We’ve been at it 16 years,” Akins said, about the Church of the Woods Project. “I believe God’s saying it’s time. Let’s rebuild the temple.”

Sherman said at the Sierra Club meeting that the last

Local Catering by Chef Tami

Local resident Tami Pounds is offering her catering service in Lake Arrowhead and the surrounding areas including Redlands, Riverside and Yucaipa. Chef Tami caters to weddings, business luncheons, barbecues, holiday celebrations, office parties, family reunions, baby showers or a just dinner for two.

"We offer full-service catering which means we will take care of everything," said Chef Tami. "This means no hassles, no headaches and no stress for the clients." In fact, Chef Tami recently catered an outdoor BBQ event for 300 guests. Equipped with over 30 years of food preparation and cooking experience, Chef Tami also offers home cooking services to entertain any special occasions such as family reunions and private parties at the client's kitchen, or client's dock on the lake.

"Last Summer, we catered a birthday party on the dock," shared Chef Tami. "The client was so pleased with our service because it was a surprise birthday party for his wife." Chef Tami and her team set up the entire party on the dock prior to the guests' arrival.

For many households, hiring a personal chef to gain back some of that time in the kitchen is worth it when they have other family members visiting during the holidays or weekends. "I am available to be hired as a person-



al chef as well," said Chef Tami who is also available to cater at your own home and prepare meals for your guests over the holidays such as the 4th of July. She is passionate about preparing home-cooked meals for her clients.

"We offer many choices including American, Italian, BBQ, Mexican, Asian and Mediterranean cuisine," said Chef Tami. "Some of my clients require special dietary meals and I certainly can work with their needs." For more information call Chef Tami at (909) 453-5013.

Continued from Page 44 — Church Development Project

paragraph of his letter he wrote a year ago for the Draft EIR still applies to the final report on the Church of the Woods Project:

"To sum up, in over seventeen years of professional environmental review, I have never seen such an environmentally-harmful project, proposed on a more sensitive, unique and ecologically important site, and based upon such faulty and unfounded assertions of legitimacy."

PLANNING COMMISSION DECIDES

The County of San Bernardino's Planning Commission convened in the Covington Chambers on Jan. 23. Additionally, a remote viewing site was established at the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station. This remote location allowed community members to participate in the hearing without driving to San Bernardino. Approximately 35 people, filled the room in Twin Peaks, watching the hearing on a monitor.

Commissioner of the Fourth District Gabriel Chavez introduced the format of the hearing. This was followed by a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

County Planner Tom Nieves read through general details about the project from the Planning Commission Staff Report. He showed maps of the proposed development area and spoke about the steps Church of the Woods has taken in reducing the size and scope of the project since 2003.

"The original project included a school and a large

ball field facility..." Nieves said. "Over the years it has been scaled down to what we have before us today."

He continued, saying that adequate infrastructure and utilities exist to serve the proposed project. Nieves said that he and the planning staff recommended the planning commission approve the project as it will provide educational (and) recreational facilities for the Rimforest community.

Chavez thanked Nieves for the presentation and asked the commissioners if they had any questions.

Second District Planning Commissioner Raymond J. Allard inquired about the FEIR's mandated traffic signals.

"The correspondence this morning from transportation regarding the three traffic signals — it says install a signal prior to (the issuance of the) building permit but it is a little bit unclear to me, based on the previous paragraph. Are they designing a signal prior to (the issuance of the) building permit or are they installing the signal prior to (the issuance of the) building permit?" Allard asked.

"Ultimately there will be installation," Nieves said.

"The condition requires that the improvement plan proposed (and) developed by the applicant include the improvements necessary as spelled out there."

Following the exchange, Akins and Hopkins addressed the commission. They played a video about the Church of the Woods and why they consider the project to be meaningful. The video is available at www.sonrisein-



**I OFFER
HOME INSURANCE
OPTIONS**

Around here, your choice is clear.

Everyone likes options. My office not only offers car insurance backed by a company with 80 years of experience, but also offers home insurance options from various unaffiliated companies, as well as North Light Specialty Insurance Company, a subsidiary of Allstate.



**Alsop & Associates
Insurance Agency
(909) 989-7444**

danielleself2@allstate.com
CA Insurance Agent #: 0761703



Allstate
You're in good hands.

Auto
Home
Life
Retirement

In California, Allstate Agents may offer home insurance from nonadmitted or surplus line insurers as well as unaffiliated insurance companies. Allstate has no financial responsibility for home insurance policies purchased in California from unaffiliated insurance companies and isn't responsible for their claims. Subject to terms, conditions and availability. © 2013 Allstate Insurance Co. 41359

thewoods.org.

"Very good presentation," Allard said after the video had completed.

Allard voiced concerns about overflow parking from the site and instructed the planning department to include this in the final staff report. He also said that he hoped the church would consider natural landscaping.

"It would be nice if the landscaping blended in with the natural trees that are out there," Allard said. "...I would certainly hope that you'd select a landscape architect that could blend it nicely."

"Yes sir, absolutely," Akins replied.

The majority of the five-hour hearing was dedicated to public comment. Attendees wanting to voice their opinions were given three minutes each.

At the Twin Peaks site, participants were directed one-by-one to a computer desk where a webcam had been rigged. Those commenting spoke into the webcam and the feed was transmitted to San Bernardino.

Of the thirteen people to comment at the Twin Peaks site, two were in support of the project being built in the proposed location along Highway 18. However, Church of the Woods supporters were in the majority at the chambers.

Over forty people spoke about topics ranging from their love for Jesus to killing the natural plants and wildlife to saving the mountain communities from drugs and violence.

Ultimately, the Planning Commission voted unanimously, 5 to 0, to approve the final environmental impact report — granting the Church of the Woods a Conditional Use Permit. However, opponents of the project may still appeal the decision.

"If somebody files a formal appeal, then it would go before the Board of Supervisors," said Second District Representative Lewis Murray. He continued saying that the Board of Supervisors will make the county's final decision, but even after that, lawsuits could continue to stall any developing.

One of the two project supporters participating from the Twin Peaks site was Taylor Ramsey.

"I support Pastor Akins," Ramsey said. "They need this facility for the children on this mountain."

Many remain skeptical about just how open the church will be when it comes to allowing the general public use of the new facilities. Ramsey tried to address those concerns.

"I'm for the youth and the facilities. I know Pastor Akins — he doesn't turn people away. He welcomes everybody." Trudie Blank, a Twin Peaks resident opposed to the project, also viewed the hearing from the remote site.

"I felt it ended up the way we all expected — that they would pass it," Blank said. "They pass everything. They don't seem to learn from their previous mistakes."

She likened the Church of the Woods Project to the litany of failed developments that were approved by the county. "They made a mistake Hawarden, [...] Eagle Ridge, [...] Mill Pond and they made a mistake with the

Bridge to Nowhere. We will end up with a desecrated eyesore for the rest of our lives.”

On Jan. 30, a week after the hearing, the Save Our Forest Association, the Sierra Club of the San Bernardino Mountains Group - San Gorgonio Chapter and the San Bernardino Audubon Society filed an official appeal with the county.

“We support the Church of the Woods congregation in their desire for a larger facility, but [we] cannot allow the county to ignore the laws and policies designated to protect public safety, quality of life, our unique forest environment and imperiled plants and animals,” stated Audubon Society member Peter Jorris in a press release about the decision. “The County of San Bernardino needs to follow its own guidelines more faithfully and accurately assess the full impacts of this project to avoid permanent harm to our community, visitors, the forest and its wildlife.”

Steven Farrell, President of the Mountain Group Sierra Club, echoed Jorris’ sentiment. “We appreciate the Church’s efforts in support of our community; but not with this project, at this location. It is too disruptive. the County is violating the law by accepting this proposal’s flawed environmental impact report and making an unsupported, inadequate Statement of Overriding Consideration, said Steven Farrell. “Even with its significant shortcomings, the EIR identifies severe impacts to the public and to the site that the Planning Commission has misleadingly declared to be of no consequence.”

EXPERT CARPET CLEANING!



EST. 1983

24-Hour Emergency Water Damage Response & Dry Out

We bill insurance & work directly with your adjuster.

- Mold & Mildew Remediation/Abatement
- Carpet Repair & Restretching • Deodorization
- FREE Cleaning Estimates by Phone • Odor Control
- Oriental Rugs • Carpet & Upholstery Protection
- No Hidden Costs • Family Owned & Operated

\$10 OFF and a **FREE** Bottle of **Spot Cleaner** with any service performed.

\$85 minimum service required. One coupon per customer/household. Not valid with any other offer. Must present coupon at time of service.

State-of-the-Art Truck-Mounted Equipment
Cleans Deeper & Dries Faster!



Call Schrader's Today!

336-5616

or

227-7441

NO MORE STEPS TO THE LAKE!



Hillside Trams – to the lake



Affordable Residential Elevators - under \$30K



Adam Fine and Family

Call 866-902-9800 Today For A Free Consultation
Ask for Adam Fine • 310-925-4330 – cell

Family Owned • Bonded & Insured • Local Blue Jay Offices • CA Contr. Lic. # 980811 • 22 years track record making homes safer and more accessible
“Very professional, pleasure to deal with” – M. Botzet – N. Shore Rd. – Lake Arrowhead

Mountain Tram & Elevator Co. by  Construction, Inc.


 State-of-the-Art Incline Elevators