

## POINT REYES LIGHT

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**INVERNESS** > David and Nic Sheff have grown a following for their new books on meth. /14



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"L" Ranch glows under the wing of the 1969 Helio Courier manned by Robert Campbell, who will present his new book of aerial photos of Point Reyes at the Dance Palace next Friday.

## Ranchland to cash in on carbon

by **Jacoba Charles**

Atmospheric carbon is a global problem, and someday the rangelands of West Marin might help reduce that pollutant. Perhaps even for a profit.

The Marin Carbon Project, a team of local scientists, ranchers and nonprofit organizations, formed in January to explore the possibility that ranchers can increase the quantity of carbon stored in the soil of grazing lands by modifying ranching practices.

The initial seven-month project, funded by a \$50,000 grant by the Rathmann foundation, was born from a conversation be-

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## Tank trouble at De Carli's

by **Justin Nobel**

Two workers from De Carli's Petaluma Butane Distributors disconnected the gas lines at the home of Bolinas resident Beverly Dubin yesterday morning.

"I can't heat my home and I'm not going to be able to cook," said Dubin. "I guess I'll become more of a raw food eater."

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Keep up on Tomales High baseball and softball

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Point Pizza shop owner leaves five children

### ASK MISSY /15

And all of a sudden I have aged a year

## Bird's eye view of the park

by **Justin Nobel**

"The aeroplane has unveiled for us the true face of the earth." Robert Campbell opens his new book of aerial photography, "Point Reyes and the San Andreas Fault Zone," with this quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who chronicled his flights to outposts in Patagonia and the Sahara in "Wind, Sand and Stars." Campbell, who has flown over West Marin for nearly 40 years, spoke to the *Light* about the awe of being airborne. His wife, Jennifer, joined us outside Toby's on Friday.

### When did you first come to West Marin?

I grew up in San Francisco but Point Reyes has been in my blood since I was young. My dad kept a little sailboat at the Golden Hinde in Inverness. We camped out here before the park was established, usually on Limantour Beach. I've been shooting Point Reyes since 1970. During the 1980s I shot in this area for the Army Corp of Engineers. Congress was considering budgets for local projects and my photos were reviewed back in

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### Memorial service

>> Pluto Maroon of Bolinas passed away on Saturday at age 76. A memorial service will be held from 3 to 6 p.m. on April 12 at the Community Center. Donations should be sent to Eve Love at 754 Clayton Street, San Francisco 94117. An obituary will be printed next week.

## >> De Carli's

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Last year Dubin filed a complaint about a \$64 demurrage fee with an inspector in Marin County's office of Agricultural Weights and Measures. The fee is sent to customers who use a certain minimum of propane, explained De Carli's chief, Angela De Carli, and is intended to offset the cost of service trucks that regularly check all tanks. Dubin claimed she shouldn't have to pay for gas she never used.

The inspector referred the case to a special unit of the District Attorney's office devoted to mediating disputes between businesses and customers. De Carli's retained an attorney to handle the mediators, which cost the company several thousand dollars. In January De Carli's sent Dubin a check reimbursing her for the demurrage fee and a letter which stated that the company no longer wished to do business with Dubin. The letter recommended that Dubin "find an alternate propane provider."

"I basically equate it to a bad marriage," said De Carli, who added that it's not the first time Dubin has complained. She once screamed at a receptionist.

"She's unhappy, we're unhappy, let's just go our own ways," said De Carli.

Dubin, who is handicapped and walks with a limp, says her only income comes from a disability check she receives each month as well as meager earnings from books and photographs featuring the hippy-lifestyle of the 1970s she produced more than thirty years ago. She is furious at De Carli's. "It's just plain mean-spirited," said Dubin.

There are a handful of other distributors that deliver propane to West Marin but getting a new tank these days involves more than just a simple replacement. In 2001, Marin County passed a code that required new tanks to have state-certified gas shut-off devices which turn gas off in the event of a jiggle such as an earthquake. Also required are straps to hold a tank down and new tanks must be placed on a concrete pad. Previously, putting a tank on squat concrete cylinders was the norm.

Installing a pad plus the shut-off device costs about \$1250, said Ed Pullman, a Bolinas contractor. "Bolinas is full of places where the propane tank is just on cylinders," he noted. Pullman said that despite the high costs the new earthquake guidelines for propane tanks were positive. "These things are like little bombs," said Pullman.

"We live in earthquake country," said Woodacre Fire Chief Scott Alber, which means extra safety measures to prevent gas leakage from propane tanks are a good thing.

A tank under pressure wouldn't necessarily explode, explained Alber. Tanks already have valves that slowly release gas during times of extreme pressure, such as would happen in a fire. Instead people would see a



Ed Pullman, a Bolinas contractor, surveys Beverly Dubin's propane tank, which was shut off Wednesday. Photo by Justin Nobel.

stream of flame shooting out the top.

But if the lines that connect the tank to the home break tanks will lose fuel, said Alber. This happens most often when trees fall on tanks during storms.

Neither Alber nor Pullman knew exactly how many West Marin tanks still hadn't been upgraded.

"It's a prickly problem," said county worker Roy Bateman, noting the high cost of conforming to the new regulations. Bateman works in a branch of the Marin Community Development Agency that distributes federal grants to county nonprofits.

"For most of the households we deal with that's an exorbitant amount of money," he said.

A county worker and a group of five volunteers run the remediation division in the Marin County District Attorney's office that handles disputes such as Dubin's. Among them is the vice president of a major electronics company, a College of Marin professor, a jeweler, a retired school teacher and a retired Marin Independent Journal reporter. These people try to resolve issues by being the bridge for communication between the business and the customer.

"The first thing that happens is the customer is mad at the business. The business has already heard the customer yell and they're both at each other's throats," said Bob Nichols, the Deputy District Attorney who handles these cases when they finally go to court. "We come in and listen to both sides."

Nichols explained the types of cases they handle: software company's that issue misleading advertising, a laundry that has lost a shirt, an office supply store that is incorrectly pricing their products.

The district attorney reads the complaints mediators receive and if necessary sends inspectors to the store front to determine whether unlawful business practices are occurring. This recently happened with Office Depot, who was charging customers more than products were priced for. Marin brought a suit with nine other California counties that resulted in a settlement of \$2.3 million for the

county plus a \$5 coupon for all customers who were affected. But on most occasions mediators resolve the issue, and the county doesn't go to court, explained Nichols.

"It's not uncommon for people to say I don't want to fight with you, I don't want any hassles, so here you go, here's your money, have a nice day, juts leave me out of it," said Nichols.

This is more or less what happened with Dubin and De Carli. In January De Carli's sent a letter to Dubin accompanied by a check for \$64, reimbursement for the demurrage fee she had complained about. The letter states: "We no longer wish to service your account. Please find an alternate propane provider at your earliest convenience...Have your new propane provider transfer any remaining propane from our tank into your tank."

It's not the first time De Carli customers have complained about some of their business practices. Shortly after company founder Vic De Carli, a Petaluma businessman with a gym at St. Vincent de Paul High School named after him, passed away a woman in their accounts department died too, explained Angela, Vic's daughter.

As a result of these losses the company fell behind on billing, she said.

John Gilbert who runs the Parkside Cafe in Stinson Beach said shortly after he took over the restaurant in 2002 he received a bill that went back two and a half years. He pointed out to De Carli's that some of the charges weren't even under his ownership. The company sent him a new bill.

"It's an accounting nightmare over there," said Gilbert. But he didn't have any qualms with the company's operation in general.

"They give me my gas on time, they've earned their money," said Gilbert. "I've never seen them do anything wrong practice-wise."

De Carli said the company was still a bit behind on billing but was working hard to catch up.

"People get confused because they don't get a monthly bill from us," she said. The company bills only after a delivery.

De Carli put the economics of running a propane delivery company these days in context. Their fuel comes from a Midwestern supplier who gets the propane from refineries in Richmond. Propane is a byproduct of oil refining. Once the gas was simply burnt off. Later propane companies were allowed to purchase it for a nominal fee. Last year propane was \$2.70 a gallon; currently it's \$3.30.

"The prices are outrageous," she said. The price of fuel for the trucks that deliver the propane has also gone up. Petaluma to Bolinas and back is a distance of more than 60 miles.

"We care about West Marin; it's part of our heritage," said De Carli. "It gets increasingly expensive to go out there."

Even the costs of tires, which are replaced once or twice a year, have gone up in concert with the price of oil, she added.

De Carli pointed out that there were community agencies Dubin could go to for help. Dubin said she had gone to them, and either their help wasn't applicable or their coffers were empty.

One such group is Community Action Marin (CAM), a San Rafael-based nonprofit that administers the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, a federal fund dedicated to helping pay utility costs. The program also supplies fuel such as wood and propane. About 90 percent of the money goes to pay utility costs for residents of East Marin where most of the county's population is, explained Dick McKee of CAM.

"We allocate a certain amount each year for wood and propane for those who live in West Marin," he said.

This past year that amount was \$12,625, and it went to about 30 different households. When Dubin called CAM they had already spent the funds. New funds won't be available until May.

Even if they had the money, McKee isn't so sure they could help. Typically they dole out about \$350 per family for propane expenses.

"The way propane prices are now that may be 90 days worth of propane," said McKee, and the program has no way to accommodate construction costs necessary in conforming to new regulations.